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# Families, Households and Marital Status Reference Guide

Census of Population, 2021



Release date: August 17, 2022

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## Definitions and concepts

The definitions pertaining to marital status, census families, economic families, couple families and households conform to standard definitions set by Statistics Canada for marital status and families. For more information on concepts related to the Families, Households and Marital Status release, see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

The topic of families includes concepts such as [household type](#), [marital status](#), family structure and the living arrangements of individuals. Family-related characteristics and concepts can apply to families, individuals (those in families or not) or households.

Two definitions of families exist, and they complement each other: the [census family](#) and the [economic family](#). The census family is the narrower concept, defined by couples living together, with or without children, and parents living in a one-parent family with their children. The economic family concept is broader and refers to two or more persons living together who are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship. All persons in a census family are part of one economic family. If there are additional relatives living with them, they are also in the economic family. Additional relatives may also be in a census family among themselves, if there are two or more, provided they are a couple with or without children, or a one-parent family with children.

Variables related to families and households are restricted to [private households](#) and the population in private households, excluding the population in [collective dwellings](#). Marital status can be examined for the total population, including the population in collective dwellings.

Tabulations of families are based on either the [census family structure](#) or the [economic family structure](#). Tabulations of the living arrangements of individuals use the concepts of [census family status](#), [economic family status](#) or [household living arrangements](#) (an extension of census family status). A person living in a private household can have any of the following living arrangements: they can be a married spouse, a common-law partner, a parent in a one-parent family, a child or a person not in a census family (including individuals living alone or living with other relatives or non-relatives).

One family-related concept at the household level is [household type](#), which takes into account the family structures present in the private household. For instance, a “multigenerational household” is a household that contains at least three generations of the same family (grandparent, child and grandchild).

## Questions

For the 2021 Census, the [2A](#) short-form questionnaire was used to enumerate all usual residents of 75% of private dwellings. The [2A-L](#) long-form questionnaire, which also includes the questions from the 2A short-form questionnaire, was used to enumerate a 25% sample of private households in Canada. For private households in First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions and other remote areas, the [2A-R](#) questionnaire was used to enumerate 100% of the population.

Family data for private households are obtained from the combination of questions 3 (gender), 4 (date of birth), 5 (marital status), 6 (common law) and 7 (relationship to Person 1). The questions appear on page 4 of the [2A](#) paper questionnaire.

The responses to all of these questions are processed together to ensure consistency. In addition, the demographic characteristics of all persons living in the same household are processed together, to ensure consistent relationships between household members.

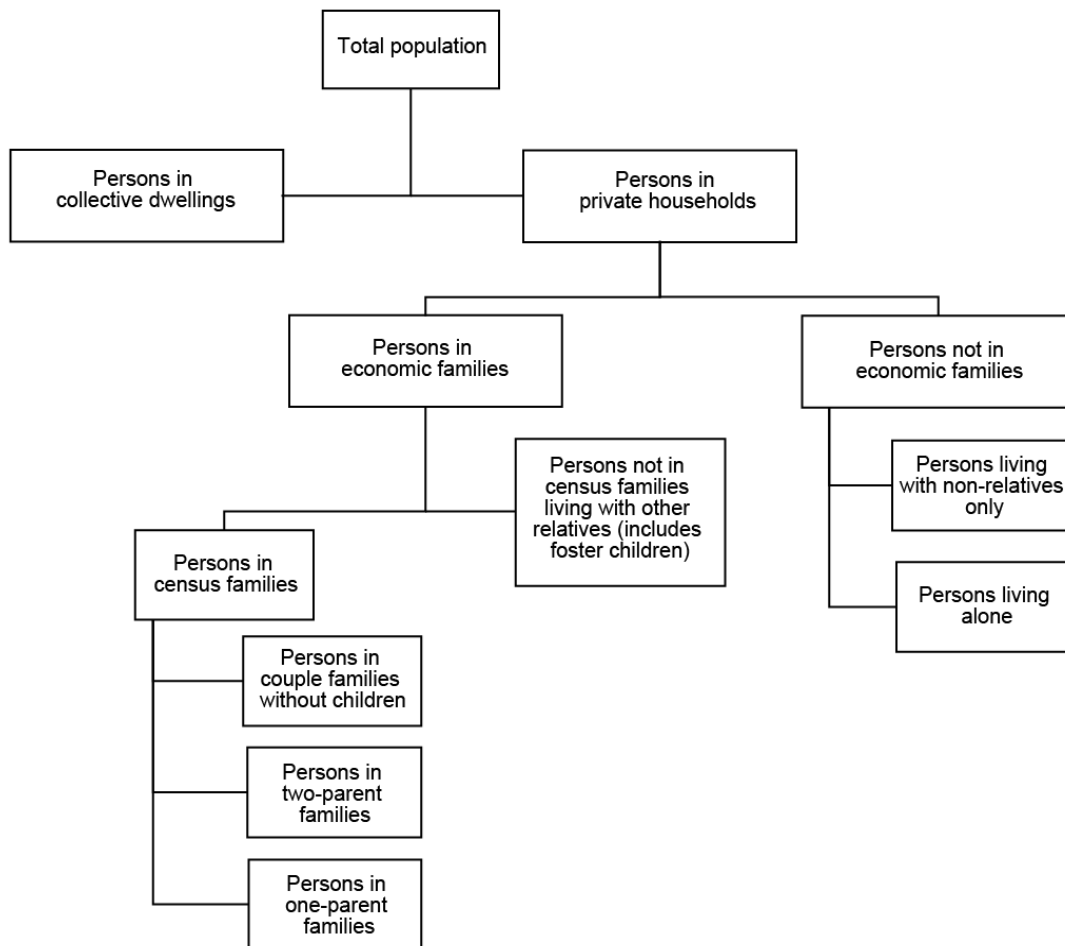
For more information on the reasons why the census questions are asked, please refer to the five [fact sheets](#) found on The road to the 2021 Census web page.

