

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

2021 PUBLIC CONSULTATION
ON GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY
STATISTICAL METADATA
STANDARDS



INTRODUCTION

For this consultation, members of the Canadian public and international partners were invited to review and provide feedback on [Statistics Canada’s gender and sexual diversity statistical metadata standards](#).¹ Specifically, Statistics Canada was seeking feedback on proposed updates to the standard for gender of person and new standards for sexual orientation and LGBTQ2+² status. Statistical standards for gender and sexual diversity (such as the definition of each concept and the classification which establishes its categories) allow for the reporting of statistically diverse groups of the population in a consistent manner. This report summarizes the feedback received from the consultation. For more information on statistical standards as well as the additional engagement activities that took place to inform standards on gender of person, sexual orientation of person, and LGBTQ2+ status of person see [Consulting Canadians landing page](#) and [StatCan Plus article](#).

Gender

Statistics Canada initially released new sex at birth and gender variables and classifications on April 13, 2018. Prior to the 2021 Census – in which the gender question was asked for the first time, and the ‘at birth’ precision was added to ‘sex’ – Statistics Canada reviewed the gender standard to ensure its relevance. Other engagement activities including a targeted expert consultation supplemented this public consultation in order to update the gender standard.

The updated sex at birth and gender standards were released on October 1, 2021. Among other changes, the definition of gender, the usage sections and the comparison to relevant internationally recognized standards were expanded. In addition, some category names and definitions in the classifications were updated.

Sexual orientation and LGBTQ2+ population

Statistics Canada has been collecting information about sexual orientation since 2003. The variable ‘sexual orientation of person’ used in the consultation included proposed classifications for the main components of sexual orientation - sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual behaviour - which could be measured separately.

The new sex at birth and gender standards have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of sexual orientation and the ability to collect data on the full LGBTQ2+ population. The creation of standards on sexual orientation and LGBTQ2+ status of person will establish a framework to address information gaps on sexual and gender diversity in Canada.

¹ For more information on statistical standards and the development of the sex at birth and gender standards, see [National Statistical Standards: Tested and Trusted, Filling the gaps: Information on gender in the 2021 Census](#) and [Sex at birth and gender: Technical report on changes for the 2021 Census](#).

² In August 2022, the Government of Canada adopted the acronym 2SLGBTQI+ to refer to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people and those who use other terms related to gender or sexual diversity. The acronym LGBTQ2+ is used in this document as it is the acronym that was used during the consultations that took place before the change of acronym, and for which respondents provided feedback.



CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

The purpose of the consultation was to ask data producers and users; representatives of civil society organizations; government bodies at the federal, provincial and local levels; academics and researchers; and all other interested parties, including the general public, to submit feedback regarding the proposed updates to the standard for gender and the new standards for sexual orientation and LGBTQ2+ status.

The consultation was conducted electronically and publicized through public announcements that described the proposed updates to the standard for gender of person, and proposed new standards for sexual orientation of person and LGBTQ2+ status of person. The announcements also listed the types of inputs sought, provided a timeline for the consultation and gave contact information for interested parties to make submissions and contact Statistics Canada with questions and comments.

Announcements were disseminated through the Statistics Canada's website and social media. In addition, stakeholders and partners, including civil society organizations, as well as a number of researchers in the field of gender and sexual diversity and gender studies, were invited by email to participate and encouraged to share the consultation invitation with others within their network.

Interested parties were invited to submit written proposals to Statistics Canada. The official consultation period started on February 2, 2021 and closed on March 12, 2021. In addition to the public consultation, virtual meetings were organized with key stakeholders and researchers to gather their feedback.

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS

Statistics Canada received 205 responses by email in both official languages from a range of individuals and organizations:

- 19 responses from academics or research groups;
- 31 responses from organizations, such as civil society organizations and government departments or agencies at the federal, provincial or territorial level in Canada and overseas;
- 155 responses from the general public.

