

# Study: Indigenous women and girls: Socioeconomic conditions in remote communities compared with more accessible areas

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Indigenous women and girls are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to live in areas farther from large population centres.

In particular, Indigenous women and girls accounted for nearly three-quarters (72%) of the female population living in very remote communities in 2016.

Indigenous women and girls living in more remote areas more often face challenges and barriers that affect their socioeconomic well-being than those living in accessible areas, according to a new study.

For example, they are less likely to have completed high school or to have obtained a higher level of education, more likely to live in dwellings in need of major repairs and more likely to be unemployed. However, they are also more likely to live in multi-generational households and speak an Indigenous language than their counterparts in more accessible areas. It is necessary to understand the real socioeconomic conditions faced by Indigenous women and girls, in order to put in place measures which foster the vitality of Indigenous communities, languages, cultures and traditions after centuries of disruption due to colonization and harmful colonial practices.

These findings come from a study entitled "[Indigenous women and girls: Socioeconomic conditions in remote communities compared with more accessible areas](#)," which was published today.

This study uses the remoteness index classification and data from the 2016 Census of Population. Specifically, it examines the characteristics of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls living in communities with varying levels of remoteness.

Indigenous people in remote communities often benefit from a closer connection to their communities, cultures, traditions, languages, lands and resources. However, they also face unique barriers and challenges. For example, accessing goods and services may be more difficult for those living in remote communities that are farther from large population centres. Examining the characteristics and outcomes of Indigenous women and girls living in more remote areas is important to help inform the development of infrastructure, policies and programs focused on improving service accessibility, as well as to explore educational and employment opportunities for Indigenous women and girls living in these communities.

## **Inuit women and girls are the most likely to live in remote areas**

In 2016, 795,730 women and girls lived in remote and very remote areas in Canada. Of these, 226,805 were First Nations, Métis or Inuit, representing nearly one-third (29%) of all women and girls living in those areas.

In contrast, Indigenous women and girls represented 2% of the female population in easily accessible areas.

Inuit women and girls were the most likely to live in remote areas. More than three-quarters (80%) lived in remote or very remote areas, compared with 32% of First Nations women and girls and 13% of Métis women and girls.

First Nations and Inuit women and girls living in more remote areas were significantly younger, on average, than their counterparts living in easily accessible areas. In contrast, Métis women and girls tended to be the same age or older than their counterparts living in easily accessible areas.



In addition, the age gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and girls was greater in more remote areas. For example, in very remote areas, the median age of Inuit (23 years) and First Nations (25 years) women and girls was about half that of their non-Indigenous counterparts (50 years). The comparable age gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous women and girls was 10 years in easily accessible areas.

### **Indigenous women and girls are more likely to speak an Indigenous language and live in multi-generational households in very remote areas**

Indigenous languages are recognized as fundamental to the identities and cultures of Indigenous people. The year 2022 marked the beginning of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Decade of Indigenous languages, which was proclaimed to support the preservation, revitalization and promotion of Indigenous languages.

Indigenous people living in remote communities benefit from a closer connection to their communities, cultures, traditions and languages which can lead to greater transmission of Indigenous languages.

Indeed, Indigenous women and girls living in very remote areas are the most likely to speak an Indigenous language when compared with other areas of remoteness.

In 2016, Inuit women and girls living in very remote areas (83%) were approximately 10 times more likely to speak an Indigenous language than those living in accessible areas (8%). Additionally, over half (57%) of First Nations women and girls could speak an Indigenous language in very remote areas, compared with 7% of their counterparts in easily accessible areas. The ability to speak an Indigenous language also rose with increasing level of remoteness for Métis women and girls, ranging from 15% in very remote areas, to less than 1% in easily accessible areas.

Indigenous women and girls in more remote areas were also more likely to live in multi-generational households, where there is at least one person living with at least one of their children and grandchildren. This was particularly true for First Nations women and girls, where roughly one-third (29%) were living in multi-generational households in very remote areas compared with 9% of their counterparts living in easily accessible areas. Multi-generational households play an important role in raising children and grandparents play a vital role as knowledge holders and transmitters of Indigenous values, stories and teachings to younger generations.

### **Indigenous women report higher unemployment rates and lower employment incomes in very remote areas**

Indigenous women and girls face several challenges and barriers when living in more remote areas. Barriers include access to adequate education, employment opportunities, services and housing. These barriers, often resulting from colonization, harmful colonial practices and ongoing marginalization are linked to disparities in socioeconomic conditions.