## Classifications

Figure 1 summarizes the categories of economic family membership and census family membership for the population in the 2021 Census. Figure 2 further describes the categories of census family structure in the 2021 Census.

**Figure 1**

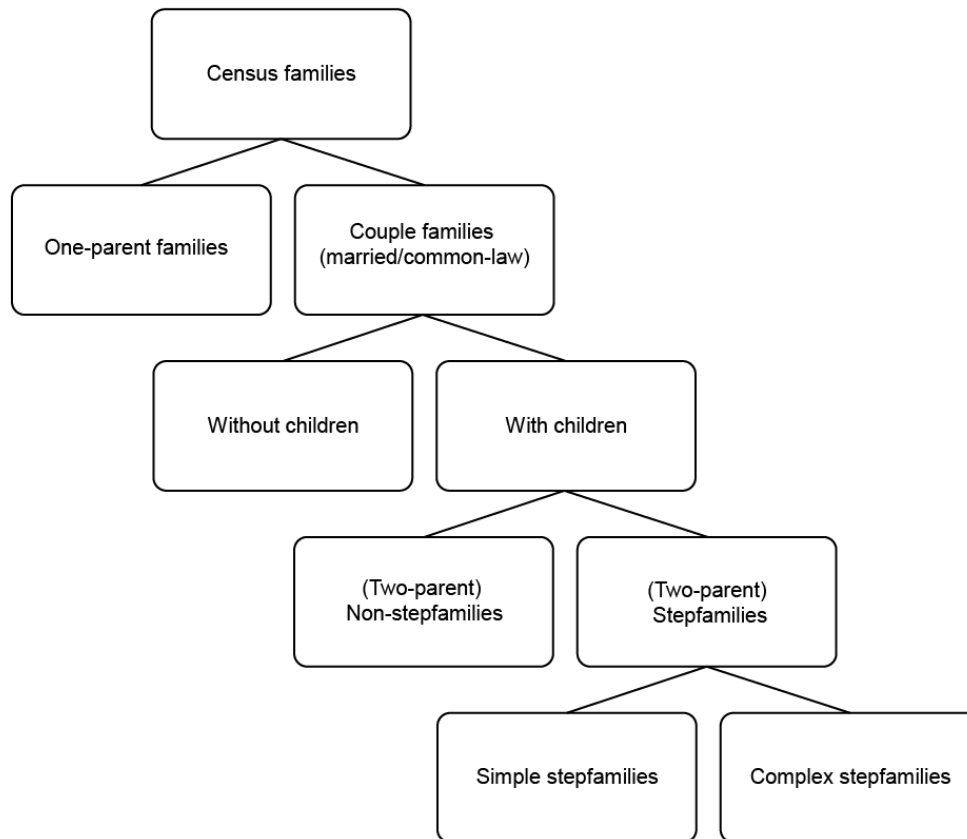
**Economic family membership and census family membership, 2021 Census of Population**



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

**Figure 2**

**Census family structure, 2021 Census of Population**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Beginning with the 2011 Census, stepfamilies were introduced as a subset of couple families with children. Stepfamilies are couple families where there is at least one child whose birth or adoption preceded the current relationship. Stepfamilies can be classified as either simple or complex. In a simple stepfamily, all children are the biological or adopted children of one and only one married spouse or common-law partner. A complex stepfamily consists of any of the following:

