

---

## ***Appendix E. Comparability of Labour Force Activity Data With Those of Previous Censuses (1971-1996) and With the Labour Force Survey***

### **Historical Census Comparability**

Census **Labour Force Activity** concepts have remained fairly consistent since 1971. However, some changes in the questions asked, in processing, as well as some minor conceptual changes, have been introduced throughout the past five censuses. These differences need to be taken into consideration whenever data from two or more census years are being compared. Derived variables which take into account as many of these differences as possible are available and they should be used in doing historical comparisons.

#### Population

For all census years, the labour force activity questions were asked of the population 15 years of age and over. Since 1981, **institutional residents** have not been asked the labour force questions and are therefore excluded from this population. In 1976 and 1971, even though the institutional residents were asked the labour force questions, they were included in the “Not in the labour force” category.

#### Employed

In 1971, the “Employed” group consisted of three categories: persons who worked in the reference week for pay or in self-employment; persons who worked in the reference week without pay in a family farm or business; and persons with a job but not at work during the reference week. Data were obtained from three separate questions.

In 1971 also, female farm labourers who were unpaid family workers and who “helped without pay” for less than 20 hours a week were excluded from the “Employed” category and classified as “Not in the labour force”. As well, in 1971, persons who indicated that they were both “absent from job” and “looking for work” were considered unemployed.

In 1976, the “Employed” group was derived from similar questions as in 1971. However, female farm labourers who worked less than 20 hours of unpaid work a week were classified as employed. In addition, persons who were both “looking for work” and “absent from work” were included in the “Unemployed” group. Persons absent without pay on training courses or on educational leave were to mark “Yes, absent” if the job was being held for their return.

In 1981, only one question on hours worked in the reference week was asked. Persons were to report both hours worked for pay or in self-employment and hours worked without pay in a family farm or business. A combined question on “temporary lay-off and absent from work” was asked for the first time in 1981. Only absences from paid training courses were to be considered as absences from work. No changes were made to the “Employed” category in either 1986, 1991 or 1996.

#### Unemployed

In 1971, the “Unemployed” category consisted of two groups: persons who looked for work in the reference week and persons who were on temporary lay-off during the reference week. According to the 1971 Census Guide, respondents were to mark “Yes” to the looking for work question if they would have looked for work but did not because they were temporarily ill or believed that no work was available in the community. The Guide also instructed respondents to include themselves on lay-off only if they had been in that situation for 30 days or less.

In 1976, two new questions were added to the questionnaire in order to determine unemployment status. The first was a question on availability for work in the reference week. This question provided for “Yes” or “No” responses only. Instructions in the Guide requested persons still in school, those who already had a job, were temporarily ill or who had personal or family responsibilities, to consider themselves unavailable. Persons unavailable for work were classified as “Not in the labour force”. The availability question was only asked of persons who looked for work in the reference week. The second new question asked respondents if they had a new job to start at a future date. In addition to these new questions, a new processing restriction was applied. Persons on lay-off or with a new job, who were in full-time attendance at elementary or secondary school at any time since September 1975, were considered unavailable for work. Therefore, in 1976, persons were considered unemployed if they were “on lay-off” or had a “new job to start in the future” and were not in full-time attendance at elementary or secondary school. Persons who looked for work in the reference week and were available to work were also included in the “**Unemployed**”.

In 1981, the reference period for the looking for work question was increased to the past four weeks instead of the reference week. The availability question was expanded to include more detailed response categories: already had a job; temporary illness or disability; personal or family responsibilities; going to school; or other reasons. Only persons who marked “going to school” or “other reasons” were considered unavailable for work. The new job to start at a future date question was reworded to specify that the job was to start within four weeks of the reference week. Persons on temporary lay-off were identified by a question which combined information on lay-off and absences from a job. The reference period for lay-off was extended to 26 weeks. As in 1976, persons on lay-off or with a new job to start were considered unavailable if they had been in full-time attendance at elementary or secondary school at any time since September 1980. Persons who looked for work and who responded “going to school” or “other reasons” were considered unavailable regardless of whether they were on lay-off or had a new job to start.

