



The 2016 Census and the Labour Force Survey

Introduction

The Census of Population and Housing (Census) and Labour Force Survey (LFS) both collect information about the labour market activity of people aged 15 years and over. While both collections seek to measure concepts related to employment, unemployment and being outside of the labour force, there are a number of differences between them. This fact sheet outlines the strengths and key uses of each collection, as well as how the collections differ and explains why the statistics produced in each of these two collections are not directly comparable.

Strengths and key uses of the Census and LFS

The Labour Force Survey produces the most authoritative and recent estimates of labour market information, including employment and unemployment. Labour force statistics are published monthly by the ABS in *Labour Force, Australia* (cat no. 6202.0). The Labour Force Survey is designed specifically to measure changes over time in the Australian labour force, and to provide a high quality measure for use in international comparisons. It provides a highly accurate estimate of key labour force statistics of the Australian economy, including employment, unemployment and underemployment, as well as a range of more detailed labour market-specific data. The Labour Force Survey is the leading source of data for monitoring Australia's labour market conditions.

The Census provides a rich snapshot of all people living in the country on Census night. It is the leading source of information for small population groups and areas, and allows for the analysis of labour market activities and industry and occupation data at a more detailed level. The Census also collects information about a range of characteristics of people, including, but not limited to, their labour force status, enabling analyses across a broader range of socioeconomic dimensions.

Summary of differences between the Census and the Labour Force Survey

	Census	Labour Force Survey
Purpose	<p>Counts the number of people living in Australia on Census night and the dwellings in which they live. Also collects information about a range of characteristics of people, including, but not limited to, their labour force status.</p> <p>Provides a rich snapshot of all people living in the country on Census night. It is the leading source of information for small population groups and areas, and allows for the analysis of industry and occupation data at a more detailed level.</p>	<p>Monthly household survey providing Australia's official estimates of employment and unemployment. It is the leading source of data for monitoring Australia's labour market conditions.</p> <p>Designed specifically to measure changes over time in the Australian labour force. It provides a highly accurate estimate of key labour force statistics of the Australian economy, including employment, unemployment and underemployment, as well as a range of more detailed labour market-specific data.</p>
Scope and coverage	<p>Includes all persons in Australia on Census night.</p> <p>Includes members of the defence forces.</p> <p>Includes the Jervis Bay Territory, the Territory of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.</p> <p>Excludes usual residents who are out of the country on Census night.</p>	<p>Includes the usually resident civilian population aged 15 years and over.</p> <p>Excludes members of the defence forces.</p> <p>Excludes the Jervis Bay Territory, the Territory of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.</p> <p>Includes people who are out of the country for less than 6 weeks.</p>

Frequency	<p>Conducted every five years.</p> <p>Provides a single snapshot of Australia on Census night.</p>	<p>Monthly collection with respondents in the sample for 8 consecutive months.</p> <p>Provides a continuous time series of data on the Australian labour force for historical and international comparisons.</p>
Reference period	The week prior to the Census night.	The week prior to that in which the monthly survey is conducted.
Collection methodology	A self-completed online or paper form.	Telephone interview, face-to-face interview by highly trained interviewers, with some self-completed online enumeration.
Survey questions	<p>Questions cover a broad range of topics.</p> <p>Labour force status determined from four simple questions. Questions are used to ascertain if a person is working, actively looking for work and available to start work.</p>	<p>Questions mainly focused on measuring labour force status.</p> <p>Labour force status determined from an extensive range of questions, producing a highly accurate classification of people as employed, unemployed or not in the labour force, at a given point in time.</p>
Sampling error	Not subject to sampling error as it aims to collect the information from everyone in Australia on Census night. However the Census is subject to some level of undercount.	Results are subject to sampling error as estimates based on information obtained from a sample of dwellings. The sample is designed to ensure sampling error is reduced to a minimum at the national and state/territory levels. However, it can be higher for labour force regions or for detailed breakdowns. The estimates are therefore accompanied by information on the quality of the estimates, including relative standard errors.
Treatment of non-response	<p>To account for unreturned Census forms, demographic characteristics of persons in non-responding households are either imputed or included in the 'not stated' category. Labour force status is not imputed and data are not adjusted for non-responding households.</p> <p>Issues with response or coverage are identified through the Post Enumeration Survey, which is conducted a few weeks after the Census to estimate the number and characteristics of people either not counted or counted multiple times on Census night.</p>	<p>Only fully responding households contribute to the estimates. Non-responding households are treated as 'not stated' and excluded and adjusted for through the weighting process.</p> <p>As a sample survey, it is weighted to an independent population benchmark based on the Estimated Resident Population (ERP), which ensures estimates add up to an independently estimated distribution of the usual resident civilian population aged 15 years and over, regardless of any sample lost due to non-response.</p>

For more information refer to:

[Census Data Quality Statement: Labour Force Status \(cat.no 2900.0\)](#)

[Labour Force, Australia \(cat. no. 6202.0\)](#)

[Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(cat. no. 6102.0.55.001\)](#)