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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Labour market activities, commuting and education

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: labour market activities, commuting and education. The tested changes for each topic are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Labour market activities

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 order of the questions within the labour market activities and commuting section of the questionnaire. • Modifications were made to the logic of the electronic questionnaire to allow those who are absent or on lay-off to bypass up to three questions, and corresponding changes were made to the paper questionnaire. • “No, retired” was added as a response category to the question on temporary lay-off or absence from the job or business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions in the section are reordered from how they appeared in 2021 to allow for those who were absent from work or on temporary lay-off and those who were retired to bypass questions, if applicable in the electronic questionnaire. • New instructions are included on the paper questionnaire to guide respondents and skip appropriate non-applicable questions. • The response category “No, retired” is now included for the question on temporary lay-off or absence from the job or business. • Minor modifications to reflect Statistics Canada’s standards, reduce space and improve data quality are included to the write-in field for firm section; to the text for the class of worker; and to the examples listed for kind of business, occupation and main duties.

Why are these questions asked?

Questions about labour market activity provide information on Canada’s workforce, including the industries and occupations people work in, the number of hours worked in a reference week, and people’s availability to start work. Including labour questions on the long-form questionnaire allows for the analysis of labour market activity according to individual and family characteristics, such as income, education, immigrant status and sociocultural factors.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Employment information is used to assess the economic conditions of communities and specific populations, such as Indigenous people and immigrants. Industry and occupation information is used to forecast job opportunities. Census data are used to update the National Occupational Classification system, which identifies and categorizes the entire range of occupational activity in Canada. Some census information feeds into adjustments to the monthly regional unemployment rates used by Employment and Social Development Canada to determine eligibility, level and duration of insurance benefits for those living within a particular employment insurance region. Additionally, the data are also used by labour market analysts, economists, consultants, planners, forecasters and academics in both the private and public sectors.

The census can generate this information across Canada, as well as low levels of geography where other surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) do not collect data. Statistics Canada considered changes to the labour market questions for the 2026 cycle to increase congruence with the LFS and to improve the ease of analysis and collaboration between the programs. Changes to the way the section is organized will help certain population groups, including those absent from work or on temporary lay-off and retirees aged 65 years and older, to bypass some labour and commuting questions. These changes will also facilitate the refinement of derived variables to increase the level of agreement of key labour market indicators between the census and the LFS.



Commuting

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new question was included to collect more detailed data about the days workers typically commute, to better understand changes in commuting frequencies with the shift to hybrid or remote work. Minor modifications were made to the wording of the questions and to the accompanying instructions and response categories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The revised wording focuses on workplace location and allows for multiple responses to account for hybrid work. The “bicycle” category has been expanded to include electric bikes and electric scooters, and the question wording was changed to “in a usual workweek.” New response options, “Usual time” and “No usual time,” have been included for the question on the time of leaving for work to account for hybrid and shift schedules. A “No usual duration” option has been added to the question on commuting duration to account for varied workplace locations or remote work.

Why are these questions asked?

These questions tell us where people work and how they get to work. This information is used to assess commuting patterns, public transit needs and energy use. Commuting information also helps urban planners identify locations for new hospitals, schools, and daycare and recreational facilities, as well as the need for roads and other travel networks. The data are used by Statistics Canada as part of the criteria to define census metropolitan areas (CMAs), census agglomerations (CAs), and CMA- and CA-influenced zones. Transportation planners for provincial, territorial, regional and municipal governments use the commuting information to analyze traffic flows, assess transportation services, and plan for changes to these services and road networks.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Statistics Canada considered improvements to the questions for the 2026 cycle in response to shifting labour force profiles and stakeholder requests to clarify questions for respondents who are hybrid, shift or gig workers. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a fundamental shift in workplace location for many Canadians. In May 2022, Statistics Canada began collecting data on hybrid workers using the LFS’s commuting supplement. The results released in 2023 indicated that at least 10% of Canadians worked in a hybrid workplace model. As a result, changes to the census questionnaire are required to capture the place of work and commuting patterns of hybrid workers. These changes are intended to better align census data with the LFS results.



Education

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 to the wording of the questions and the accompanying instructions and response categories. New response category options were added. The reference period for school attendance was modified from “since September 2023” to “between September 2023 and May 2024.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new response category has been included for the question on completed college credentials. The category “1 year to 2 years” is now “1 year to less than 2 years” and “2 years,” to improve usefulness and comparability to international standards. The reference period for the school attendance question now reads “between September 2025 and May 2026” rather than “since September 2025” to improve data quality. The apprenticeship question will remain unchanged from the 2021 Census because the tested modifications to the wording failed to improve data quality.

Why are these questions asked?

These questions provide information on the education, training and recent school attendance of residents of Canada, providing a snapshot of the educational credentials and qualifications of all Canadians, including those who studied outside Canada. Collecting these data through the census provides detailed information that can be analyzed across key demographic groups, such as Indigenous people and immigrants to Canada, by occupation and by detailed level of geography. Governments use this information to develop training and other programs to meet the changing needs of the workforce and of specific groups, such as First Nations people, Métis, Inuit, immigrants and youth.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

The education content on the census questionnaire provides the most detailed and comprehensive data on the educational characteristics of Canadians, including completed credentials, major field of study, location of study for their highest credential and whether they attended school in the previous academic year. This is long-standing census content; no other data source provides this information to the same level of detail as the census, and the content has been largely consistent since 2006. However, minor modifications to the questions can increase the accuracy and relevance of the data, better fulfill policy and program needs at both federal and provincial levels, and reduce respondent burden without compromising the ability to compare education data over time. Statistics Canada considered small changes to the questions on education to clarify response options for respondents in English and French.