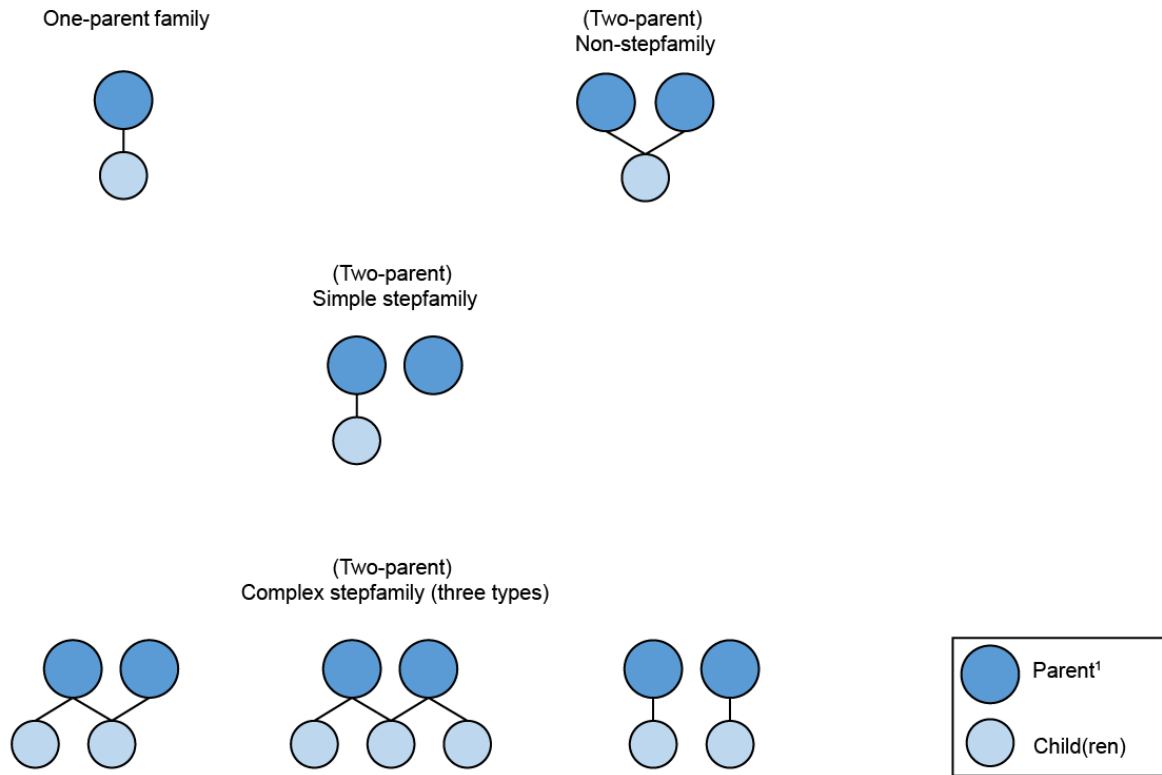
- a family in which there is at least one child of both parents and at least one child of only one parent
- a family in which there is at least one child of each parent and no children of both parents
- a family in which there is at least one child of both parents and at least one child of each parent.

Figure 3 illustrates the various configurations of families with children, including stepfamilies.

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**Figure 3**

**Census families with children by parent–child configuration, 2021 Census of Population**



1. Or grandparent in a skip-generation family

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Users should note that in all census years since the introduction of the stepfamilies concept in 2011, there may be a small underestimation of the number of stepfamilies because this family structure can only be captured among families in which one member is “Person 1” on the census questionnaire (the first person in the household for whom information is collected). In 2021, 98% of all couple families with children included “Person 1.”

## The concept of “children”

Parent–child relationships, which are key to identifying the family status and family structure, are not restricted to individuals below a certain age unless an age limit is explicitly stated. When the family status or structure includes an age limit for children, such as “children aged 24 and younger,” those aged 25 and older are considered persons not in a census family and other relatives in an economic family. This in turn affects the number of persons in families and, possibly, the number of families. If families are categorized as (1) those with at least one child aged 24 and younger or (2) families without children and those with all children aged 25 and older, then the overall number of families will remain the same.

Careful consideration must be given to the concept of “children.” In general, the term “children” may be used in various analytical products to refer to a dependent population, such as individuals aged 14 and younger, 17 and younger or 24 and younger. Specific definitions of “children” do exist, and the particular usage should be clear from the context of the analysis. For example, “children” in census families refer to biological, adopted or step sons and daughters (regardless of age) whose usual place of residence is the same dwelling as their parent(s), as well as to grandchildren living in households with grandparent(s) with no parents present. Sons and daughters who are living

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with their married spouse or common-law partner, or with one or more of their own sons and/or daughters, are not considered to be members of the census family of their parent(s), even if they are living in the same dwelling. In addition, sons and daughters who do not live in the same dwelling as their parent(s) are not considered members of the census family of their parent(s).

Concepts such as “foster children,” who are considered “other relatives” in an economic family, comprise part of the population in private households, but are not considered “children” in census families.

### The new concept of gender in the Families, Households and Marital Status release

In censuses prior to 2021, concepts and classifications relating to the family characteristics of individuals used information from a question about the sex of individuals. Beginning in 2021, the census asks questions about both the sex at birth and the gender of individuals. While data about sex at birth are needed to measure certain indicators, for the purposes of the Families, Households and Marital Status release, gender (as opposed to sex) is now the standard variable used in concepts and classifications. For more details on the new gender concept, including impacts on historical comparability, see [Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-500-X.

