

## Brief on Statistics Canada Sex and Gender Data – Census 2021

### Key takeaways

- In the 2021 Census, 100,815 people reported being transgender or non-binary in Canada, approximately 0.33% of the country's population.
- The rates of transgender and non-binary people were higher in younger generations (Gen Z, Millennials) than in older generations (Gen X, Baby Boomers, Interwar and Greatest Generations).
- Most transgender or non-binary people lived in urban settings, with approximately 50% of them living in one of the 6 largest urban centers in the country.

### Background

Canada is the first country in the world to collect and publish data on gender and sex diversity, using a nation-wide census (Statistics Canada, 2022). In 2021, Statistics Canada added two main elements to the census with the aim of understanding and reporting gender diversity at the population level. Firstly, Statistics Canada included “sex at birth” as a question, ensuring both continuity with previous versions of the national census and inclusivity of people whose sex at birth and gender do not necessarily match.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, they added a choice to the “gender” question: “Male,” “Female,” and “Please specify this person's gender.”

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, Statistics Canada did not include “intersex” as an option for the “sex assigned at birth” question in the 2021 census. They argued: “for reasons related to the small size of the intersex

These changes to the census questionnaire are a step in the right direction in recognizing and advocating for equity, inclusion, and belonging of gender-diverse individuals in Canada, as well as all members of 2SLGBTQI communities. The changes better reflect the current social reality and will support emerging legislation in the future, providing more reliable data to policy makers, employers, and workers in healthcare, education, justice, and other services.

## **The Numbers – An Overview**

Of the 30.5 million people in Canada aged 15 and older, 59,460 reported being transgender and 41,355 reported being non-binary.<sup>2</sup> These numbers account for 0.33% ( $n = 100,815$ ) of the population in this age group. In other words, approximately 1 in 300 people aged 15 and older identified as transgender or non-binary.

The average age of the Canadian population (aged 15 and older) was 48 years old in May 2021. For transgender people, the average age was 39.4 years old, and for non-binary people, the average age was 30.4 years old. In addition, transgender men were on average younger (34.9 years old) than transgender women (43.3 years old), and 62% of non-binary people were younger than 35 years old.

## **Gender by Generation**

The proportion of transgender and non-binary people was higher in younger generations than in older generations. For instance, 0.79% of Gen Z (those born between 1997–2006) reported being transgender or non-binary. For other generations, 0.51% of Millennials (1981–1996), 0.19% of Gen X (1966–1980), 0.15% of Baby Boomers (1946–1965), and 0.12% of Interwar and Greatest Generations (1945 and earlier) reported being transgender or non-binary. This trend is possibly due to increased awareness of gender diversity—due to social media and global networks—in younger generations, in addition to the attitudes and behaviors informed by the historical context of their upbringing.

## **Geographical Distribution and Urbanity**

Geographically speaking, 39.1% ( $n = 39,450$ ) of transgender or non-binary Canadians lived in Ontario, which is similar to the distribution of the general Canadian population

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population and the challenges in identifying intersex people, Statistics Canada does not currently collect specific information on intersex people in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> When completing the gender question, respondents could write in a gender identity other than "male" or "female" (the other two options for that question). Respondents indicated "non-binary" (70.5% of respondents), "fluid" (7.3%), "agender" (5.1%), "queer" (4.1%), "gender neutral" (2.9%), "Two-Spirit" (2.2%), "neither man nor woman" (1.3%), and "gender-nonconforming" (1.1%).

(of which 38.8% live in Ontario). Proportionally, Nova Scotia and British Columbia had the greatest number of transgender or non-binary people, with approximately 1 in 200 people. Québec and Saskatchewan had the smallest proportions of transgender or non-binary people (approximately 1 in 400 people).

Statistics Canada also notes that within the younger Canadian population (aged 15–34 years old), approximately 1 in 100 people in Nova Scotia and British Columbia are transgender or non-binary. This suggests that being transgender or non-binary is more common in younger people than in older people, and that this group constitutes a significant part of the population in some geographical locations.

Compared to the Canadian cisgender population who lived in urban (100,000+ people) and mid-sized urban (10,000+ people) centers at proportions of 74.3% for women and 73.6% of men, over 92% of non-binary people lived in similar urban settings. Transgender people lived in urban and mid-sized urban centers at rates of 78.5% for women and 78.4% for men.

Victoria (BC), Halifax (NS), and Fredericton (NB) had the largest proportions of transgender and non-binary people. These urban centers experienced strong population growth between 2016 and 2021 and have major colleges or universities in their cities. These facts can be thought to be linked to younger populations in these areas, and thus to higher rates of transgender and non-binary people. Inversely, Drummondville (QC), Saguenay (QC) and Trois-Rivières (QC) had the lowest proportions of transgender and non-binary people, three areas that also have smaller proportions (approximately 22%) of young people (aged 15–34 years old) than the national average (25% in Canada as a whole).

Interestingly, 52.7% of non-binary people and just under 50% of transgender people (both women and men) lived in one of six largest urban centers: Toronto (ON), Montréal (QC), Vancouver (BC), Ottawa-Gatineau (ON/QC), Edmonton (AB), and Calgary (AB).

## **Conclusion**

These data are useful to gain more information on transgender and non-binary people in Canada at the national level, with the idea of minimizing discrimination and improving the mental health and wellbeing of these populations, among other things. Indeed, the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (Statistics Canada, 2019) found that 65% of transgender and non-binary people had poor to fair mental health (compared to 11% in the cisgender population), the Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers (Statistics Canada, 2020) revealed that 41% of non-binary people experiences unfair treatment or discrimination (as opposed to 11% of men and 20% of women).

Economic insecurity and social marginalization were also exacerbated by the pandemic for transgender and non-binary people, according to a 2019 national survey by Trans PULSE Canada (Trans PULSE Canada, 2020). This further highlights the need for more data on demographic, economical and mental health of transgender and non-binary people, working towards a better understanding of gender-diverse individuals in Canada. On a positive note, working together with the community and NGOs to implement changes in the census, as they relate to better language and representation of gender diversity, will eventually lead to better decisions and stronger partnerships with policymakers in government and other service providers (corporations, other NGOs, etc.).

There remains work to be done for better inclusion of gender-diverse individuals in Canadian society, and although including these questions in the census is a step forward, some aspects remain problematic for 2SLGBTQI communities. For example, the lack of inclusion of “intersex” as an option for the “sex assigned at birth” question forces an intersex person to “best identify” with female or male, while it is estimated that 1.7% to 4% of people globally are born with sex characteristic variations (Egale Canada, 2020). Asking “sex assigned at birth” in the census might be triggering for some trans and nonbinary people. Furthermore, the use of “Male” and “Female” labels as *gender* categories (rather than labels such as man, woman, non-binary) risks conflating sex and gender—when in fact, they are entirely distinct concepts (Airton, 2018). It is important to move past male/female in the Census because the sex and gender diversity of the Canadian population goes beyond and outside of the binary.

## References

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