

2011 National Household Survey: Immigration, place of birth, citizenship, ethnic origin, visible minorities, language and religion

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New data from the National Household Survey (NHS) show that Canada was home to about 6,775,800 foreign-born individuals in 2011. They represented 20.6% of the total population, compared with 19.8% in the 2006 Census. The country's immigrant population, the ethnic backgrounds of its people, its visible minority population, and its linguistic and religious diversity showed that Canada is an ethnocultural mosaic. A detailed analysis is available in the report [Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada](#).

Immigration

In 2011, many of the 6.8 million foreign-born individuals have lived in Canada for many years, while others were relatively new to the country.

Of this total, around 1,162,900 foreign-born people arrived in Canada between 2006 and 2011. These recent immigrants made up 17.2% of the total foreign-born population and 3.5% of the total population in Canada.

Among the G8 countries, Canada had the highest proportion of foreign-born population (20.6%), followed by Germany (13.0% in 2010) and the United States (12.9% in 2010). Outside the G8 nations, Canada's proportion of foreign-born was lower than that of Australia (26.8% in 2010), one of the major immigrant-receiving countries.

Among the recent immigrants who arrived between 2006 and 2011, the largest share, 56.9% or about 661,600 individuals, came from Asia (including the Middle East). In contrast, immigrants born in this region accounted for 8.5% of the foreign-born population who settled in Canada prior to the 1970s.

Most of the 1.2 million immigrants who arrived in Canada between 2006 and 2011 settled in a census metropolitan area (CMA). Just over 6 in 10 (62.5%) of these recent immigrants chose to settle in the three largest CMAs — Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. In comparison, just over one-third (35.2%) of Canada's total population lived in these three CMAs.

Ethnic origin

Ethnic origin is another aspect of the nation's ethnocultural diversity. Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of the respondent's ancestors.

More than 200 ethnic origins were reported by respondents to the 2011 NHS. Of these, 13 different ethnic origins had surpassed the 1-million mark. People reported these origins either alone or in combination with other ethnic origins.

The ethnic origin most often reported was Canadian, cited by about 10,563,800 people, either alone or with other origins. It was followed by English, French, Scottish, Irish and German. The other ethnic origins that surpassed the 1-million mark were: Italian, Chinese, First Nations (North American Indian), Ukrainian, East Indian, Dutch and Polish.

Just over 1,369,100 people reported a First Nations (North American Indian) ancestry, alone or with other origins, while around 447,700 people reported Métis ancestry, alone or with other origins, and around 72,600 people reported Inuit ancestry, alone or with other origins.



Visible minority population

In 2011, nearly 6,264,800 people identified themselves as a member of the visible minority population. They represented 19.1% of Canada's total population, compared with 16.2% in the 2006 Census.

This increase in proportion was largely because of the increasing number of immigrants from non-European countries. Visible minorities accounted for 78.0% of the immigrants who arrived between 2006 and 2011. In contrast, they made up 12.4% of immigrants who arrived before 1971.

Combined, the three largest visible minority groups — South Asians, Chinese and Blacks — accounted for 61.3% of the visible minority population. They were followed by Filipinos, Latin Americans, Arabs, Southeast Asians, West Asians, Koreans and Japanese.

In 2011, 1,567,400 individuals identified themselves as South Asian, the largest visible minority group. They represented one-quarter (25.0%) of the total visible minority population.

The second largest group was Chinese, who numbered just over 1,324,700. They made up 21.1% of the visible minority population. Just under 945,700 individuals identified themselves as Blacks, the third largest group. They made up 15.1% of the visible minority population.

Knowledge of languages

Most (93.5%) of the foreign-born population was able to converse in English and/or French. The remaining 6.5% reported that they did not know either official language.

In 2011, three-quarters (74.5%) of Canada's foreign-born population were able to conduct a conversation in more than one language in 2011, compared with 36.6% of the total population.

Of the roughly 6.8 million immigrants in Canada, 54.6% could speak two languages, while 19.9% had knowledge of at least three languages.

In many cases, immigrants who could speak more than one language reported knowledge of English or French, in tandem with a non-official language.

Among all immigrants, 61.2% were able to converse in English or French and one or more non-official language(s), while 9.9% were able to converse in both English and French as well as one or more non-official language(s). Another 2.6% could speak English and French but not a non-official language. A small proportion (0.8%) said they knew only non-official languages.