The new gender variable impacts the classification of family variables involving couples and one-parent families. As part of the 2021 Families, Households and Marital Status release, three new categories of couples will be distinguished, with three sub-categories for transgender or non-binary couples:

1. **Different-gender couple (cisgender):** A couple family (married or common-law, with or without children) in which members of the couple are of different genders (one man and one woman) and neither member is transgender.
2. **Same-gender couple (cisgender):** A couple family (married or common-law, with or without children) in which members of the couple are of the same gender (two men or two women) and neither member is transgender.
3. **Transgender or non-binary couple:** A couple family (married or common-law, with or without children) in which at least one member is transgender or non-binary.
  - a. **Couple with at least one transgender person:** A couple family in which at least one member is transgender and neither member is non-binary.
  - b. **Couple with at least one non-binary person:** A couple family in which at least one member is non-binary and neither member is transgender.
  - c. **Couple with one transgender person and one non-binary person:** A couple family in which one member is transgender and the other member is non-binary.

Note that information about same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples is still collected in 2021. Table 1 provides a comparison of the total count of the various categories of couples based on sex and gender.

**Table 1**  
**Number of couples by type of union, Canada, 2016 and 2021**

Type of union	2016	2021
Opposite-sex couples <sup>1</sup>	8,155,040	8,458,945
Same-sex couples <sup>1</sup>	72,880	117,640
Different-gender couples (cisgender)	..	8,448,945
Same-gender couples (cisgender)	..	95,435
Transgender or non-binary couples	..	32,205

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. In 2016, these couples were formed on the basis of the variable “sex.” In 2021, these couples were formed on the basis of the variable “sex at birth.”

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021.



## Concepts over time

Over the history of the census, the information collected about families, households and individual living arrangements has evolved to reflect changes in society. Table 2 provides a summary of the key changes in the collection of information on families in the census.

**Table 2**  
**Key conceptual changes related to families, households and marital status by census year**

Census year	Change
2021	First year data are available for different-gender couples, same-gender couples and transgender or non-binary couples.
2016	Definition of one-census-family households changed slightly to include either a couple with or without children or a lone-parent family and <b>no other persons</b> . In previous censuses, the definition of one-family households included both one-family households without additional persons and those with additional persons. <sup>1</sup>
2011	Couples with children can be further classified as stepfamilies.
2011	First year data are available for foster children. Foster children are categorized as “other relatives” within economic families.
2006	First year data are available for same-sex married couples, following the legalization of same-sex marriage across Canada in 2005.
2001	First year data are available for same-sex common-law couples.
2001	The concept of “census family” is broadened to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● children in a census family who were previously married (as long as they are not currently living with a spouse or common-law partner); from 1941 to 1996, children had to be “never married” to be included in the census family</li> <li>● skip-generation families (grandparents and grandchildren in the same dwelling and without the presence of a middle-generation parent)</li> <li>● a child and their lone parent (middle generation) living in a three-generation household; prior to 2001, the two older generations would have formed a census family.</li> </ul>
1981	First year data are available for common-law unions.
1941	The concept of “census family” is first introduced. Prior to the 1941 Census, there was no consistent definition of a family, and little distinction was made between the household and family units in census publications from 1901 to 1931. <sup>2</sup>

1. This change reflects the United Nations’ principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses regarding the classification of households. As a result of the change, households containing a single census family plus other persons are now included either with “multigenerational households” or “other family households.” These new household type categories are published back to 2001.

2. Gauthier, H. 1971. *The Census Definition of Family: 1871-1971*. Population and Housing Research Memorandum no. PH-FAM-1. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 1570-E.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1941, 1981, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021.

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Table 3 illustrates how the criteria for membership in a census family have changed over time.

**Table 3**  
**Census family membership as defined in the Census of Population, 1941 to 2021<sup>1</sup>**

Census family member	1941 to										
	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Married spouse in opposite-sex couple	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Married spouse in same-sex couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√	√	√
Married spouse in different-gender couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Married spouse in same-gender couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Married spouse in transgender or non-binary couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Common-law partner in opposite-sex couple <sup>2</sup>	..	..	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Common-law partner in same-sex couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	√	√	√	√	√
Common-law partner in different-gender couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Common-law partner in same-gender couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Common-law partner in transgender or non-binary couple	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	√
Parent in one-parent family <sup>3</sup>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Never-married son or daughter who is not living with his or her own child	√	√	√	√	√	√	√ <sup>4</sup>	√ <sup>4</sup>	√ <sup>4</sup>	√ <sup>4</sup>	√ <sup>4</sup>
Never-married son or daughter who is living with his or her own child	√ <sup>5</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Previously-married son or daughter who is not living with his or her own child	..	..	..	..	..	..	√	√	√	√	√
“Guardianship child” <sup>6</sup> aged 20 years or younger	√	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

.. not available for a specific reference period

√ indicates membership in the corresponding censuses

1. An earlier version of this table was published in Bohnert, N., Milan, A. and Lathe, H. 2014. [Enduring Diversity: Living Arrangements of Children in Canada Over 100 Years of the Census](#). *Demographic Document* Research Paper. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 91F0015M – No. 11.