The consultation also included a number of follow up discussions with academics and subject matter experts.

Statistics Canada is committed to respecting the privacy of consultation participants. All personal information created, held or collected by the Agency is protected by the *Privacy Act*. As such, the identity of organizations, individuals and academics who participated in the consultation process are kept confidential.



SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON THE UPDATED GENDER STANDARD

DEFINITION – GENDER

The consultation materials presented an updated definition of gender. In this update, gender was defined as “a person’s social or personal identity as a man, woman or non-binary person (a person who is not exclusively male or female).” This definition included the following concepts:

- gender identity (felt gender), which is the gender that a person feels internally, and;
- gender expression (lived gender), which is the gender a person expresses publicly in their daily life, including at work, at home or in the broader community.

The proposed definition stated that a person’s current gender may differ from the sex they were assigned at birth (male or female) and that a person’s gender may change over time.

Some of the most consistent feedback received regarding the English version of the gender definition was related to the incongruent use of the biological terms ‘male’ and ‘female’. Respondents also commented that the gender standard conflated sex and gender. To this end, a number of suggestions were received regarding terminology. These included suggestions for the use of ‘male’, ‘female’ (or ‘intersex’) when referring to the biological characteristics of sex, and ‘men/boy’, ‘women/girl’, ‘transgender’, ‘cisgender’ and ‘non-binary’ when referring to gender identities. Suggestions were received for the use of gender terminology in the non-binary definition, replacing ‘male’ or ‘female’ with ‘man’ or ‘woman’.

Input was received providing suggested modifications to the definitions of gender identity and expression. Feedback was also received on the sex at birth variable which reflected differing perspectives. Some respondents suggested that more emphasis be put on sex assigned at birth, while others suggested that sex is not assigned at birth, but rather observed and reported, and recommended using other terminology.

USAGE – GENDER

The proposed usage section included the following explanation, among other content:

The variable ‘Gender of person’ and the ‘Classification of gender’ are expected to be used by default in most social statistics programs at Statistics Canada. The variable ‘Sex of person’ and the ‘Classification of sex’ are to be used in conjunction with the variable ‘Gender of person’ and the ‘Classification of gender’, where information on sex at birth is needed.

While comments specifically referencing the gender usage section were limited, some overarching feedback was received that expressed disagreement with the overall concept of gender identity and communicated concerns about self-identification into protected groups.



Some respondents were not supportive of the introduction of the gender variable by default at Statistics Canada and argued that collecting data on gender, rather than sex, could disrupt the historical comparability of the data and result in a loss of information.³

CLASSIFICATION – GENDER

The proposed Classification of gender contained three categories: male gender; female gender; and non-binary gender. The ‘non-binary’ gender category of the classification is intended to capture relevant write-in responses to the gender question where a respondent indicates being neither exclusively ‘man’ nor ‘woman’.

A few respondents suggested that the classification contain additional categories, such as a Two-Spirit category, with the recommendation that the response option only be available to Indigenous respondents when asked on surveys.

Feedback received regarding the English version of the classifications of gender and transgender status was similar to the comments mentioned above regarding the use of the biological terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ in the proposed definitions, with ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as suggested replacements.

Comments regarding the reference to ‘current gender’ (e.g., “This category includes persons whose current gender was reported as male”) were received, which suggested the removal of the term ‘current’. Similar comments were made regarding the use of the word ‘current’ in the Classification of transgender status.

CLASSIFICATION – TRANSGENDER STATUS

Consultations sought input on a classification consisting of the following two broader categories with their respective subcategories (along with their definitions, not presented here):

1. Cisgender person
 - 1.1 Cisgender man
 - 1.2 Cisgender woman
2. Transgender person
 - 2.1 Transgender man
 - 2.2 Transgender woman
 - 2.3 Transgender non-binary person

Respondents suggested the creation of a third, standalone category, ‘Non-binary person’, rather than being included as a sub-category of ‘Transgender person’.

