On guard for thee: serving in the Canadian Armed Forces

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Wednesday, July 13, 2022

Canada has a proud military tradition

According to new data from the census, in the spring of 2021, 97,625 Canadians were counted as serving in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and 461,240 were counted as Veterans. This is the first census profile of Canada's military in half a century. Currently serving CAF personnel were younger on average than the employed population overall and almost one in five were women. While more than 4 in 10 Veterans were seniors aged 65 and older, almost one-third were in the core working age group of 25 to 54.

Once a decade from 1951 up to 1971, Statistics Canada asked Canadians about their military service (see note to readers). However, the 2021 Census marks the first time Statistics Canada asked Canadians whether they were active CAF members serving in the Regular Force or Primary Reserve Force.

Canada has a proud military tradition. During the First World War, over 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders served. Their contributions and sacrifices helped Canada gain new respect on the international stage as an independent country. In the Second World War, more than 1 million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served, both at home and around the world.

Canada's military plays an important role internationally. Over the years, many CAF members have deployed overseas to take part in a variety of United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other multinational peace support operations. More than 125,000 CAF members have served in international peacekeeping missions to dozens of countries over the past several decades. Not only does the CAF serve in these roles, it also helps the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other law enforcement partners monitor Canada's borders, helps in search and rescue operations, and is an invaluable resource during natural disaster responses.

Most recently, the military supported Canadians through the COVID-19 pandemic by deploying to long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario, supporting northern and remote communities, and helping the Public Health Agency of Canada with contact tracing and the management and distribution of personal protective equipment.

The CAF also created the Vaccine Roll-out Task Force to ensure that it was prepared to support vaccine distribution across Canada. By doing so, the CAF provided planning assistance to Indigenous Services Canada for the vaccine roll-out to Indigenous communities.

Highlights

In 2021, 97,625 Canadians were reported in the census as serving in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as members of the Regular Force or Primary Reserve Force.

For more than 100 years, women have contributed to Canada's military heritage and, in 2021, almost one-fifth of currently serving Canadian military personnel enumerated in the census were women.

The CAF were younger on average (36.2 years old) than the employed labour force overall (41.9), but currently serving women were older than their male counterparts.

Ontario (35.4%) and Quebec (20.2%) had the highest share of currently serving military personnel.

Belleville–Quinte West and Kingston had the largest share of military personnel among Canada's census metropolitan areas, given that they are both in close proximity to military bases.

In 2021, 461,240 Canadians were counted as Veterans in the census.

For more than 100 years, women have contributed to Canada's military heritage

The role of women in the CAF has evolved considerably over the years. Over 3,100 women served with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps during the First World War, with approximately 2,500 going overseas. Women served in hospitals, on hospital ships and in combat zones with field ambulance units. Women also provided crucial support at home, with thousands volunteering to manufacture items such as pillows, sheets, socks and scarves to send to the front lines.

Because hundreds of thousands of men were serving in the war, the role of women in the labour market changed significantly. Given the shortage of male workers, over 30,000 women worked outside the home. Similarly, during the Second World War, labour shortages led to hundreds of thousands of women stepping into jobs that were typically held by men.

Women were not permitted to serve in combat positions during the First and Second World Wars, but the establishment of a Women's Division in 1941 and 1942 changed their role. In those two years, 50,000 women enlisted and served with the Navy, Army and Air Force.

The dedication and determination of the women serving Canada over the past century have opened the door for many more women to join. In 1989, all military occupations became open to women, with the exception of the submarine service, which opened in 2001. When combat roles opened to women in the 1990s, this doubled the recruiting pool.

Despite the increasing integration of women into the CAF, a less favourable picture of the experiences of many women and sexual and gender minorities in the military has emerged in recent years. In particular, in 2015, an independent external review on sexual misconduct and sexual harassment in the CAF found a sexualized culture hostile to many members—but in particular to those who are women, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Despite efforts to modify this culture since then, a recent report released in May 2022 acknowledged little progress on that front.