2. Opposite-sex common-law partners have been included with married spouses since at least 1971. They have been identifiable separately in the database since 1981, even though they were not shown separately in published tables (including those on marital status) until 1991, the year common-law status was first asked about on the census questionnaire under marital status.

3. Referred to as “lone parent” prior to 2021. Inclusion in this category depends on the presence of a “child” as defined for that census year.

4. Includes grandchildren living with a grandparent and no parents present.

5. The child of that never-married son or daughter, i.e., a grandchild in a three-generation household, is also considered to be part of the census family for the period from 1941 to 1971.

6. Examples include nieces, nephews or other wards for which no pay was received by the guardian. Note that this concept differs from that of foster children, first included as a separate category in the 2011 Census. Foster children are not considered members of a census family but are categorized as other relatives within economic families.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1941 to 2021.

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Beginning in 2021, the terms used to describe certain categories of census family structure and census family status have been revised, though their underlying concepts and definitions remain unchanged. These changes are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Changes in terminology for the 2021 Census release on families, households and marital status**

2016 Census term	2021 Census term
Lone-parent family	One-parent family <sup>1</sup>
Lone parent	Parent in one-parent family
Couple family with children	Couple family with children <b>or</b> Two-parent family
Intact family	(Two-parent) Non-stepfamily
Stepfamily	Stepfamily <b>or</b> (Two-parent) Stepfamily

1. Change made only in English; the French term remains the same.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021.

Some concepts have changed over time. When making historical comparisons, it is important to refer to the [census definitions](#) found in the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-301-X, for the census year in question.

The method used for deriving data on multigenerational households was modified slightly in 2021. In 2016, a multigenerational household was defined as a household in which at least one person is both the grandparent of a person in the household and the parent of another person in the same household. In 2021, this definition was expanded to also include households in which at least one person is both the child of a person in the household and the grandchild of another person in the same household. The analytical and data products of the 2021 Census release also apply this updated concept to the 2011 and 2016 census years. As a result, there may be small differences in counts for 2011 and 2016 in archived tables.

The method used for deriving data on young adults (aged 20 to 34 years) living with parents was modified slightly in 2021. Since 2001, a person living in a skip-generation family—that is, with at least one grandparent and no parent present—is considered to be a “child in a census family.” In these situations, the grandparent is also considered to be the child’s parent within the census family. However, before 2021, young adults living with a grandparent in a skip-generation family were not considered to be “living with a parent.” In 2021, the definition of young adults living with parents was expanded to include those young adults living in a skip-generation family with at least one grandparent. The analytical and data products of the 2021 Census release also apply this updated concept to the 2011 and 2016 census years. As a result, there may be small differences in counts for 2011 and 2016 in archived tables.

For more information on comparability between the 2021 and 2016 censuses, please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

## Collection and processing methods

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in Canada in early 2020 and affected all steps of the 2021 Census process, from data collection to dissemination. Please refer to the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X, for more detailed information on this topic.

## Data quality

The 2021 Census of Population underwent a thorough data quality assessment. The different certification activities conducted to evaluate the quality of the 2021 Census data are described in [Chapter 9](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

The data quality assessment was conducted in addition to the regular verifications and quality checks completed at key stages of the census. For example, throughout data collection and processing, the accuracy of specific steps such as data capture and coding was measured, the consistency of the responses provided was checked, and the non-response rates for each question were analyzed. As well, the quality of imputed responses was assessed during data editing and imputation.

During the data quality assessment, a number of data quality indicators were produced and used to evaluate the quality of the data. These indicators are briefly described below. Finally, resulting census counts were compared with other data sources and certified for final release.

The main highlights of this assessment of the data pertaining to families, households and marital status are presented below in the [Data quality for families, households and marital status](#) section.

## Data quality indicators

A number of quality indicators were produced and analyzed during the 2021 Census of Population data quality assessment. Three indicators are available to data users for short-form content: the total non-response (TNR) rate, as well as the non-response rate and imputation rate per question.

The **total non-response (TNR) rate** is the primary quality indicator that accompanies each disseminated 2021 Census of Population product, and is calculated for each geographic area. It measures total non-response at the dwelling level. Non-response is said to be total when no questionnaire is returned from a dwelling or when a returned questionnaire does not meet the minimum content. More information on the TNR rate is available in [Chapter 9](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Partial non-response is when answers to certain questions are not provided for a respondent household.

The **non-response rate per question** is a measure of missing information due to non-response to a question. For the short-form questionnaire, the non-response rate per question includes both TNR and partial non-response to the question.

