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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Ethnic or cultural origins, religion, immigration, citizenship and place of birth

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: ethnic or cultural origins, religion, immigration, citizenship and place of birth. The tested changes for each topic are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Ethnic or cultural origins

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifications were made to the instructions for the question. • The list of examples linked in the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure relevance for the 2026 Census, as well as for improvements to the format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instructions for the question have been modified to help respondents better understand the meaning of the term “ancestors”: “Ancestors refer to the people from whom one is descended (grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.).” • The list of examples linked in the questionnaire has been formatted to be displayed in alphabetical order, with a revised list of examples to reflect the highest-frequency responses in the previous cycle.

Why are these questions asked?

A question on ethnic or cultural origins has been included in the Census of Population since 1871. Furthermore, a question on this topic was asked in censuses even prior to Confederation, reflecting a long-standing, continuing and widespread demand for information on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population.

Today, this information is used to support federal legislation, policies and programs such as the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Governments, businesses, academics, researchers, and ethnic and cultural associations throughout the country also use this information to plan products and services.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

To reflect the changing and complex nature of diversity in the country, Statistics Canada has conducted extensive engagement and research to improve the collection and measurement of the ethnocultural diversity of the population. In the 2021 Census, updates were made to the question on ethnic or cultural origins to better reflect Canada’s growing diversity. Examples were removed from the questionnaire and replaced with a link to an extensive list of examples of ethnic or cultural origins to encourage Canadians to provide specific responses without prompting. More than 450 ethnic or cultural origins were reported in the 2021 Census.

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and continues to produce relevant, high-quality data, Statistics Canada considered minor modifications to the question on ethnic or cultural origins. The results of extensive qualitative testing indicated that some respondents questioned how far back in their family tree they should go when considering the origins of their ancestors and found the existing instructions for the question confusing. The existing instructions indicated that “ancestors may have Indigenous origins, or origins that refer to different countries, or other origins that may not refer to different countries.” In addition, some respondents had difficulty finding their ethnic or cultural origin in the [list of examples](#) provided via hyperlink. As a result, modifications were made to the instructions and to the way the list of examples is displayed.

These changes have been carefully analyzed, discussed with stakeholders and guided by expert advice to preserve the relevance and overall quality of the data on ethnic or cultural origins, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met. Notably, the modifications aim to provide clearer instructional text and improve the functionality of the list of examples that is accessible via hyperlink in the questionnaire.



Religion

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Statistics Canada evaluated the inclusion of the question on religion in the 2026 Census to address the increased demand for more frequent data on religious groups (i.e., every 5 years rather than every 10 years).The list of examples was reviewed and updated to ensure relevance for the 2026 Census.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The questionnaire will include the same question on religion as the 2021 Census, with an updated list of examples directly in the questionnaire to reflect the highest-frequency responses in the previous cycle.The extensive list of examples provided via hyperlink will remain the same as in 2021.

Why are these questions asked?

A question on religion has been included in the Census of Population every 10 years since 1871, reflecting a long-standing, continuing and widespread demand for information about religious affiliation and diversity in Canada.

Information on the religion of the population is commonly used by governments, as well as by religious groups, denominations and associations across the country. For example, these data support the planning of programs and inform decisions on where to establish places of worship such as churches, synagogues, mosques and temples. Additionally, this information is used to evaluate the need and potential for separate religious schools in some provinces. It also provides insights on the diversity of Canada, highlights the unique experiences of various religious groups and supports efforts to combat hate crimes.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Religion is a core dimension of ethnocultural diversity in Canada. Combining religion with other variables, such as ethnic or cultural origins, racialized groups, languages, and immigration data, is essential for conducting intersectional analyses and providing a detailed portrait of the diversity of the Canadian population.

Historically, data on religion have been collected every 10 years, with the most recent data being from the 2021 Census. Statistics Canada heard from key stakeholders and data users that there was an increased need for benchmark data on religious groups to respond to the rapid changes in Canadian society through immigration and the increased diversity of the population, as summarized in [2026 Census of Population Content Consultation Results: What we heard from Canadians](#). The 2021 Census measured the rapid growth of some religious groups since data were last collected in 2011. For example, the proportion of the population who reported being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh has doubled in the last 20 years. In addition, the share of the population reporting no religious affiliation, or a secular perspective (atheist, agnostic, humanist and other secular perspectives) rose from 16.5% in 2001 to 34.6% in 2021.

