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Labour Statistics: Technical Papers

Ensuring that the Labour Force Survey Remains the Cornerstone of Canada's Labour Market Information Ecosystem

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Ensuring that the Labour Force Survey Remains the Cornerstone of Canada's Labour Market Information Ecosystem

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the cornerstone of Canada's Labour Market Information ecosystem. In addition to playing a key role in the administration of the Employment Insurance program, the LFS, in combination with the Survey of Employment Payroll and Hours and the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey, is relied upon by a wide range of policy makers.

The LFS is a monthly survey of Canadian households carried out by Statistics Canada. Since its inception in 1945, the LFS has been the source of Canada's official unemployment rate and has provided information on short-term changes in employment, as well as shifts in employment across industrial sectors, hours worked and labour force participation. More recently, enhancements to LFS have included a targeted sample increase to enable more granular data for smaller communities and racialized groups, as well as a series of supplementary surveys addressing aspects of quality of employment.

In January 2024, the LFS response rate was 72.1% compared to an average of 87.0% in 2019. From 2010 to 2019, the LFS response rate – or the proportion of selected households who complete an LFS interview – had been on a slow downward trend, due to a range of social and technological changes which have made it more challenging to contact selected households and to persuade Canadians to participate when they are contacted. These factors were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the suspension of face-to-face interviewing between April 2020 and fall 2022. The challenges involved in conducting the LFS are not unique to Canada, and comparable countries, including the US and UK have reported similar response rate trends.¹

The LFS is founded on world class statistical methods and techniques, including non-response adjustment and weighting techniques which partly mitigate the impact of lowered response rates. Every month a wide range of data quality indicators are reviewed prior to the release of LFS estimates and these evaluations have consistently shown that LFS data continue to be fully reliable and representative of current labour market conditions.

Despite LFS estimates continuing to be of very high quality, Statistics Canada is committed to restoring LFS response rates to the greatest extent possible. To this end, two initiatives are underway. First, the schedule of activities associated with monthly LFS data collection is being expanded to increase the time available to establish contact with sampled households and convey the importance of participating in the survey. Second, the option of responding online is being extended to more LFS respondents, based in part on experiences gained from the Census of Population, which has shown that many Canadians prefer to complete an online questionnaire.

Both initiatives are currently being developed, with the goal of full implementation beginning in the summer of 2024.

LFS collection period

Each month, approximately 68,500 households are included in the LFS sample. Once selected, households remain in the sample for six consecutive months. Each month, approximately 1/6 of the sample is replaced with newly selected households.

Households selected for LFS are interviewed using a questionnaire which refers to the activities of each household member during the LFS reference week (generally the week containing the 15th day of the month). LFS interviews are carried out over the ten-day period immediately following the reference week. This ensures that any events which occur during the reference week (such as changes in employment or increased hours of work) are properly reported. In addition, it facilitates seasonal adjustment of LFS estimates ([Seasonally adjusted data – Frequently asked questions](#)).

While LFS interviews will continue to be conducted during a defined 10-day period, and will continue to refer to the same reference week, a number of data collection activities will be scheduled for the 15 to 45 days preceding the reference week. This includes identifying dwellings entering their first month to exclude those which are

1. See, for example, [Current Population Survey Modernization Efforts Set to Launch \(census.gov\)](#) or [Labour Force Survey: planned improvements and its reintroduction - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

out-of-scope (such as vacant and seasonal dwellings and business addresses). For dwellings which are confirmed to be in-scope, this extended collection period will be used to collect socio-demographic characteristics of household members and to arrange an LFS interview following the completion of the reference week.

LFS online response

LFS interviews are conducted in one of three ways:

- In person, with interviewers visiting a selected dwelling and interviewing household members face-to-face
- By telephone, with selected dwellings being contacted by telephone, either:
 - ▶ by an interviewer working from their home; or
 - ▶ by an interviewer working in one of five centralized call centers
- Online, with members of selected households receiving an e-mail invitation to complete their questionnaire on a secure Statistics Canada website. These interviews are completed without the involvement of an interviewer.

Currently, all households who enter the LFS sample for the first time are interviewed either face-to-face or by telephone. The online response option is made available to households following their first month in-sample.

In contrast to the approach used for the LFS, the Census of Population uses an 'online first' approach, in which households first receive a Secure Access Code and are invited to complete their Census questionnaire online. Only those who do not respond within a pre-determined timeframe are contacted by telephone or face-to-face.

Statistics Canada is currently developing new LFS data collection procedures, based on the Census approach, but adapted to the monthly LFS schedule. During the 15 to 45 days preceding the LFS reference week, households will be contacted by mail and provided with a Secure Access Code which will allow them to complete an online interview in which they will provide the socio-demographic characteristics of household members and schedule their LFS interview during the 10-day period following the reference week. Only those who do not respond to this online interview will be contacted face-to-face or by telephone.

In combination with changes to the LFS collection activities, these changes will provide respondents with more choice in the way they respond to LFS. In addition, they will allow face-to-face and telephone interviewers to focus on households which would not otherwise respond to LFS. This will lead to increased data quality and increased cost-effectiveness, while modernizing the way in which Statistics Canada interacts with respondents.

Continuing to engage Canadians

Statistics Canada will continue to provide updates on initiative to improve the LFS response rate.

The success of the Labour Force Survey ultimately depends on the willingness of tens of thousands of Canadians who complete the survey each month. As it modifies the LFS collection schedule and makes online reporting available to more LFS respondents, Statistics Canada will also continue to engage with Canadians to understand better the factors which drive participation in surveys like LFS.

For questions related to initiatives to increase Labour Force Survey (LFS) response rate, please contact statcan.labour-travail.statcan@statcan.gc.ca.