It is defined as the total number of in-scope units for which no response was provided to the question, divided by the total number of in-scope units for the question. Here “units” refers to the statistical units for which data are collected or derived (e.g., persons or households, depending on whether the question is about a person-level characteristic or a household-level characteristic). A unit is considered to be in scope if it belongs to the census target population (i.e., private and collective dwellings occupied by usual residents) and if the question is applicable to that unit.

The **imputation rate per question** measures the extent to which responses to a given question were imputed. Imputation is used to replace missing data in the event of non-response or when a response is found to be invalid (e.g., multiple answers are provided when a single answer is expected). Imputation is conducted to eliminate data gaps and to reduce bias introduced by non-response. Imputation is generally done by identifying persons or households in the same geographical area with similar characteristics to the incomplete record and copying their values to fill in the missing or invalid responses.

The imputation rate per question is defined as the total number of in-scope units for which the response to that question was imputed, divided by the total number of in-scope units (see the definition of “units” provided in the above section on the non-response rate per question). For short-form content, imputation resolves both total

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and partial non-response (weighting is not done to adjust for total non-response, as it is for long-form content). Whole household imputation (WHI) is used to resolve total non-response. It first imputes the occupancy status of non-respondent dwellings and further imputes all the data for those dwellings resolved as occupied in the first step. WHI is included in the imputation rate per question, including the use of administrative data to impute non-responding households in areas with low response rates; see [Appendix 1.7](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X. As with the non-response rate, a unit is considered to be in scope if the question is applicable to that unit and the unit belongs to the census target population.

The non-response and imputation rates for a question are often similar, but some differences can be observed for a given question because of additional data processing steps that may have been required. These rates were regularly checked during data assessment, and a detailed analysis was done if there was a difference between the two rates for a question, to ensure the appropriateness of the processing steps taken and the quality of the data. A difference between the non-response rate and the imputation rate for a question can generally be explained by one of the following two factors:

- Some responses were considered invalid or inconsistent during the edit stage and imputation was needed, which is why the imputation rate is higher than the non-response rate for a question.
- Some non-responses were resolved in a straightforward manner early during data processing because a single resolution was possible based on the answers provided to other questions, making imputation unnecessary. This may explain why the non-response rate is higher than the imputation rate for a question.

The non-response and imputation rates per question at lower levels of geography are also available in 2021 Census data tables presenting data quality indicators. This information is scheduled for release on August 17, 2022 for short-form questions and on November 30, 2022 for long-form questions.

### Certification of final counts

Once data editing and imputation were completed, the data were tabulated to represent the total Canadian population. Certification of the final counts was the last step in the validation process, which led to the recommendation to release the data for each level of geography and domain of interest. Based on the analysis of the data quality indicators and the comparison of the census counts with other data sources, the recommendation is for unconditional release, conditional release, or non-release (for quality reasons on rare occasions). For conditional release or non-release, appropriate notes and warnings are included in the products and provided to users. Moreover, other data sources were used to evaluate the census counts. However, since the risk of error often increases for lower levels of geography and for smaller populations, and the data sources used to evaluate these counts are less reliable or not available at these lower levels, it can be difficult to certify the counts at these levels.

Census counts are also subject to confidentiality rules that ensure non-disclosure of respondent identity and characteristics. For more information on privacy and confidentiality, please refer to [Chapter 1](#) of the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2021*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X. For information on how Statistics Canada balances the protection of confidentiality and the need for disaggregated census data, with specific attention to new 2021 Census content, please refer to [Balancing the Protection of Confidentiality with the Needs for Disaggregated Census Data, Census of Population, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-26-0005.

### Data quality for families, households and marital status

Tables 5, 6 and 7 present the non-response and imputation rates for the three key census questions from the [short-form census questionnaire](#) on the families, households and marital status topics for Canada and for each province and territory.

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**Table 5**  
**Non-response rate and imputation rate for relationship to Person 1, Canada, provinces and territories, Census of Population, 2021**

Geography	Non-response rate	Imputation rate
	percent	
Canada	2.9	3.6
Newfoundland and Labrador	2.8	3.4
Prince Edward Island	2.3	2.9
Nova Scotia	2.7	3.4
New Brunswick	3.0	3.8
Quebec	2.5	3.1
Ontario	2.5	3.3
Manitoba	3.8	4.6
Saskatchewan	4.6	5.5
Alberta	3.4	4.1
British Columbia	3.4	4.1
Yukon	4.8	5.7
Northwest Territories	8.3	9.2
Nunavut	22.2	23.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

**Table 6**  
**Non-response rate and imputation rate for marital status, Canada, provinces and territories, Census of Population, 2021**

Geography	Non-response rate	Imputation rate
	percent	
Canada	4.5	4.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	4.0	4.2
Prince Edward Island	4.1	4.0
Nova Scotia	3.8	4.0
New Brunswick	4.6	4.8
Quebec	4.6	4.7
Ontario	3.7	4.0
Manitoba	6.3	6.4
Saskatchewan	6.7	6.8
Alberta	5.3	5.5
British Columbia	5.0	5.1
Yukon	8.4	8.2
Northwest Territories	11.1	11.1
Nunavut	25.6	26.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