³ For more information on data historical comparability, see *Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021, Filling the gaps: Information on gender in the 2021 Census and 2021 Census: Sex at birth and gender – the whole picture (video)*.



Respondents also provided feedback regarding the terminology. A few commented that the terms ‘trans’ and ‘transgender’ are not necessarily interchangeable, while others suggested replacing the term ‘cisgender’ with ‘non-transgender’. A few respondents suggested using the term ‘gender modality’ as the name of the classification; for example, the Classification of transgender status could be called the Classification of gender modality.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION

DEFINITION – SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In the proposed standard, sexual orientation was presented as a multidimensional concept defined as

an umbrella term that includes a person’s sexual identity, sexual attraction and sexual behaviour. Sexual identity refers to how a person perceives their sexuality (e.g., lesbian, straight, bisexual), sexual attraction refers to whom a person finds sexually appealing, and sexual behaviour refers to with whom a person engages in sexual activity. A person’s sexual orientation may change over time.

Input was supportive of sexual orientation being a multidimensional concept. Some minor changes were suggested for how to define sexual orientation as well as its different components. Feedback was received in favour of using the term ‘sexual orientation’ rather than ‘sexual identity’. It was also suggested that the definition of sexual orientation should include the concept of emotional attraction.

USAGE – SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Feedback regarding usage mainly consisted of the need for transparency around the rationale for collecting data on sexual orientation, ensuring data are only collected as needed. While the consultation did not specifically focus on the minimum age for responding to sexual orientation question, a few organizations and academics provided input on the proposed minimum age of 15. They noted the value of having data on youth who are LGB+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual or of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual), and felt that a rationale should be provided for requiring a minimum age for asking questions about sexual orientation. Similarly, it was suggested that the minimum age to collect data on sexual orientation should be lower than 15 or that a minimum age may not be needed at all.

CLASSIFICATION - SEXUAL IDENTITY

Consultations sought input on the Classification of sexual identity which included proposed categories along with their definitions. The classification included: ‘heterosexual or straight’;



'gay or lesbian'; 'bisexual'; 'pansexual'; 'asexual'; 'queer'; and 'Two-Spirit'. Some respondents suggested including more categories, while others thought the classification should include fewer categories.

It was also pointed out that some of the proposed categories were not mutually exclusive and that this should be addressed (e.g., a person could be both Two-Spirit and bisexual, or asexual and gay, or queer and lesbian). In addition to not being a mutually exclusive category, 'queer' saw some support, but some respondents also suggested to avoid this term loaded with political history and potential derogatory interpretation. Input was also received that the 'Two-Spirit' category was a distinct concept requiring a separate measure only made available to Indigenous respondents.

In addition, feedback was received suggesting that the proposed definitions of different sexual orientations conflated sex and gender by referring to attraction based on sex and/or gender. Some respondents felt that the definition of sexual orientation should solely be based on sex. Other input suggested that sexual orientation definitions include being attracted to a person's gender expression, along with their sex and gender.

Feedback from different types of respondents (i.e., individuals, academics, and organizations) recommended combining the 'bisexual' and 'pansexual' categories, as these terms may overlap and be used interchangeably, making the two categories not mutually exclusive. It was pointed out in some comments that responses may be influenced by whether a person conceptualizes sex/gender as binary or not.

The proposed Classification of sexual identity also included higher levels of aggregation, including category groupings 'heterosexual or straight' and 'minority sexual identity'. Some of the most consistent feedback was that the 'minority sexual identity' category carried a negative connotation and that it was inappropriate. Other feedback suggested that different sexual identities should not be aggregated together.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON SEXUAL ATTRACTION

CLASSIFICATION - SEXUAL ATTRACTION

The proposed Classification of sexual attraction was presented in two versions, each including a number of categories for respondents to identify their sexual attraction. One version measured attraction in reference to the respondent's own gender, without specifying the gender or genders of persons that they are attracted to (e.g., 'person only attracted to person of a different gender'). The other version specified the gender or genders of persons to which the respondent is attracted to (e.g., 'person only attracted to persons of male gender'). Each version also included categories for people who are 'equally attracted' to more than one gender, as well as for people who do not experience sexual attraction or who are unsure of their sexual attraction.



