LMI SOURCES

Census

WHAT IS IT?

Statistics Canada conducts a census of the national population every five years. Eighty per cent of individuals in the country receive the short version of the census questionnaire while the remaining 20 per cent complete a detailed version which explores a number of areas of interest in greater depth. Census indicators related to the labour market include: labour market status, population demographics, education, work activity, earnings, place of work, commuting distance, migration, and profiles of various target groups (e.g., Indigenous peoples, immigrants, persons with disabilities, etc.).

REASONS TO USE (STRENGTHS)

- **Highly reliable data –** Since the census captures a wealth of data for almost everyone in the country, it provides more reliable estimates of various indicators, thereby representing a more accurate picture of what is happening throughout the country.

- **Greater ability to focus on indicators –** The census's greater reliability means that data on smaller groups of interest are possible, such as more local levels of geography and specific demographic groups within the population. Furthermore, the census allows us to look at many of these indicators in combination without negatively impacting the analysis along the way (for example, the labour market profile of immigrants in the St. John's CMA).

- **Better comparisons possible –** Because data from the census is collected the same way across different provinces and regions within a province, we are able to better compare these different areas effectively. As an example, we can easily compare data for a community such as Corner Brook or Gander or Labrador City to the province overall. In addition, a large number of indicators are available through the survey; not only those directly related to labour market status, but also indicators related to important subgroups such as immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and so on. These can also be effectively compared to data for the population as a whole.

- **Variety of user-friendly tools and products –** The census provides meaningful information in a number of formats, including customizable data tables, easy-to-read charts, and side-by-side comparisons of different communities and provinces. More recently, Statistics Canada has added a related **data visualization tool** (interactive charts, infographics, videos, thematic maps, etc.) to make results for the census even more accessible.

AREAS OF CAUTION (WEAKNESSES)

- **Timeliness –** Because the census is only completed once every five years and results are typically released in segments over several years following that, it tends to reflect older data almost from the moment it becomes available and is therefore not as current as that from other sources. For instance, data related to labour often do not become available until more than year after the Census takes place, thus affecting its timeliness as a key source for LMI.

- **Challenges related to comparability –** When specific questions or topics are changed from one census to another, it makes comparing indicators across two or more censuses impossible, as the way in which topics are examined is no longer the same. As an example, the one-time shift to a voluntary National Household Survey in 2011 made comparisons of its data to previous and later years much more challenging than would ordinarily be the case. In other words, revisions to individual censuses can have strong impacts on our ability to look at data over time.

- **Snapshot of the labour market –** Much of the labour market data available in the census presents labour market data tied to a single week of the census year (i.e., the "*reference week*" which is typically a week near the middle of May of that year). Given that census labour market data is based on a snapshot in the reference week, it only allows for data related to a specific point in time and would therefore not do a good job of capturing changes in the labour market due to factors such as seasonality, or unique factors which affect the labour market in years outside of the census year (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic). While some data <u>is</u> available for the entire year (note: you can find these by looking for tables highlighting "*reference year*"), this is not nearly as in depth as the data available for reference week timeframe.

- **Limitations on usefulness of some indicators –** While the census does a better job than most other sources in collecting comprehensive data on indicators such as geography and various underrepresented groups, it doesn't always provide the level of data desired and may result in the user having to consult additional data sources to obtain the full picture

(e.g., the census only provides a broad picture of the labour market profile for persons with disabilities while the Canadian Survey on Disability provides better data on this group).

RELATED LINKS

- **Information on Statistics Canada's census program -** https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm

- **Data Visualization Tool (2021 Census) -** https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/dv-vd/index-eng.cfm

- **Data products for 2021 Census** (including data tables) - https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm

- **Analytical products for 2021 Census** (including reports and commentary on specific topics) **-** https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/index-eng.cfm

- **Reference materials for 2021 Census** (including census dictionary) - https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/index-eng.cfm

- **Geographic profiles for 2021 Census -** https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/index.cfm?Lang=E

- **Statistics Canada general census page -** https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/census?MM=1