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Table 7

Non-response rate and imputation rate for common law, Canada, provinces and territories, Census of Population, 2021

Geography	Non-response rate	Imputation rate
	percent	
Canada	4.0	5.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	3.8	4.4
Prince Edward Island	3.6	4.2
Nova Scotia	3.6	4.2
New Brunswick	4.1	4.9
Quebec	3.6	4.3
Ontario	3.5	4.7
Manitoba	5.5	6.3
Saskatchewan	6.1	6.9
Alberta	4.7	5.7
British Columbia	4.3	5.7
Yukon	6.5	7.2
Northwest Territories	10.9	11.6
Nunavut	26.5	27.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

## Comparability over time

All trend analyses presented in this July 13, 2022, release and its accompanying products compare 2021 data with previous census data. An evaluation of the data by Statistics Canada's Centre for Demography indicates that they are comparable to those of the previous census cycles.

The 2021 Census measured the living arrangements of people in residences for senior citizens and nursing homes. People were classified as living alone in their unit, living as a couple in their unit or living with others in their unit. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, collection procedures for the 2021 Census were redesigned to ensure the safety of respondents and census employees and limit contacts. Census employees did not visit any institutional collective dwellings, such as hospitals, nursing homes and residences for senior citizens, or any long-term care facilities. Administrators of institutional collective dwellings answered a series of questions about their facility and provided census information on their usual residents using the [2021 Census: Collective Dwellings](#) electronic questionnaire. However, in some residences for senior citizens and nursing homes, incomplete information from administrative records or questionnaires, non-response, and limitations related to data processing resulted in at least 36% of people being systematically classified as living alone in their unit regardless of their actual living arrangements. Consequently, 2021 Census data on the living arrangements of people in residences for senior citizens and nursing homes should be used with caution.

## Comparability with other data sources

The quality of the 2021 Census information released in July 2022 (on families, households and marital status) was evaluated internally before publication. The data were compared, to the extent possible, with data from alternate data sources. In the case of data by marital status and census families, the main source for comparison is the [Annual Demographic Estimates: Canada, Provinces and Territories](#) produced by Statistics Canada's Centre for Demography.

Tables 8 and 9 compare the July 1, 2021, annual demographic estimates with the 2021 Census of Population results by census family structure and marital status. There is a similar distribution for the data from the two sources. Variations largely stem from the [differential methodologies](#) used in the census and the postcensal population estimates.

**Table 8**  
**Comparison of results for census family structure from the July 1, 2021, annual demographic estimates (adjusted for net undercoverage) and the 2021 Census of Population, Canada**

Census family structure	Annual demographic estimates <sup>1</sup>	Census
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,502,580</b>	<b>10,262,925</b>
Couple families	8,676,069	8,576,585
Couple families without children	4,286,249	4,286,165
Couple families with children	4,389,820	4,290,415
One-parent families	1,826,511	1,686,340
One-parent families in which the parent is a woman <sup>2</sup>	1,354,246	1,302,670
One-parent families in which the parent is a man <sup>2</sup>	472,265	383,670

1. Preliminary postcensal estimates.

2. The sex variable in the Demographic Estimates Program and the two-category gender variable in the 2021 Census are included together in the data table. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations. For additional information on changes of concepts over time, please consult the [Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide](#). For the 2021 Census data, 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 "man+" includes men as well as some non-binary persons. The category "woman+" includes women as well as some non-binary persons.

**Note:** Counts are calculated on rounded data and may not necessarily add up to the total.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Demographic Estimates Program and Census of Population, 2021.



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**Table 9**

**Comparison of results for marital status of the population aged 15 and older from the July 1, 2021, annual demographic estimates (adjusted for net undercoverage) and the 2021 Census of Population, Canada**

Marital status	Annual demographic estimates <sup>1</sup>	Census
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,228,024</b>	<b>30,979,185</b>
Married or living common law	18,310,047	17,626,000
Married	14,547,623	13,725,630
Living common law	3,762,424	3,900,375
Never married	2,759,815	2,967,670
Separated	146,282	123,830
Divorced	754,766	721,710
Widowed	101,561	87,165
Not married and not living common law	13,917,977	13,353,185
Never married	9,166,148	9,025,870
Separated	860,020	741,140
Divorced	1,986,825	1,921,880
Widowed	1,904,984	1,664,300

1. Preliminary postcensal estimates.

**Note:** Counts are calculated on rounded data and may not necessarily add up to the total.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Demographic Estimates Program and Census of Population, 2021.

Users of family-related information from the census often use the data in conjunction with previous cycles of the census or with other comparable data. Comparability is affected by differences in the survey target populations, survey sampling and collection methodologies, question wording, format, examples and instructions, approaches to data processing, social context at the time of data collection, and other factors.