Recognizing that many challenges remain, the Canadian military has acknowledged and begun to address the issue of sexual misconduct. Measuring its prevalence is one step towards that, and, in 2016 and 2018, Statistics Canada conducted the Survey on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. It provided information on the prevalence of sexual assaults, as well as perceptions of sexualized and discriminatory behaviours in the Regular Force and Primary Reserve Force. Newer data will be collected in the fall of 2022. Census data do not allow for an examination of such experiences in the CAF. However, they will provide key insights into the demographic, socioeconomic and ethnocultural characteristics of those currently serving in the military. This release takes the first step in this direction by describing the age and gender of currently serving military members in the Regular Force and Primary Reserve Force.

Almost one-fifth of those currently serving in the Canadian military are women

The 2021 Census of Population counted 97,625 members of the military (see note to readers) currently serving in Canada. The primary source of information on the number of currently serving members of the CAF is the Department of National Defence (DND). The census counted more currently serving members than reported by DND. Census information is mainly collected through self-enumeration, which is different than the method used by DND. For more details, please refer to the *Canadian Military Experience Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*.

Of the currently serving members counted through the census, nearly one in five (19.3%) were women. Compared with most other industries, the share of women in the military is relatively low. In 2021, according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), women accounted for almost half (47.3%) of the employed labour force. Two sectors had fewer than one in five women among their employed labour force: construction (13.2%) and forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas (18.5%).

However, compared with other countries, the share of women in the CAF is relatively high. According to the Statistics of women in the Canadian Armed Forces, a publication by DND, 16.3% of currently serving military members were women. This suggests that Canada exceeds the 15% target for 2028 set out by the United Nations for the share of women in the military. In the most recent Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations, Canada ranks among the top five countries with the highest percentage of full-time military women in 2019, along with Hungary, Greece, the United States and Bulgaria.
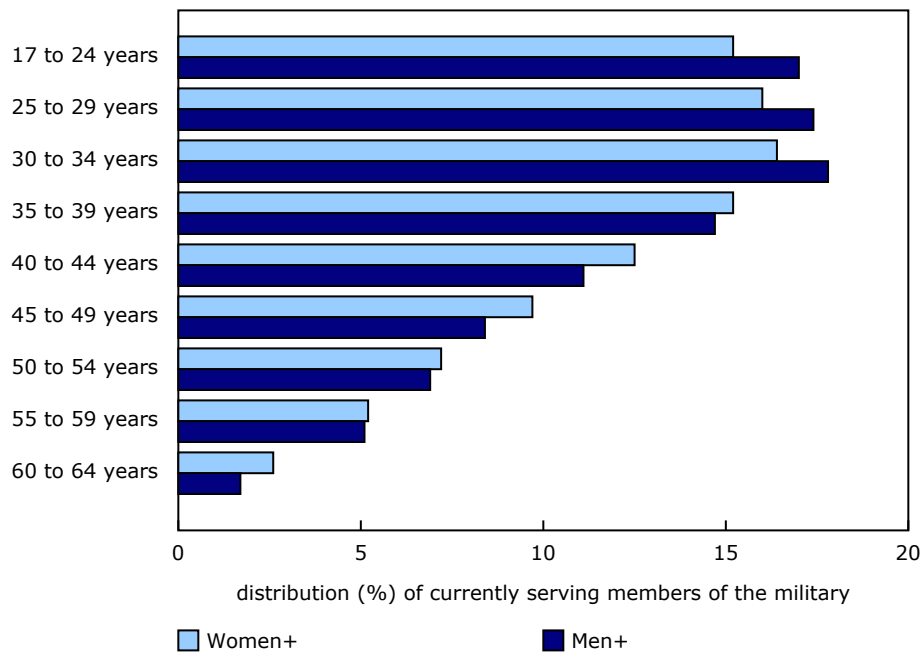
The number of women serving in the military has been increasing over the years and continues to rise. The CAF is making a significant recruitment effort to attract female candidates, with the goal of having one in four members be women by 2026.