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society, continues to produce relevant and high-quality data, and meets the increased demand for more frequent data on religious groups, Statistics Canada considered including the question on religion in the 2026 Census to increase the frequency of data collection. Canada is an increasingly diverse country, and the inclusion of this question on a more frequent basis will better measure the growing religious diversity in the country. One minor change was introduced: the list of examples presented directly in the questionnaire was updated to reflect the highest-frequency responses in the previous cycle.

These changes have been carefully analyzed, discussed with stakeholders and guided by expert advice to preserve the relevance and overall quality of the data on religion, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met.



Immigration, citizenship, and place of birth of person and of parents

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements were made to the wording and format of the citizenship question and answer categories. Modifications were made to the order of the response categories for the question on the place of birth of parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The text “other than Canada” is now in bold font in Part B of the citizenship question to add emphasis, and the text for both answer categories has been modified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “No” response category now reads “No other countries of citizenship.” The “Yes” response category now reads “Yes, other countries of citizenship.” No changes were made to the questions on the place of birth of person or of parents for the 2026 Census. Immigration variables (e.g., immigrant status, year of immigration, admission category) will continue to be integrated from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada’s administrative records.

Why are these questions asked?

The census is one of the most comprehensive sources of data on immigrants and non-permanent residents living in Canada, allowing for comparability over time and at various levels of geography, including information on place of birth, place of birth of parents, generation status, citizenship and immigration.

The question on the place of birth of person is used to determine the Canadian province or territory or the country outside Canada where the respondent was born. It provides information on the diversity of the Canadian population and on population movements within Canada and from other countries to Canada.

Data on the place of birth of parents are used to determine the country where each of the respondent’s parents was born. The main purpose of this question is to derive the generation status of the respondent (whether the person or their parents were born in Canada) and establish whether the person is in the first generation, second generation, or third generation or more. Generation status provides information on the diversity of Canada’s population and makes it possible to study how the children of immigrants (the second generation) are integrating into Canadian society.

Citizenship data provide information on the legal citizenship status of Canada’s population. This information is used to estimate the number of potential voters and to plan citizenship classes and programs. It also provides information about the population with multiple citizenships and the countries of citizenship outside Canada.

In the census, data on immigration are obtained from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) administrative records. The immigration variables provide information on the number of immigrants and non-permanent residents in Canada at the time of the census, as well as on the year immigrants were admitted to Canada. Additional variables such as immigrant admission category provide information on the programs through which immigrants have been granted the right to live in Canada (e.g., refugees, economic immigrants, immigrants sponsored by family). Non-permanent resident type refers to whether a non-permanent resident is an asylum claimant or holds a work or study permit.



Data on place of birth, citizenship and immigration are used to compare the social and economic conditions of immigrants over time; to evaluate employment and immigration policies and programs; and to plan education, health care and other services. This information is required by IRCC, as well as by provincial and territorial immigration departments, to develop and monitor immigration policies and programs. It is also used in support of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, the *Citizenship Act*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

According to the 2021 Census, more than 8.3 million people, or almost one-quarter (23.0%) of the population, were, or had ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents in Canada. This was the largest proportion since Confederation, topping the previous 1921 record of 22.3%, and the highest among the “G7” countries. Based on Statistics Canada’s population projections from 2022, the proportion of immigrants in the Canadian population could reach from 29.1% to 34.0% in 2041.

Canadian-born children of immigrants, also called the second generation, have at least one foreign-born parent. According to the 2021 Census, almost 1.9 million children younger than 15 had at least one parent who was born abroad. This accounts for almost one-third (31.5%) of all children in Canada.

The census collects information about the population with more than one country of citizenship. This helps provide a richer picture of the citizenship of the country’s population. For the 2021 Census, the citizenship question was changed from a single question (with a “select all that apply” format) to a two-part question to clarify the main concepts being measured. For 2026, it was determined that further improvements were needed. To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and continues to produce relevant, high-quality data, minor content changes were considered for Part B of the citizenship question for the 2026 Census.

Any changes made to census content are carefully analyzed, 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. Specifically, Statistics Canada has consulted with IRCC, as well as various academics.