



2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Date of birth (age), sex at birth and gender, relationship to Person 1, and marital status

2026 Census of Population

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Introduction

The next Census of Population will take place in May 2026. To maintain the relevance of the census, Statistics Canada evaluates and reviews the questionnaire content in preparation for each census cycle. This includes several stages of consultative engagement, as well as testing and data evaluation, to recommend questionnaire content for the census.

Approximately 222,000 households from communities across the country were selected to participate in the 2024 Census Test. The test helped to determine whether new or modified questions under consideration could be easily understood and answered by Canadians. Testing census content ensures that high-quality data will be available from the 2026 Census of Population to support a wide variety of programs and services in communities across the country.

A series of fact sheets provides an overview of the content changes for the 2026 Census of Population because the census process is always evolving to reflect changes in the Canadian population and its demographic characteristics.

This fact sheet offers a summary of content changes for the 2026 Census specific to the following topics: date of birth (age), sex at birth and gender, relationship to Person 1, and marital status. The tested changes for each topic are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Date of birth (age), sex at birth and gender

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The position of the questions on sex at birth, gender and date of birth was reordered. Minor modifications were made to the text of the questions on sex at birth and gender and the gender response options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The date of birth question now appears first, followed by the questions on gender and sex at birth. The terminology for the gender response categories is now “man” and “woman” for people aged 15 and over and “boy” and “girl” for children aged 14 and under. These options are shown dynamically in the electronic questionnaire based on the person’s age. Updated definitions for the concepts of sex at birth and gender are included below the questions, and more contextual information is available in the help text of the electronic questionnaire.

Why are these questions asked?

Questions on date of birth (age), sex at birth and gender provide information about the demographic characteristics of people in Canada. This information is used by all levels of government to make important decisions, such as planning community services and social programs, including Old Age Security and the Canada Child Benefit. It is also used by municipalities to plan a variety of services, such as childcare, schools, hospitals and emergency services.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

In 2021, Statistics Canada began collecting information on gender in addition to sex at birth in the Census of Population to fill information gaps on gender diversity in Canada. Consultations on 2021 Census content emphasized that this lack of data was perceived as a limitation for governments, non-governmental organizations and researchers in understanding the experiences of transgender and non-binary people, as summarized in [The 2021 Census of Population Consultation Results: What we heard from Canadians](#). During the consultations on 2026 Census content, Statistics Canada also heard from key stakeholders and data users that more granular data on the transgender and non-binary population were still needed. This is one of the most frequently reported perceived data gaps in census content, as summarized in the [2026 Census of Population Content Consultation Results: What we heard from Canadians](#).

In parallel, Statistics Canada also received consistent feedback from respondents to the 2021 Census and other social surveys, data users, and participants of the [2021 Public Consultation on Gender and Sexual Diversity Statistical Metadata Standards – What We Heard Report](#) regarding the incongruent use of the biological terms “male” and “female” for gender. Further to public consultation, the category names of the [classification of gender](#) were updated in the fall of 2021.

Statistics Canada considered changes to the census questionnaire for 2026 based on the recommendations from stakeholders and data users and the updated Statistics Canada standards for collecting the sex at birth and gender variables. Modifying the order of the questions from how they appeared in 2021 and asking the question on gender prior to that on sex at birth aligns with Statistics Canada’s approach of collecting and using gender data by default and is consistent with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat’s 2018 policy direction [Modernizing the Government of Canada’s Sex and Gender Information Practices: summary report](#).



Relationship to Person 1

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor modifications were made, including updated response categories for the question on the relationship to Person 1 and more inclusive relationship terminology. The position of the question on the relationship to Person 1 was reordered to before the questions on marital status and common-law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The question now appears before the questions on marital status and common-law, allowing households to skip one or both questions in certain cases. Dynamic relationship pronouns are now used in the electronic questionnaire based on the identified gender of the person. For example, “wife of Person 1” is displayed for women, “husband of Person 1” is displayed for men and “married spouse of Person 1” is displayed if “or specify” was selected for the person’s gender. In French questionnaires, the term “partenaire en union libre” is replaced with the term “conjoint(e) de fait.” Irrelevant relationship options are now omitted in the electronic questionnaire for people aged 14 and under (e.g., parent of Person 1, grandparent of Person 1, spouse or partner of Person 1). In the electronic questionnaire, relationship options are no longer tied to the order in which household members are listed. In the electronic questionnaire, the category “other relationship, specify” now includes the explanatory text “for example, ex-spouse or ex-partner” for people aged 15 and over.

Why are these questions asked?

These questions provide information about the household and family characteristics of people in Canada, including household composition, family size, family structure, the number of children living with one or two parents and the number of people living alone. The family and household data that result from these questions are essential for all levels of government to develop effective policies and legislation regarding the composition of families and households. Data help identify, evaluate and administer federal, provincial and local programs for daycare and support for people with disabilities, seniors living alone, one-parent families and other vulnerable populations.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Following content consultation and testing, Statistics Canada considered modifications to the response categories and wording to reduce respondent burden, use more inclusive language and better reflect changes in Canada’s social context. It was determined that reordering the household relationship and marital status questions and updating the logic of the questionnaire would allow certain individuals and households to bypass some questions, helping to reduce the burden of response for a substantial portion of Canadians.



There is also a historical precedent for placing the question on household relationships before the questions on marital status. In all historical censuses prior to 2001, the question on the relationship to Person 1 appeared before the marital status questions and was often the first question on the questionnaire. The order was changed to accommodate the incorporation of other census questions into the questionnaire.

Marital status

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The marital status and common-law question module was revised to collect information on cohabiting partnerships between adults. It was composed of a series of “yes” or “no” questions asking whether respondents are currently married or living with a partner; whether they have ever been married; or whether they are separated, divorced or widowed from their most recent marriage. The position of the questions was reordered to after the question on the relationship to Person 1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2021 version of the marital status and common-law questions has been retained with minor modifications, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minor adjustment to wording and font (bolding) in the definition of “living with a common-law partner” replacement of the term “partenaire en union libre” with the term “conjoint(e) de fait” in the French questionnaire. The placement of the questions on marital status and common-law has been changed to now appear after the question on the relationship to Person 1.

Why are these questions asked?

Questions on marital status provide information about the household and family characteristics of people in Canada, including household composition, family size, family structure, the number of children living with one or two parents and the number of people living alone. Demographic variables have always been crucial to the census and are recommended for collection from every Canadian in a full enumeration by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: [Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing](#). Data on marital status and people living common-law are required for legislative, policy and programming, and research purposes by all levels of government, private industries, international statistical agencies and academia.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Through content consultations, changes to the questions were recommended by key stakeholders, subject-matter experts and users of the data, with a goal of reducing confusion between the legal and colloquial use of some words and concepts. Statistics Canada also considered the substantial volume of feedback received from respondents of the 2021 Census indicating confusion about the questions and answer options. For instance, many non-married couples—a growing segment of couples in Canada—were confused that their situation was not clearly mentioned as a possible answer option in the first marital status question of the 2021 questionnaire. Some respondents who were formerly in a common-law relationship also wondered whether they should use the “divorced,” “widowed” or “separated, but still legally married” categories to report their situation, even though they had not been married. The proposed modifications to the module’s content are expected to reduce respondent burden and to better reflect Canada’s evolving society.