In 1986, the reference period for temporary lay-off was removed and the phrase “from a job to which the person expects to return” was added to the questionnaire. The 1986 questionnaire did not include a question on school attendance. It was therefore not possible to apply the school attendance criteria to persons on lay-off or with a new job to start.

In 1991 and 1996, the questions asked to determine unemployment status were the same as those asked in 1986. In addition, a school attendance question was included on the questionnaire in 1991 and in 1996.

The processing of unemployment data in 1991 and 1996 was similar to that of 1981. There was, however, a change introduced for students in full-time attendance at elementary or secondary school at any time since the previous September. In 1991 and 1996, these persons were considered unavailable for work if they had looked for full-time work in the past four weeks.

#### Not in the Labour Force

The “Not in the labour force” category is a residual group. Persons who are not “Employed” or “Unemployed” fall into this category provided they are in the population for which labour force activity is relevant. The main differences for this group are the inclusion of **institutional residents** in 1976 and 1971 and the inclusion of persons not in the “Unemployed” category in each of the census years between 1976 and 1996 because they were considered unavailable for work. In 1971, female farm labourers who did less than 20 hours of unpaid work were classified as “Not in the labour force”.

---

## Comparability With the Labour Force Survey

### Difference in Assignment of Labour Force Activity Status

The census has attempted over the past years to bring its labour force definition more closely in line with that used by the monthly Labour Force Survey. Most changes to question wording have been made for this purpose. However, differences do exist between the two sources in the assignment of a labour force activity status. These differences are largely due to the nature of the questions asked. The census bases its labour force activity assignments on the responses to five questions, while the Labour Force Survey asks a far more extensive set of labour questions. Among the differences in questions asked are the following:

- (a) The census asks one looking for work question with a reference period of the past four weeks. Persons who indicated that they did look for work were asked the availability question "Could you have started work last week?". The survey asks two looking for work questions. The first one refers to looking in the past six months and the second to searching in the past four weeks. The availability question is asked of everyone who searched in the past four weeks **as well as** persons who looked in the past six months but did not search in the past four weeks.
- (b) The survey asks respondents if they attended school **last week**. In the 1996 Census, respondents were asked if they attended school in the past eight months (that is, since September 1995).

This information is used in determining availability for work. The census and the Labour Force Survey differ in their determination of availability for work. The segment of the population most affected by this difference is full-time students.

### Coverage

The Labour Force Survey excludes persons living on Indian reserves, full-time members of the Armed Forces, people living in institutions as well as persons residing in the Yukon or the Northwest Territories. Households of diplomatic or other Canadian government personnel outside Canada are also excluded. The census provides complete coverage of the Canadian population. However, in 1996, institutional residents were not asked the labour force activity questions. In addition, the 1996 Census enumerated non-permanent residents (persons who are student authorization holders, employment authorization holders, Minister's permit holders and refugee claimants). The Labour Force Survey excludes these persons.

### Enumeration Methods

The Labour Force Survey is conducted by well-trained interviewers rather than the self-enumeration technique used in the census.

### Reference Periods

The reference week for the May 1996 Labour Force Survey was the week of Sunday, May 12 to Saturday, May 18, while that for the 1996 Census was the week of Sunday, May 5 to Saturday, May 11.

The Labour Force Survey collects information about the occupation and industry attachments of persons employed, unemployed and not in the labour force who held a job in the past five years. In the 1996 Census, only persons who had worked since January 1, 1995 were asked to provide industry and occupation information.

Sample Size

The labour force questions are contained on the long form census questionnaire which was distributed to persons in every fifth household in Canada. The May 1996 Labour Force Survey data are based on a sample of 52,000 households.

Other Considerations

Methods of collection, processing, editing and imputation in the Labour Force Survey can take advantage of data available from the previous month's questionnaire.