While feedback on which version was preferable was very limited, one of the key issues identified in responses was that both versions included too much detail or that they were too complicated. Others argued that sexual attraction should be defined on the basis of sex rather than gender. While both versions included a category for people who do not experience sexual attraction, some comments suggested that the classification should be more inclusive of people with little or no sexual attraction (i.e., people on the asexual spectrum). It was also suggested to re-name the 'unsure' category to 'questioning'.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

CLASSIFICATION - SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Overall, this classification elicited stronger reactions than the other classifications. Some feedback indicated understanding the need to refer to the concept of sex rather than gender in the context of sexual behaviour. However, many comments expressed surprise or confusion that sex rather than gender terminology was used in the proposed sexual behaviour classification, which differed from the proposed sexual identity and sexual attraction classifications which used gender terminology. Some suggested that the purpose of the Classification of sexual behaviour was unclear, and proposed that the classification provide some base standard definitions of 'sexual activity'. Other input suggested to shift the focus away from the sex of the sexual partners towards specific acts.

A significant amount of feedback from different sources (i.e., organizations, individuals and academics) noted that intersex people were only included as partners in the Classification of sexual behaviour and that there was not a specific category for intersex respondents. Some input also indicated that no definition of intersex was provided.

Some respondents suggested that the number of sexual partners should be included within the sexual behaviour dimension. Finally, it was recommended not to refer to 'men who have sex with men' in the classification as the term may have a negative connotation to some people.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON LGBTQ2+ STATUS

DEFINITION – LGBTQ2+

Statistics Canada is committed to supporting disaggregated data analysis in order to highlight the experiences of specific segments of the population. Recognizing that sample size may be an issue for small populations, the consultation proposed an aggregate LGBTQ2+ standard to establish a consistent approach to combining data on gender identity and sexual orientation. Input was



sought on the proposed definition of LGBTQ2+ status as well as the choice of acronym. The proposed definition was that “LGBTQ2+ status refers to whether or not a person is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, Two-Spirit, or another non-binary gender or minority sexual identity.” Feedback received focused on the acronym rather than the proposed definition. The majority of feedback proposed to move the ‘2’ referring to Two-Spirit people at the beginning of the acronym to acknowledge Indigenous people in the context of reconciliation.

CLASSIFICATION – LGBTQ2+

Feedback was sought on the proposed Classification of LGBTQ2+ status as two distinct categories (i.e., ‘LGBTQ2+ person’ and ‘non-LGBTQ2+ person’ (‘heterosexual and cisgender person’) as well as their definitions. Some feedback argued against aggregating diverse populations under one umbrella category as these groups have different experiences and are not homogenous in their characteristics. However, others indicated that this approach was a useful way to analyze complex issues experienced by the LGBTQ2+ population as a whole.

NEXT STEPS

Statistics Canada has completed the review process for the updated gender standard and the new sexual orientation standard. The updated gender standard was released on October 1, 2021. All of the comments received during this consultation and other engagements activities were taken into account, and many are reflected in this updated standard.

The new sexual orientation standard was released on August 16, 2023. The public consultation summarized in this What We Heard report was one of four phases that informed the development of the sexual orientation standard. In addition to the public consultation, Statistics Canada undertook a targeted expert consultation, focus groups, and a testing phase which consisted of one-on-one interviews.

The focus groups and testing were conducted in English and French and engaged diverse participants from urban and rural communities in different regions across the country. Participants included LGBTQ2+ and non-LGBTQ2+ individuals from a range of ages, genders and socio-economic status groups. Focus groups and testing also engaged Indigenous Two-Spirit participants, as well as immigrant and racialized participants.

