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AMERICAS

# 1 in 300 Canadians 15 and up identify as transgender or nonbinary



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One in 300 people ages 15 or older in Canada identify as transgender or nonbinary, according to newly released data from Canada's 2021 Census, offering the country's clearest snapshot yet of gender identity on a nationwide level.

The findings, which included data rarely collected in national censuses, offer a picture of evolving definitions of gender and sexual identity — which in Canada, young and urban populations have increasingly adopted — at a time when LGBTQ rights, and especially a newfound awareness around policies that affect transgender people, have become a key battleground in U.S. politics and culture wars.

Canada's national statistics agency documented a sharp generational divide: Younger populations were three to seven times likelier to identify as transgender or nonbinary compared with older ones.

Among Generation Z, or people born between 1997 and 2005, 0.79 percent identified as transgender or nonbinary. . For millennials — born between 1981 and 1996 — the proportion was 0.51 percent. In contrast, only 0.15 percent of baby boomers born between 1946 and 1965 chose transgender or nonbinary, and 0.12 percent of people born in 1945 or earlier did.

The rate was even higher among people age 20 to 24, nearly 1 in 100 of whom selected transgender or nonbinary.

The census, which collected this information for the first time, recorded 59,460 people in Canada 15 and older identifying as transgender and 41,355 as nonbinary. Of those, the average age among transgender people was 39.4 years and 30.4 years for nonbinary people. In contrast, 48 was the average age among the nearly 30.5 million people in Canada 15 years and older.

Just over half of nonbinary people resided in one of the six largest urban centers in Canada. They also reported high rates of living in urban centers. Just under half of transgender people said they lived in the six largest urban areas, proportionally similar to Canada's overall average.

Canadian officials said they decided to add the new language to the census in response to the country's efforts to extend protections to LGBTQ people, along with a growing, global focus on gender diversity.

"These modifications reflect today's reality in terms of the evolving acceptance and understanding of gender and sexual diversity and an emerging social and legislative recognition of transgender, nonbinary and LGBTQ2+ people in general," the statistics agency said in a statement.

Two-spirit, represented by the 2, is an umbrella word in Canada used to describe a spectrum of genders among Indigenous peoples.

Including these changes provided "formal recognition to the idea that sex and gender are two different things," said Neela Ghoshal, senior director of law, policy and research at OutRight Action International, a New York-based organization advocating for LGBTQ rights. "I hope other governments will adopt similar policies ... to recognize the increasing number of people who see gender as somewhat fluid or don't feel like they fit into a binary identification."

"We are being seen," she added. "Gender is something that individuals can have a say in."

The 2021 Census asked participants their sex “at birth” and had a separate question asking about gender. Respondents could mark male, female or other and then provide their choice. People who identify with the same sex they were born with are overall classed as cisgender.

“These data can be used by public decision-makers, employers, and providers of health care, education, justice, and other services to better meet the needs of all men and women — including transgender men and women — and nonbinary people in their communities,” Statistics Canada said in a statement.

Transgender advocate Anna Murphy told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. that the change was long needed but objected to people still having to mark “other.”

“You’re still calling it an ‘other,’” Murphy said.

“If you actually care ... you would have a box that says ‘trans’ that a person could check. You would have a box that says ‘two-spirit’ that a person could check. Because that shows that you or whoever has made this form actually recognizes that rather than just leaving a blank space.”

There’s still very little global data available on gender identity for a simple reason: Most countries do not collect it.

The World Health Organization estimates that around 0.5 percent of the global population is transgender or identifies with a gender that's different than strictly male or female. Surveys in Belgium in 2020 found that 0.3 to 0.5 percent of adults and 1.2 to 2.7 percent of children and adolescents identified as transgender.

Other nonrepresentative and crowdsourcing surveys have reached largely similar figures, though Statistics Canada cautioned against direct comparisons given the different means of measurement.

In 2021, the British census for the first time offered respondents the opportunity to list a gender other than male or female. The results have not yet been released.

“Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?” the census asked.

There is no national census data available for the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau first asked about gender identity and sexual orientation only last year in the Household Pulse Survey, which measured the pandemic's impacts on households.

About 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender and around 1.2 million as nonbinary, according to studies by the Williams Institute, a research center focused on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy.

In 2011, India included the choice of other in its national census for the first time. Pakistan followed in 2017 and Nepal in 2021.

In many South Asian countries, communities have long accepted the concept of a third gender. Some countries who afford transgender people rights, however, retain very restrictive or repressive rules against populations who do not identify as male or female.