In 2016, Indigenous women living in more remote areas were less likely to have completed studies than those living in more accessible areas. For example, approximately 4 in 10 Inuit women aged 18 and older and living in very remote areas had completed high school or a higher level of education (41%), compared with more than 7 in 10 of those living in easily accessible areas (72%).

In addition to lower level of educational attainment, limited access to employment in many sectors in remote communities can have a significant impact on the labour force participation and income of people living in these communities.

In particular, the employment of First Nations and Métis women tends to decrease with the level of remoteness. For example, the employment rate for First Nations women was 52% in easily accessible areas, but 37% in very remote areas. In contrast, the employment of Inuit women showed no particular pattern by level of remoteness. The employment rate for Inuit women was 48% in both very remote and less accessible areas.

The unemployment rate was higher for all groups of Indigenous women in very remote areas. This is particularly striking for Métis women living in very remote areas, for whom the unemployment rate (19%) was more than twice that of their counterparts living in easily accessible areas (9%).

The employment income of Indigenous women also tended to decrease, the higher the level of remoteness, particularly for First Nations women whose median employment income in very remote areas (\$18,400) was 23% lower than that of their counterparts living in easily accessible areas (\$23,800). Similarly, significant income decreases were observed for employment income in very remote areas, for Inuit (\$14,500) and Métis (\$23,200) women whose employment income in these areas was 35% and 17% lower, respectively, than that of Inuit (\$22,200) and Métis (\$28,000) women living in easily accessible areas.

### **First Nations and Inuit women and girls in more remote areas are more likely to reside in dwellings in need of major repairs and crowded households**

In 2016, nearly half of First Nations women and girls living in very remote areas (47%) resided in dwellings in need of major repairs, which was significantly higher when compared with their counterparts living in easily accessible areas (13%). The proportion of Inuit (31%) and Métis (19%) women and girls living in dwellings in need of major repairs was also significantly higher among those living in very remote areas, compared with those living in easily accessible areas.

In addition, Indigenous women and girls living in very remote areas were more likely to reside in crowded dwellings than those living in more accessible areas (i.e., housing that was considered not suitable for the number of people who lived there).

Information from the 2021 Census on the Indigenous population will be available in September 2022. These data will provide an update on the Indigenous populations living in more remote areas.

#### **Note to readers**

*This study used data from the 2016 Census of Population long-form questionnaire. Statistics Canada conducts the Census of Population every five years and collects data on demographic and economic characteristics of people and households. The Census of Population is the primary source of sociodemographic data for specific population groups (e.g., Indigenous people, immigrants, seniors) as well as for lower levels of geography. A sample of 25% of Canadian households received the long-form questionnaire, and all reserves and Inuit communities were enumerated using the long-form questionnaire. All other households received a short-form questionnaire. The long-form questionnaire was administered to those in private dwellings only, thus excluding those in collective dwellings such as hospitals, nursing homes and correctional and custodial facilities.*

#### **Remoteness index**

*Statistics Canada's remoteness index (RI) was used to quantify the extent to which a census subdivision (CSD) is remote, or far from neighbouring population centres. To develop the RI, researchers used data from official statistical sources, including census data, in addition to data from non-official statistical sources, such as Google Maps Application Programming Interface. For each CSD, the RI value was determined based on the CSD's relative proximity to all surrounding population centres within a radius that permits daily accessibility (measured in travel cost), as well as the size of those population centres (measured in population size).*

*The RI is a continuous index variable that provides a value for each CSD, ranging from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest level of remoteness. The RI values were categorized using classification thresholds, classifying RI values into five categories of remoteness: easily accessible areas, accessible areas, less accessible areas, remote areas and very remote areas.*

*For example, the CSD Coquitlam 1, a First Nations reserve under the administration of Kwikwetlem First Nation, is located in the greater Vancouver area in British Columbia and was classified as an easily accessible area. In contrast, the CSD of Taloyaok (or Talurjuaq), an Inuit community, was classified as a very remote area. It is located in Nunavut and is the northernmost community on the Canadian mainland.*

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3901](#).**

The article entitled "[Indigenous women and girls: Socioeconomic conditions in remote communities compared with more accessible areas](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).