The strength of the census is to provide reliable data for smaller populations, such as the transgender and non-binary populations. According to the census, four in five currently serving members of the military were cisgender men (80.5%) and nearly one in five (19.1%) were cisgender women. The military had a much higher share of cisgender men and a lower share of cisgender women than the total population aged 17 and older (48.8% cisgender men; 50.9% cisgender women).

The share of military members who were transgender men and transgender women was the same as that of the total population aged 17 and older (0.1% respectively). An additional 0.2% of military members were non-binary, which is higher than the share of non-binary individuals in the total population (0.1%). Statistics Canada is the first country to provide census data on transgender and non-binary people, while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of respondents when disseminating detailed data.

The Canadian Armed Forces are younger than the employed labour force overall, but currently serving women are older than their male counterparts

Chart 1
Women currently serving in the military are older than their male counterparts

distribution (%) of currently serving members of the military

Women+   Men+

Note(s): Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.
Source(s): Census of Population, 2021 (3901).

Previous 2021 Census releases have highlighted that a record number of Canadians are approaching retirement. The outlook is somewhat different in the military, since a larger share of the Canadians currently serving is younger than the population overall. This is expected, as the retirement age in the CAF is 60 years old.
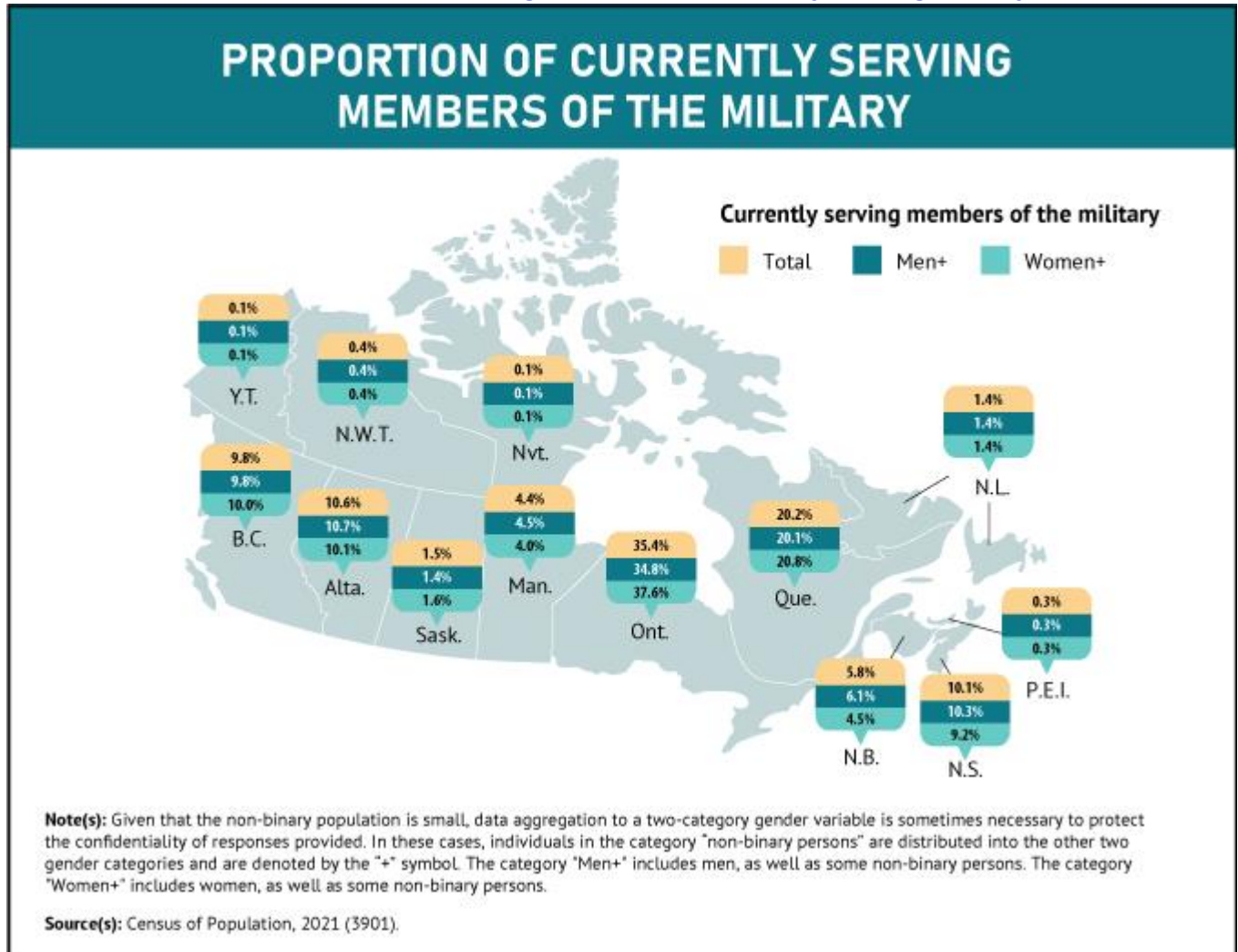
For example, over one-third (34.7%) of current members were 25 to 34 years old at the time of the census, compared with 22.5% of the employed population aged 17 and older, according to the 2021 LFS. Conversely, 7.0% of CAF members were 55 to 64 years old, compared with 17.4% of the overall employed population aged 17 and older. The average age of people currently serving in the military was 36.2 years, compared with 41.9 in the employed labour force, according to the 2021 LFS.

