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Reference Guide

Ethnic Origin Reference Guide



National Household Survey, 2011

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Standard symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| . | not available for any reference period |
| .. | not available for a specific reference period |
| ... | not applicable |
| 0 | true zero or a value rounded to zero |
| 0 ^s | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| P | preliminary |
| r | revised |
| X | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i> |
| E | use with caution |
| F | too unreliable to be published |
| * | significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05) |

Catalogue no. [99-010-X2011006](#)

Table of contents

	Page
Definitions and concepts	4
Classifications.....	4
Questions	5
Data and other products.....	6
Data quality.....	6
Survey process	6
Certification of final estimates.....	6
Non-response bias.....	6
Data quality indicators	7
Comparability with other data sources.....	8

Definitions and concepts

The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) question on ethnic origin collects information on the ancestral origins of the population and provides information about the composition of Canada's diverse population.

Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of the respondent's ancestors. An ancestor is someone from whom a person is descended and is usually more distant than a grandparent. Other than Aboriginal persons, most people can trace their origins to their ancestors who first came to this continent. A person may have only a single ethnic origin, or may have multiple ethnicities.

Ethnic origin refers to a person's 'roots' and should not be confused with citizenship, nationality, language or place of birth. For example, a person who has Canadian citizenship, speaks Panjabi (Punjabi) and was born in the United States may report Guyanese ethnic origin.

It is important to note that ethnic origin responses are a reflection of each respondent's perception of their ethnic ancestry, and, consequently, the measurement of ethnicity is affected by changes in the social environment in which the question is asked and changes in the respondent's understanding or views about the topic. Awareness of family background or length of time since immigration can affect responses to the ethnic origin question as well.

This means that two respondents with the same ethnic ancestry could have different response patterns and thus could be counted as having different ethnic origins. For example, a respondent could report 'East Indian' as an ethnic origin while another respondent, with a similar ancestral background, could report 'Punjabi' or 'South Asian' instead. Therefore, ethnic origin data can be fluid. Nevertheless, ethnic origin data in the NHS are a reflection of the respondent's perception of his or her ethnic ancestry at the time of collection. Users who wish to obtain broader response estimates may wish to combine data for one or more ethnic origins together or use estimates for ethnic categories (e.g., 'South Asian origins').

In the 2011 NHS, the terms 'ethnic origin,' 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic ancestry' are used interchangeably.

Classifications

Data from the ethnic origin question in the National Household Survey (NHS) are used to derive summary and detailed variables which help to provide an ethnocultural portrait of the population living in Canada. Tables accessible from the ['Data and other products'](#) section of this document show the specific Ethnic origin variables used in data products for the 2011 NHS. The detailed ethnic origin classification in the 2011 NHS is also available in [Appendix 1.2](#) of the *National Household Survey Dictionary*, Catalogue no. 99-000-X. The 2011 NHS includes data for more than 200 ethnic origins reported by people living in Canada. For each ethnic origin published, total, single- and multiple-response counts are provided.

A single ethnic origin response occurs when a respondent provides one ethnic origin only. For example, in 2011, about 544,445 people stated that their only ethnic origin was Scottish.

A multiple response occurs when a respondent provides two or more ethnic origins. For example, in 2011, about 4,170,530 people gave a response which included Scottish and one or more other ethnic origins.

Ethnic Origin Reference Guide

Total response counts (also called 'Total – Single and multiple ethnic origin responses' in some data tables) indicate the number of persons who reported a specified ethnic origin, either as their only ethnic origin or in addition to one or more other ethnic origins. Total responses are the sum of single and multiple responses for each ethnic origin. For example, in 2011, a total of about 4,714,970 persons reported having Scottish as an ethnic origin (the sum of the 544,445 persons who reported Scottish as their only ethnic origin and the 4,170,530 persons who reported Scottish in combination with other ethnic origins).

Ethnicity is a difficult concept to measure and there is no internationally recognized classification for this concept. In general, 2011 NHS data for an ethnic group are published by Statistics Canada if the count is about 500 or higher.

Questions

Most 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) respondents received the [2011 National Household Survey Form N1 questionnaire](#), while respondents living on Indian reserves, in Indian settlements and in other remote areas received the [2011 National Household Survey Form N2 questionnaire](#). On both questionnaires, data on ethnic origin were collected in Questions 17.

To assist respondents whose first language was neither English nor French, NHS questions were translated into 31 other languages, including 11 Aboriginal languages.

On both versions of the questionnaire, the 2011 NHS ethnic origin question asked: 'What were the ethnic or cultural origins of this person's **ancestors**?' A note provided above the question stated that 'this question collects information on the ancestral origins of the population and provides information about the composition of Canada's diverse population.' Below the question, a second note indicated that 'an ancestor is usually more distant than a grandparent.'

The 2011 NHS Form N1 question provided the following 28 examples, in order of appearance: Canadian, English, French, Chinese, East Indian, Italian, German, Scottish, Irish, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Salish, Métis, Inuit, Filipino, Dutch, Ukrainian, Polish, Portuguese, Greek, Korean, Vietnamese, Jamaican, Jewish, Lebanese, Salvadorean, Somali, and Colombian. In contrast, the N2 form provided 12 examples, starting with Canadian Aboriginal groups. The examples, in order of appearance, were: Cree, Ojibway, Mi'kmaq, Salish, Dene, Blackfoot, Inuit, Métis, Canadian, French, English, and German.

