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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Population group

2026 Census of Population

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Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Population group

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 question on population group. The tested changes are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Population group

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various modifications were made to the wording and format of the question, the response categories, and the instructions for the question. • Modifications were made to the logic of the questionnaire to allow respondents who reported being First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit) to also answer the question on population group, if applicable. • A new response category—“First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)”—was added. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The question text has been reformulated and softened from the previous statement “Is this person:” and is now a question, “Which population group or groups best describe this person?” to improve clarity and accessibility. • The response instructions have also been revised to encourage respondents to report multiple groups, if applicable. • Reference to the <i>Employment Equity Act</i> has been removed from the introductory text to reflect the broader uses of the data. • The logic of the questionnaire now allows respondents who reported being First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit) to also answer the question on population group, if applicable. • A new response category—“First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)”—is now included. • The term “Indian” has now replaced “East Indian” in the list of examples, to simplify and use more commonly accepted terminology.

Why is this question asked?

A question on population group had been included in the census since 1996; its primary purpose is to derive counts for the “visible minority” population, as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal¹ peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”² The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

This question helps collect data that are used by governments, businesses, community groups, health care providers, researchers and a variety of organizations throughout the country to inform programs that promote equal opportunity for everyone to share in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada. Data on population groups can be used by employers to compare the characteristics of their workforce with those of the population living in the same area.

In the final report [A Transformative Framework to Achieve and Sustain Employment Equity - Report of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force](#), delivered to the Minister of Labour in 2023, the *Employment Equity Act*

1. The term Aboriginal has been replaced with Indigenous in Statistics Canada’s products but remains in the definitions of the *Employment Equity Act*.
 2. [Employment Equity Act](#).



Review Task Force recommended changing the term “visible minority” to “racialized workers.” Similarly, and further to feedback from stakeholders regarding the use of the term “visible minority” when disseminating data, Statistics Canada is currently using the term “racialized groups” to refer to data on visible minorities in communications and analytical products—a change that does not impact the collection of data.

Additionally, Statistics Canada conducted a consultative engagement on the visible minority concept with over 500 people, including academics; representatives from federal, provincial and municipal governments; not-for-profit organizations; community-based organizations; and the general public. For more information on the results of the engagement, refer to the [Report and Draft Recommendations - Results of the Consultative Engagement on the Visible Minority Concept](#).

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Canada is an increasingly diverse country—data from the 2021 Census indicated that 26.5% of the population is part of a racialized group. In 2021, three racialized groups represented 16.1% of Canada’s total population: South Asians (2.6 million people; 7.1%), Chinese (1.7 million; 4.7%) and Black people (1.5 million; 4.3%). According to the [most recent population projections](#), the racialized population in Canada could continue to increase, with the South Asian population reaching 5 million people and the Chinese and Black populations each exceeding 3 million by 2041.

In tandem with this growth, there is also growing demand for more detailed data about racialized groups to better understand the diversity of these populations and the unique experiences of each racialized group, while maintaining data quality, historical comparability and comparability between data sources.

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and continues to produce relevant, high-quality data, Statistics Canada considered modifications to the question on population group for the 2026 Census to address feedback received through consultations and qualitative testing.

Statistics Canada heard through consultations and testing that the original wording of the question as a statement, “Is this person:”, was considered blunt and confusing by some respondents. To improve this, the question was reworded to: “Which population group or groups best describe this person?” This revision softens the phrasing and encourages respondents to select multiple groups, making the question easier to understand.

Qualitative testing revealed that some respondents did not realize that they could select more than one category. In response, the instructions for the question have also been revised to emphasize that each respondent of a given household can select more than one group or report in the open text box, providing greater clarity that people can report multiple groups, if applicable.

We also heard through consultations and testing that people who reported an Indigenous group earlier on in the questionnaire wanted to be asked the population group question. Since the question was designed to derive the visible minority population as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*, respondents who reported being First Nations, Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit) in a previous question were not asked the population group question and were given instructions to skip it on the paper questionnaire. However, this exclusion created a data gap for individuals who identify with multiple groups, for example, those who would report being First Nations and Black. To address this, Statistics Canada updated the logic of the questionnaire so that Indigenous respondents no longer skip the population group question. The revised population group question now also includes a new response category of “First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit).”

While the revised population group question will capture more detailed information on the diversity of the Indigenous population, the existing Indigenous group question on the census questionnaire will remain the basis to derive the Indigenous identity population and to provide benchmark data on First Nations people, Métis and Inuit populations.

Results of the 2024 Census Test indicated that these changes did not result in statistically significant differences in the current visible minority variable or for the Indigenous group variable, apart from multiple visible minority groups. A higher proportion of multiple responses were observed on the 2024 test version compared with the 2021



control version of the question. This trend was observed among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents, reflecting greater flexibility and accuracy in capturing complex identities. The revised question will still allow for the current visible minority variable to be derived in accordance with the *Employment Equity Act*, thereby maintaining data quality and historical comparability.

Consultations also identified that the response options for the question may be too broad and may not reflect the socioeconomic disparities and issues experienced between groups or within the groups themselves. In response, Statistics Canada conducted many rounds of qualitative testing to test changes to the number and wording of the categories. However, results indicated that the changes were not well understood by respondents. Most stakeholders and data users also emphasized the importance of keeping historical comparability between census cycles. Meeting both these objectives requires a balanced and measured approach.

Statistics Canada concluded that the categories for the question should remain the same for the 2026 cycle, with the addition of the “First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)” category, until enough evidence is gathered regarding the effects of potential modifications. A further testing strategy will be put in place to evaluate the effect of modifying categories, and Statistics Canada will explore alternative ways to measure various population groups. Statistics Canada will continue its ongoing engagement to develop alternative ways to present these data to better reflect the diversity between and within these groups. An example is the publication [The Diversity of the Black Populations in Canada, 2021: A Sociodemographic Portrait](#).

The revised question has been discussed with stakeholders and guided by expert advice to preserve the relevance, historical comparability and overall quality of the data on the populations designated as visible minorities, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met. Specifically, Statistics Canada has relied on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Ethnocultural and Immigration Statistics and will continue to rely on its advice as further changes to the question on population group are considered for the future.