In 2021, women serving in the military were older than their male counterparts. For example, 44.7% of currently serving women were aged 35 to 54, compared with 41.0% of men. The average age was also higher for women than men (37 versus 36 years).

As a result, the share of women serving in the military was lowest in the youngest age group (17.6% among those aged 17 to 24) and highest in the oldest age group (21.5% among those aged 55 to 64). This is an important factor to consider for recruitment, since many of these currently serving women are approaching retirement age. To increase the share of women in the military in the coming years, more young women will need to be recruited to make up this gap.

Ontario and Quebec have the highest share of members currently serving in the military

Map 1 – Ontario and Quebec have the highest share of currently serving military personnel

Note(s): Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.

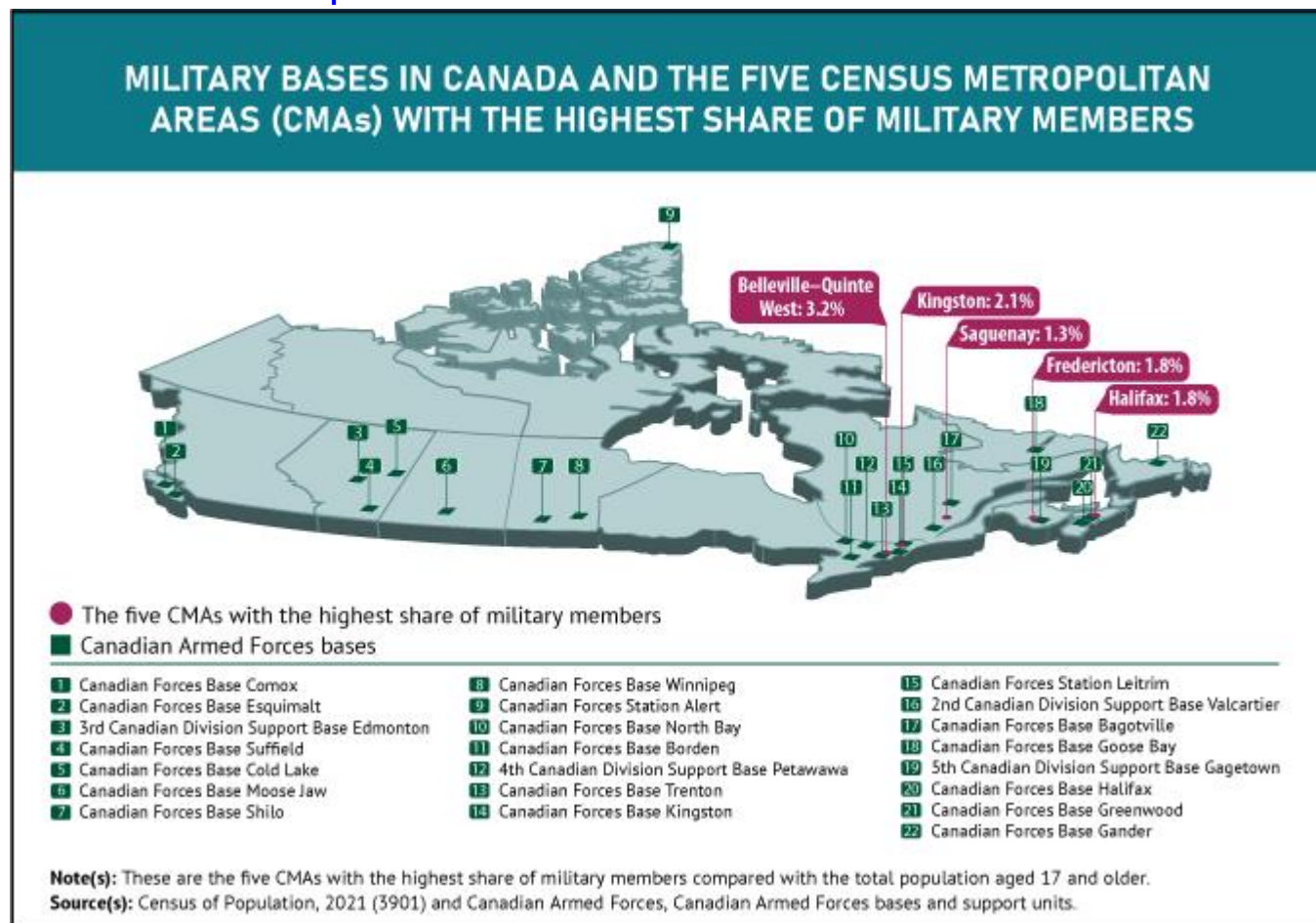**Source(s):** Census of Population, 2021 (3901).

Just over one-third (35.4%) of those currently serving in the CAF were living in Ontario, and one-fifth (20.2%) were living in Quebec at the time of the census. Approximately 1 in 10 were in Alberta (10.6%) or Nova Scotia (10.1%).

While Canada's most populous provinces accounted for the largest number of CAF personnel, several smaller provinces and territories were overrepresented in the CAF compared with their overall share of the population aged 17 and older. For example, 0.4% of those currently serving in the CAF were in the Northwest Territories, a share 3.8 times higher compared with its share of the total population aged 17 and older overall (0.1%). Nova Scotia (3.7 times higher) and New Brunswick (2.7 times higher) also had a larger share of current CAF members compared with their overall population.

Belleville–Quinte West and Kingston have the largest share of military personnel among Canada's census metropolitan areas