Religions in Canada

The NHS collected information on religious affiliation, regardless of whether respondents practised their religion.

The largest faith in Canada was Christianity. About 22,102,700, or two-thirds of Canada's population (67.3%), reported that they were affiliated with a Christian religion.

Roman Catholics were the largest Christian religious group in 2011. About 12,728,900 people identified themselves as Roman Catholic, representing 38.7% of Canada's population as a whole.

Consistent with changing immigration patterns, there were growing proportions of the population who reported religious affiliations other than Christian. These religions included Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist. In 2011, about 2,373,700 people, or 7.2% of Canada's population, reported affiliation with one of these religions. This was up from 4.9% a decade earlier, as recorded in the 2001 Census.

In 2011, people who identified themselves as Muslim made up 3.2% of the population, Hindu 1.5%, Sikh 1.4%, Buddhist 1.1% and Jewish 1.0%.

Roughly 7,850,600 people, or nearly one-quarter of Canada's population (23.9%), had no religious affiliation. This was up from 16.5% a decade earlier, as recorded in the 2001 Census.

Immigration has contributed to a higher share of the population having affiliation with Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religions as well as to a higher share of the population having no religious affiliation. Of the immigrants who came prior to 1971, 2.9% were affiliated with Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religions, whereas 33.0% of immigrants who came between 2001 and 2011 reported affiliation to one of these religions. As well, 16.0% of immigrants who came before 1971 had no religious affiliation, compared with 22.0% among those who came between 2001 and 2005, and 19.5% among those who came between 2006 and 2011.

Citizenship

Over three-quarters (78.3%) of the total population were Canadian citizens by birth. Another 15.8% were Canadian by naturalization (that is, the process through which immigrants acquire Canadian citizenship), while the remaining 6.0% did not have Canadian citizenship.

Additional analysis can be found in the *National Household Survey in Brief Series* article "[Obtaining Canadian Citizenship](#)".

Second generation: Canadian-born children of immigrants

Second generation includes individuals who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada. In 2011, this group consisted of about 5,702,700 people, accounting for 17.4% of the total population.

For over half (54.8%) of this group, both parents were born outside Canada. For the remaining 45.2%, one parent was born in Canada.

Additional analysis can be found in the *National Household Survey in Brief Series* article "[Generation Status: Canadian-born Children of Immigrants](#)".

Note to readers

The [National Household Survey User Guide](#) provides information on the methodology, collection, processing, evaluation and data quality of the National Household Survey (NHS).

Estimates and trends from other data sources suggest that certain population groups may be overestimated or underestimated in the NHS. Information on the quality of NHS data on immigration, place of birth, citizenship, ethnic origin, visible minorities, language and religion as well as explanations of concepts, classifications, questions and comparability with other data sources can be found in the series of [reference guides](#) for these topics.

National Household Survey

This is the first release of data from the NHS. The second release will be on June 26 and the third release on August 14.

The analytical document [Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada](#) presents the results of the NHS on immigration, place of birth, ethnic origin, visible minorities, language and religion. In addition, there are two companion articles in the *National Household Survey in Brief Series* entitled "[Obtaining Canadian citizenship](#)" and "[Generation status: Canadian-born children of immigrants](#)."

A second analytical document [Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit](#), also released today, analyzes findings from the NHS on Aboriginal peoples. In addition, there is a companion analytical article in the *National Household Survey in Brief Series* for this topic entitled "[Aboriginal peoples and language](#)."

Data and highlights on key topics found in these analytical products are also available for various standard levels of geography in the [National Household Survey Focus on Geography Series](#).

Various data and reference products are also available from the [2011 National Household Survey](#) website. A wide range of data for standard geographic areas is available in the [National Household Survey Profile](#) and [National Household Survey Data Tables](#). The [National Household Survey User Guide](#) and a series of [reference guides](#) provide information about the NHS.

A brief overview of immigration and ethnocultural diversity in Canada is presented on [video](#).

Users are also invited to [Chat with an expert](#) on May 10, from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5178.

The report *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada* (99-010-X2011001) is now available from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

Additional analysis is also available in the *National Household Survey in Brief Series* (99-010-X2011003): "Obtaining Canadian Citizenship" and "Generation Status: Canadian-born Children of Immigrants."

Census tract level data will be available at a later date.

For more information, contact Media Relations (613-951-4636; mediahotline@statcan.gc.ca).