

Study: Indigenous Youth in Canada

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The Indigenous population is significantly younger than the non-Indigenous population. Young people aged 15 to 24 years make up 17% of the Indigenous population, compared with 12% of the non-Indigenous population. On average, Indigenous peoples were 8.8 years younger than the non-Indigenous population in 2016. It is also expected that the Indigenous population will remain younger, and that youth will make up a larger share of the population in the coming decades.

These findings are from [Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada](#) of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*, a publication that provides a comprehensive overview of Canadian youth. In the next few months, *Portrait of Youth in Canada* will continue to focus on themes like social engagement, well-being and the environment.

This fourth chapter also examines parenting and family structure, education and employment, mental and physical health, and attitudes about language and culture for Indigenous youth in Canada. It uses mostly data from the 2016 Census and the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which are currently the two most comprehensive sources of information on First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth. However, the chapter also includes more recent information on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Indigenous youth.

Indigenous youth highly value Indigenous languages, identity and culture

The majority of First Nations (91%), Métis (93%) and Inuit youth (97%) reported that they felt good about their Indigenous identity. Most also reported making an effort to learn more about their history, traditions and culture—71.4% for First Nations youth, 64.6% for Métis, and 74.4% for Inuit.

Half of Indigenous youth also reported that speaking an Indigenous language was important or very important to them. In 2016, 13% of Indigenous youth could speak an Indigenous language well enough to conduct a conversation. This figure was 16.5% for First Nations youth, 0.8% for Métis youth, and 64.4% for Inuit youth.

Using the broader concept for knowledge of an Indigenous language from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which includes those who can speak even a few words, these numbers increase to 42.5% for First Nations youth, 18.4% for Métis youth, and 80.8% for Inuit youth.

Indigenous youth report less positive mental health outcomes than older age groups

In general, youth in Canada have reported worse mental health outcomes than older age groups. The same trends were observed among Indigenous peoples.

In 2017, 48.9% of Indigenous youth reported that their mental health was either excellent or very good. This was lower than the share of Indigenous peoples aged 25 to 44 years (53.7%) as well as those aged 45 years and over (55.4%). Indigenous youth were also more likely than older age groups to have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

More Indigenous youth are completing high school

Among Indigenous youth aged 20 to 24 years, 70% had completed high school in 2016, up from 57% in 2006. Within this age group, the figure was 64% for First Nations people, 82.7% for Métis, and 47% for Inuit. However, a gap remains between these youths and non-Indigenous youth, who had a high school completion rate of 91%.

Indigenous youth contribute significantly to the labour market

In 2016, there were over 111,000 Indigenous workers aged 15 to 24 years in Canada, representing 5.1% of total youth employment in the country. Among the provinces, the proportion was highest in Manitoba (15.1%) and Saskatchewan (13.6%). In the Northwest Territories, close to half (48.1%) of all young workers were Indigenous, while in Yukon, the proportion was 22.8%. In Nunavut, the vast majority (87.8%) of young workers were Inuit.



Despite the significant contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth to the economy, gaps in labour market outcomes with non-Indigenous youth remain. In 2016, the employment rate for Indigenous youth was 39.3%, and the unemployment rate was 23%, compared with 52.8% and 15.1% for non-Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth were less likely to be employed even when excluding youth who were attending school (47.8% compared with 72% for non-Indigenous youth).

As with the 2008-2009 recession, recent data on the COVID-19 downturn indicate that employment has been slower to recover for Indigenous peoples than for non-Indigenous people, and youth saw a particular challenging summer job market in 2020.

However, more recent trends have converged, and the summer job market was much more favourable in 2021 than in 2020, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth alike.

Specifically, the unemployment rate among Indigenous youth in the three months ending in August 2021 was 14.1%, 11.5 percentage points below its level in the summer of 2020. Similarly, the non-Indigenous youth unemployment rate of 12.5% was much lower in the summer of 2021 compared with the summer of 2020 (-11.8 percentage points).

The employment rate among Indigenous youth reached 57.4% in the three months ending in August 2021, surpassing its pre-pandemic and summer 2020 level of 47.4%. Finally, the labour force participation rate among Indigenous youth was 66.8%, the highest since the onset of the pandemic and 3.0 percentage points above that seen in the summer job market in 2020.

Analysis of the 2021 Census is underway

Data from the 2021 Census of Population will provide further insight into the experiences of Indigenous youth in Canada. Two new questions were added to the 2021 Census, allowing Métis and Inuit to identify themselves further, which will permit more detailed analysis of these population groups—examining characteristics by membership in a Métis organization or settlement, or by enrolment under an Inuit land claims agreement. The 2021 Census will also inform on the experiences of Indigenous peoples during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of employment, income, education and other aspects.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3250](#) and [3901](#).

The chapter entitled "[Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada](#)" is now available in the online issue of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report* ([42280001](#)).

The infographic "[Portrait of youth in Canada: Indigenous peoples](#)" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).