Map 2 – Belleville–Quinte West and Kingston have the largest share of military personnel among Canada's census metropolitan areas
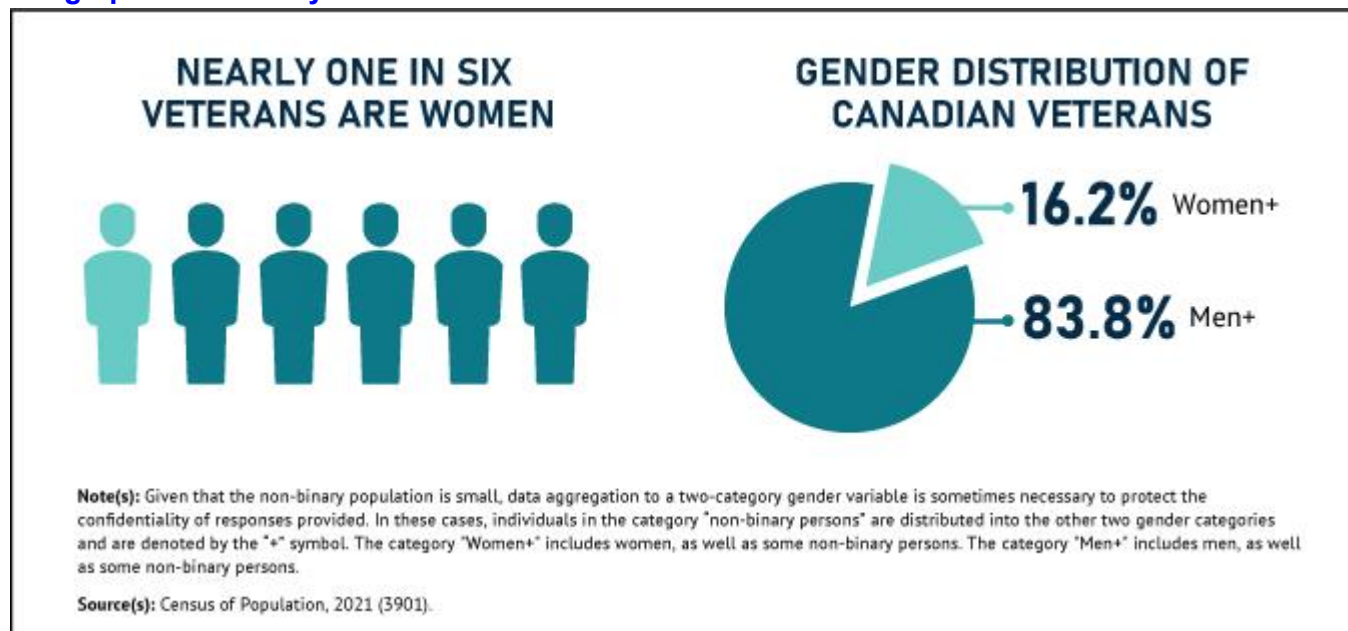

Belleville–Quinte West (3.2%), Kingston (2.1%), Halifax (1.8%), Fredericton (1.8%) and Saguenay (1.3%) had the largest share of military personnel among the total population aged 17 and older within a large urban centre (census metropolitan area, or CMA). The concentration of military personnel within certain urban centres reflects their proximity to military bases. These five CMAs, for example, have military bases within them or near them. Kingston is also home to the Royal Military College of Canada, a degree-granting university for future officers and other members of the CAF. The other Canadian military college and university is the Royal Military College Saint-Jean, which is located in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

The five municipalities (census subdivisions) with the highest share of military personnel compared with the total population aged 17 and older were found in Oromocto, New Brunswick (33.8%); Petawawa, Ontario (30.0%); Shannon, Quebec (22.5%); Cornwallis, Manitoba (20.9%); and Moose Jaw No. 161, Saskatchewan (16.8%). There are CAF bases or support units in or near these municipalities.

Over one-fifth of the CAF personnel from Saskatchewan (21.5%) and Prince Edward Island (21.3%) were women, the highest shares nationally.

Beginning of a journey: For the first time in 50 years, Statistics Canada collects census data on Veterans

Infographic 1 – Nearly one in six Veterans are women

NEARLY ONE IN SIX VETERANS ARE WOMEN

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF CANADIAN VETERANS

16.2% Women+

83.8% Men+

Note(s): Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons.

Source(s): Census of Population, 2021 (3901).

For the first time since 1971, the census enumerated members of the CAF who have previously served. One of the main purposes of collecting this information through the 2021 Census is to fill a significant data gap about the social characteristics and socioeconomic outcomes of Canadian Veterans and their families. Ultimately, these data are needed to inform the policies and programs that serve Canadian Veterans.

Together, Statistics Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) are working with partners and stakeholders to build a stronger data ecosystem to fill the information gaps for Canadian Veterans. This work is already well underway. For example, Statistics Canada, in collaboration with VAC and DND, has been conducting the Life After Service Survey since 2010. This survey has helped to understand the challenging transition period from military to civilian life and health outcomes of Canadian Veterans.