### Appendix: Considerations for examining families and living arrangements with the Census of Population

As a consequence of changes in the family and society overall in recent decades in Canada, an increasing number of adults and children are likely to have more than one residence where they live throughout the year. However, the census does not capture the phenomenon of individuals living in multiple households.

The main purpose of the Census of Population is to enumerate the population. To ensure that individuals are counted once and only once in the census, persons in private households are counted as residing at only one dwelling, and in only one household, by applying the concept of [usual place of residence](#). As part of this concept, rules are applied for individuals who have multiple residences, including the following:

- Family members who live elsewhere for part of the year for work-related reasons should be included at their family's home regardless of the amount of time they spend there.
- Children who split their time throughout the year between the homes of two parents or guardians should be included in the home where they live most of the time. If they spend an equal amount of time with each parent or guardian, they should be included where they were staying on Census Day.
- Students who periodically return to their parents' home should be listed only at this home, even though they may spend much less than half the year there.

A consequence of the approach the census currently uses to count the population based on the usual place of residence is that it does not always reflect the full complexity of families, households and living arrangements. Indeed, the census likely underestimates the true number of families and households of various types if data users conceptually want to include families and households constituted on a part-time basis. For instance, a study using data from the General Social Survey found that the number of census family households increased by about 4% when children living part time or half the time with their parents were accounted for. The proportion of two-parent non-stepfamilies also tended to decrease, while that of one-parent families in which the parent is a man and stepfamilies increased.<sup>1</sup> From a practical perspective, for researchers, planners, programmers and policy makers, it is often important to know the prevalence and location of these “part-time” families and households.

Part-time living situations also undoubtedly have significant impacts on the day-to-day lives of individuals in many ways. For example, someone who is recorded as living alone in the census may have close relationships with family members who live or spend time with them on a regular basis, such as young children or partners with whom they are not co-residing. As evidence of this, the 2017 General Social Survey found that among persons aged 35 to 64 who were living alone, had experienced a separation or divorce within the last 20 years and had a dependant-aged child, 59% had their child living with them for some period of time in the last 12 months, 74% contacted their child at least once a week when their child was not living with them and 24% paid child support.<sup>2</sup> These connections to children are likely to affect individuals' consumption patterns regarding housing, furniture, entertainment, food and other daily essentials—this may be hidden by the census categorization of this individual as a person who lives alone.

Similar occurrences of hidden complexity can occur for other types of family structures and living arrangements. Here are some examples:

- In a household recorded in the census as being a simple stepfamily—consisting of a child, the child's mother and the child's stepfather, with no additional persons—the stepfather may in reality have children from a previous relationship who live in the house periodically throughout the year.

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1. See Lapierre-Adamcyk, Évelyne, Céline Le Bourdais and Valerie Martin. 2009. “[Familles et réseau familial extra-résidentiel : une réflexion sur les limites de la définition statistique de la famille](#).” *Cahiers québécois de démographie*. Vol. 38, no. 1. p. 5-39 (available in French only).

2. Tang, J., N. Galbraith and J. Truong. 2019. “[Living alone in Canada](#).” *Insights on Canadian Society*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X.

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- A family recorded in the census as being a one-parent family may in reality have relatives staying in the home to take care of the child on a regular basis (while the parent is working a night shift, for instance).
- A family recorded in the census as a couple family with children may function effectively as a one-parent family, since one parent lives in another province for 10 months of the year for work reasons.
- A postsecondary student who lives with their partner most of the year but returns to their parental home on holidays will be recorded in the census as living in their parents' home, and not as being part of a couple.
- A couple "living apart together," the members of which each live in their own household but whose lives are closely entwined and who regularly spend the night at each other's homes, will not be captured in the census as a couple. Instead, the members of this non-residential union will be recorded as two separate one-person households.

As families, households and living arrangements become more varied, flexible and complex in terms of membership and history, it is important to keep in mind these possibilities of hidden complexity when using and interpreting census data. As society continues to evolve, it must be increasingly acknowledged that many families cannot be restricted to the four walls of a single dwelling, nor can they always be adequately categorized by a single term.

Statistics Canada is currently investigating how persons with multiple residences might best be measured using various statistical vehicles such as the census, surveys and other data collection activities. In the coming months, Statistics Canada will consult with Canadians, stakeholders and partners on this issue and will assess the feasibility of testing content on multiple residences as part of preparations for the 2026 Census. Although few countries currently explicitly address multiple-residence situations in their censuses, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has studied the topic. The Commission indicates that taking into account "commuters between households" can have major impacts, including "improving the quality of population enumeration, by avoiding double-counting," and "creating more precise information on family and household characteristics."<sup>3,4</sup>

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3. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. 2011. [Measurement of different emerging forms of households and families](#). Prepared by the Conference of European Statisticians' Task Force on Families and Households. New York and Geneva: United Nations.

4. Much of the information in this note comes from the 2018 internal Statistics Canada report "Discussion paper: Multiple residences of students, workers and children in shared custody" by Heather Lathe, France-Pascale Ménard and Nora Galbraith.