It is not possible to list all the ethnic or cultural origins on the NHS questionnaires, and examples were provided only to guide respondents as to how to answer the question. The list of examples was based on Statistics Canada's long established methodology. For the most part, the N1 examples were based on the most frequent single origins reported in the 2006 Census and were arranged in order of size as reported in 2006, beginning with the largest group. Examples were also included which represent Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Cree, Mi'kmaq, Salish, Métis and Inuit). The last four examples (Lebanese, Salvadorean, Somali and Colombian) were included so that an example was provided for each world region, ensuring that recently arrived groups in Canada, who might not be the most numerous, were also represented in the list of examples.

Similarly, on the N2 questionnaire, the most frequently reported Aboriginal origins were included as examples, with an effort being made to ensure that Aboriginal examples from different regions of Canada were included. Non-Aboriginal examples in the list included the most frequently reported origins in the 2006 Census. For more information on the Aboriginal ancestry variable in the 2011 NHS, please refer to the [Aboriginal Peoples Reference Guide, National Household Survey](#), Catalogue no. 99-011-X2011006.

Data and other products

Data for the 2011 National Household Survey ethnic origin variables were released on May 8, 2013, as part of an integrated release with other ethnocultural and Aboriginal variables.

The products published using 2011 NHS ethnic origin data include:

- [Data products](#)
 - NHS Profile
 - NHS Data Tables
- [Analytical products](#)
- [Reference products](#)

For more information on and access to 2011 NHS data, please refer to the [2011 National Household Survey \(NHS\)](#) website.

Data quality

The National Household Survey (NHS) underwent a thorough data quality assessment similar to what was done for the 2011 Census of Population and past censuses. It consisted of an assessment of various data quality indicators (such as response rate), and an evaluation of the overall results, in comparison with other data sources such as Census of Population data.

Survey process

Quality indicators were calculated and assessed at each of the key steps of the survey. During the collection and processing of the data, the quality and consistency of the responses provided were assessed as were the non-response rates. The quality of the imputed responses was assessed after the completion of the control and imputation steps.

Certification of final estimates

Once data processing and imputation were completed, the data were weighted to represent the total Canadian population. These weighted data (the final estimates) were then certified to determine if they were coherent and reliable in comparison to other independent data sources. This is the final stage of data validation. The main highlights of this assessment are presented below.

Non-response bias

Non-response bias is a potential source of error for all surveys including the NHS. This issue arises when the characteristics of those who choose to participate in a survey are different than those who refuse. Statistics Canada adapted its collection and estimation procedures in order to mitigate, to the extent possible, the effect of non-response bias. (For more details please refer to the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X.)

Several data sources were used to evaluate the NHS estimates for ethnic origin such as: 2006 Census of Population, 2011 Census of Population results for mother tongue, the Longitudinal Immigrant Database (IMDB) and administrative data pertaining to permanent residents and non-permanent residents from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Ethnic Origin Reference Guide

It is impossible to definitively determine how much the NHS may be affected by non-response bias. Furthermore, the reporting of ethnicity, and subsequent interpretation of the results, is complex, and poses challenges for comparisons with other data sources. There is evidence of non-response bias for other ethnocultural variables (e.g., Filipino population group could be overestimated in the NHS).

Generally, the risk of error increases for lower levels of geography and for smaller populations. At the same time, the data sources used to evaluate these results are also less reliable making it difficult to certify these smaller counts.

For more information on NHS non-response bias and mitigation strategies employed by Statistics Canada, please refer to the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X.

Data quality indicators

Of all the quality indicators used for the evaluation, two are presented: the global non-response rate and the imputation rate by question.

- The global non-response rate combines the non-response at the household level and the non-response at the question level. It is provided for geographic areas. The global non-response rate is the key criterion that determines whether or not the NHS results will be released for a given geographic area. Information on the global non-response rate is available in the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X.
- The imputation rate is the proportion of respondents who did not answer a given question or whose response is deemed invalid and for which a value was imputed. Imputation improves data quality by reducing the gaps caused by non-response.

The imputation rates for the NHS Ethnic origin variable are similar to those of the 2006 Census (see Table 1). The NHS imputation rate for Ethnic origin at the national level is 5.8% which compares with the 2006 Census imputation rate for ethnic origin of 5.9%.

Ethnic Origin Reference Guide

Table 1 Imputation rates in the National Household Survey for Ethnic origin, Canada, provinces and territories

Provinces and territories	Ethnic origin
	%
Canada	5.8
Newfoundland and Labrador	10.5
Prince Edward Island	8.6
Nova Scotia	8.1
New Brunswick	7.3
Quebec	6.2
Ontario	5.7
Manitoba	4.7
Saskatchewan	5.3
Alberta	5.4
British Columbia	5.1
Yukon	5.2
Northwest Territories	2.3
Nunavut	2.7

Comparability with other data sources

The National Household Survey (NHS) is currently Statistics Canada's primary source of data on ethnic origin. Prior to 2011, the Census of Population collected information on ethnic origin. Occasionally, other household surveys (e.g., the General Social Survey, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada) also collect data on the ancestral origins of the population. In addition, a one-time postcensal survey, the [Ethnic Diversity Survey](#), was conducted in 2002.

Many factors affect comparisons of ethnic origin data across these sources. Amongst other factors, comparability is affected by differences in survey target populations, reference period, sampling and collection methods; question wording, questionnaire format, examples and instructions; approaches to data processing; the social and political climate at the time of data collection. For additional information, please see the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X.