The 2021 Census is another step on this journey to gather information from a variety of sources and using different methods. The 2021 Census data released today provide insights on the demographic characteristics, such as age and gender of Veterans enumerated through the census.

About one-third of Veterans are of core working age

In 2021, 461,240 people were counted as Veterans (see note to readers) in the census. This 2021 Census count is lower than the modelled estimates produced by VAC. Several factors may contribute to this difference. The census information is mainly collected through self-enumeration, which is a different method than the modelling employed by VAC. Also, the census provides a snapshot of the population at a specific moment in time (May 11, 2021). For more details, please refer to the *Canadian Military Experience Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021* and the summary technical report: *Veterans data in the 2021 Census of Population*.

Key findings about Canadian Veterans from the 2021 Census so far

A clearer picture of Canadian Veterans has already begun to emerge with the release of 2021 Census data on the population as a whole by age, gender, living arrangements and place of residence.

Results show that almost one-third (32.0%) of all Veterans counted at the time of the census were in the core working age group of 25 to 54. Forthcoming census data on labour, to be released in November 2022, will enable analysis of Veterans' experiences in the labour market after their years of service.

Over 4 in 10 Canadians who were counted as Veterans at the time of the census were aged 65 and older (41.8%). The census enumerated 33,420 Veterans who were aged 85 and older.

Nearly one in six Veterans were women (16.2%). Unlike currently serving members of the military, the average age of women Veterans was lower compared with men Veterans (59.1 vs. 61.7 years). As a result, 43.7% of men Veterans were aged 65 and older, compared with just under one-third (32.3%) of women Veterans.

While the Veteran population had a much higher share of cisgender men than cisgender women compared with the total population aged 17 and older, the share of Veterans who were transgender men and transgender women was the same as that of the total population (0.1% respectively). The share of Veterans who were non-binary was also similar to that of the total population (0.1% each).

Nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of Veterans lived alone in 2021. Women Veterans were more likely to live alone than men Veterans (28.1% vs. 22.2%). Veterans were more likely to live alone than Canadians aged 17 and older overall (16.9% for women and 14.7% for men).

The share of Veterans living alone also increases with age. For example, of the women Veterans who were living alone at the time of the census, four in five (80.2%) were aged 55 and older, compared with three in four (75.8%) men Veterans. By way of comparison, 70.2% of Canadian women who were living alone at the time of the census were aged 55 and older, as were 51.8% of Canadian men.

In 2021, 3.6% of Canadians counted as Veterans lived in a collective dwelling, compared with 2.1% of the total population aged 17 and older. The majority (93.6%) of this group of Veterans lived in a health care or related facility.

Veterans made up 1.5% of the total population aged 17 and older in 2021. Belleville–Quinte West (4.5%), Halifax (4.4%), Kingston (4.0%), Fredericton (3.8%) and Saint John (3.5%) had the highest share of Veterans among the total population aged 17 and older within Canada's CMAs.

More detailed insights about Canadian Veterans will become available in the future as other census variables are released, such as Indigenous, ethnocultural and other sociodemographic characteristics. Data tables describing the characteristics of Veterans are available upon request.

The contributions of the Canadian Rangers and Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service

The Reserve Force in Canada comprises three groups of serving members: the Primary Reserve Force, Canadian Rangers, and Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS). The Supplementary Reserve is the fourth subcomponent of the Reserve Force, made up of former Regular Force or Reserve Force members who are no longer serving.

The Primary Reserve Force is the largest subcomponent of the Reserve Force. The Primary Reserve Force is predominantly part time, and its role is to augment the Regular Force.

The Canadian Rangers are part of the Reserve Force and work in remote, isolated and coastal regions of Canada. They provide self-sufficient mobile forces to support national security and public safety operations within Canada. Their motto is "Vigilans," meaning "the Watchers," and the ways in which they protect Canada include conducting patrols, reporting unusual activities or sightings, collecting local data for the CAF, performing sovereignty or national security duties, assisting in search and rescue efforts, and assisting with natural disasters such as forest fires and floods.

The COATS supervises, administers and trains cadets and Junior Canadian Rangers.

According to the CAF's employment equity report, in 2020/2021, there were approximately 5,200 Canadian Rangers, of whom 23% were women, and 6,900 COATS members, of whom 41% were women. For more information on the CAF's employment equity report, please contact **information@forces.gc.ca**

As part of the journey to build an ecosystem of military and Veteran data, Statistics Canada is developing new methods to enumerate members of the Canadian Rangers and COATS in partnership with DND and VAC.

Looking ahead

Sociocultural and socioeconomic data from the 2021 Census to be released over the coming months will continue to shed light on the military population in Canada.

Upcoming analysis will examine the household and family, ethnocultural, religious, Indigenous, and immigration characteristics of the Canadian military.

Note to readers

Canadians are invited to download the StatsCAN app to view the census results.

Definitions, concepts and geography

Currently serving military members include those with the Regular Force or the Primary Reserve Force. This does not include service with the Cadets, Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service instructors, or the Canadian Rangers, because they have obligations that are different from those of other components of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The term includes CAF members aged 17 and older living in private households. In addition to the population living in private households, there were approximately 2,400 CAF members living on military bases at the time of the census.

The primary source of information on the number of currently serving members of the CAF is the Department of National Defence (DND). The census counted more currently serving members than reported by DND. Higher counts of currently serving women, currently serving members older than 50 and currently serving members in the territories were observed than what is reported by DND.

The counts for Veterans are for the total population aged 17 and older, including institutional residents.

The CAF comprises Regular Force and Reserve Force members. All Regular Force members are employed full time in the CAF, and they make up the bulk of personnel employed domestically and abroad on operations.

Regular Force members are posted to bases and wings across the country, depending on their trade, career progression and environment (sea, land, air or special operations).

Most Reserve Force members are employed part time in the CAF, typically working one night per week and one weekend per month. The Reserve Force augments the Regular Force, meaning that it contributes trained personnel to operations at home and abroad to help sustain and support Regular Force activities.

The military service question was asked exclusively to those aged 17 and older as of Census Day.

Beginning in 2021, the census asked questions about both the sex at birth and the gender of individuals. While data about sex at birth are needed to measure certain indicators, for the purposes of this release, gender (as opposed to sex) is the standard variable used in concepts and classifications. For more details on the new gender concept, see Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.

Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, the category "men" includes men, as well as some non-binary persons. The category "women" includes women, as well as some non-binary persons.

A fact sheet on gender concepts, Filling the gaps: Information on gender in the 2021 Census, is also available.

2021 Census of Population products and releases

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing the third results from the 2021 Census of Population.

Several 2021 Census products are also available today on the 2021 Census Program web module. This web module has been designed to provide easy access to census data, free of charge.

Analytical products include an article in The Daily.

Data products include Canadian military experience results for standard geographic areas, available through data tables.

Focus on Geography provides data and highlights on key topics found in this Daily release and in the Census in Brief articles at various levels of geography.

Reference materials are designed to help users make the most of census data. They include the Guide to the Census of Population, 2021, the Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021, and the 2021 Census of Population questionnaires. The Canadian Military Experience Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021 is also available.

Geography-related 2021 Census Program products and services can be found under Census geography. This includes GeoSearch, an interactive mapping tool, and thematic maps, which show data for various standard geographic areas, along with Focus on Geography and Census Program Data Viewer, which are data visualization tools.

Videos on census concepts can be found in the Census learning centre.

Over the coming months, Statistics Canada will continue to release results from the 2021 Census of Population, and provide an even more comprehensive picture of the Canadian population. Please see the 2021 Census release schedule to find out when data and analysis on the different topics will be released throughout 2022.

Available tables: table 98-10-0141-01.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3901.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; **infostats@statcan.gc.ca**) or Media Relations (**statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca**).