

Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes of Indigenous peoples, 2021

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Indigenous people have made important gains in higher education from 2016 to 2021, with the share of Indigenous people holding a bachelor's degree or higher increasing by 1.9 percentage points over that period. Increases were seen across all Indigenous groups, namely First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. This corresponded with better labour market outcomes compared to Indigenous people with lower levels of educational attainment.

Despite these educational gains and related advantages in the labour market, significant gaps remain when compared to the non-Indigenous population. These gaps in educational attainment and labour market outcomes are most notable among Indigenous people living in very remote areas, that is, further away from population centres. Although Indigenous people living in more remote areas may face additional barriers to pursuing higher levels of formal education, they often benefit from a closer connection to their communities, cultures, traditions, languages, lands, and resources.

Released today, a new study using data from the 2021 Census examines postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among First Nations, Métis and Inuit adults aged 25 to 64 years, examining variations by gender, and among those residing in remote areas, on reserve, and communities across Inuit Nunangat. Examining educational attainment and labour market outcomes by geography can help inform the development of infrastructure, policies and programs which aim to improve both access to higher education and employment opportunities.

Almost half of Indigenous adults held a postsecondary qualification in 2021

According to the 2021 Census, just under half (49.2%) of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 years had completed a postsecondary qualification, with the most common being the completion of a college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma. The overall rates of postsecondary completion were 45.3% for First Nations people, 56.3% for Métis and 33.6% among Inuit. These rates were below those recorded for the non-Indigenous population, at 68.0%.

In 2021, Indigenous women (53.5%) were more likely than Indigenous men (44.4%) to have completed a postsecondary qualification.

The share of Indigenous people with postsecondary qualification was higher in more accessible areas

First Nations people, Métis and Inuit are more likely to live in certain geographic regions, which can impact their participation in formal education. In particular, educational attainment is related to level of remoteness, which describes the extent to which a municipality is remote, or far from neighbouring population centres (see the "Classification of remoteness index" box).

The share of Indigenous people with a postsecondary qualification was higher in more accessible areas, with rates of postsecondary education generally declining with higher levels of remoteness. In 2021, 54.7% of Indigenous people living in easily accessible areas completed a postsecondary qualification, compared to 42.9% among those living in remote areas and to 27.0% in very remote areas.

While this pattern was also observed for the non-Indigenous population, non-Indigenous adults were consistently more likely to have a postsecondary qualification across each level of remoteness. Notably, in 2021, over half (54.0%) of non-Indigenous adults had a postsecondary credential in very remote areas, meaning that they were twice as likely as their Indigenous counterparts in very remote areas (27.0%) to have a postsecondary qualification.

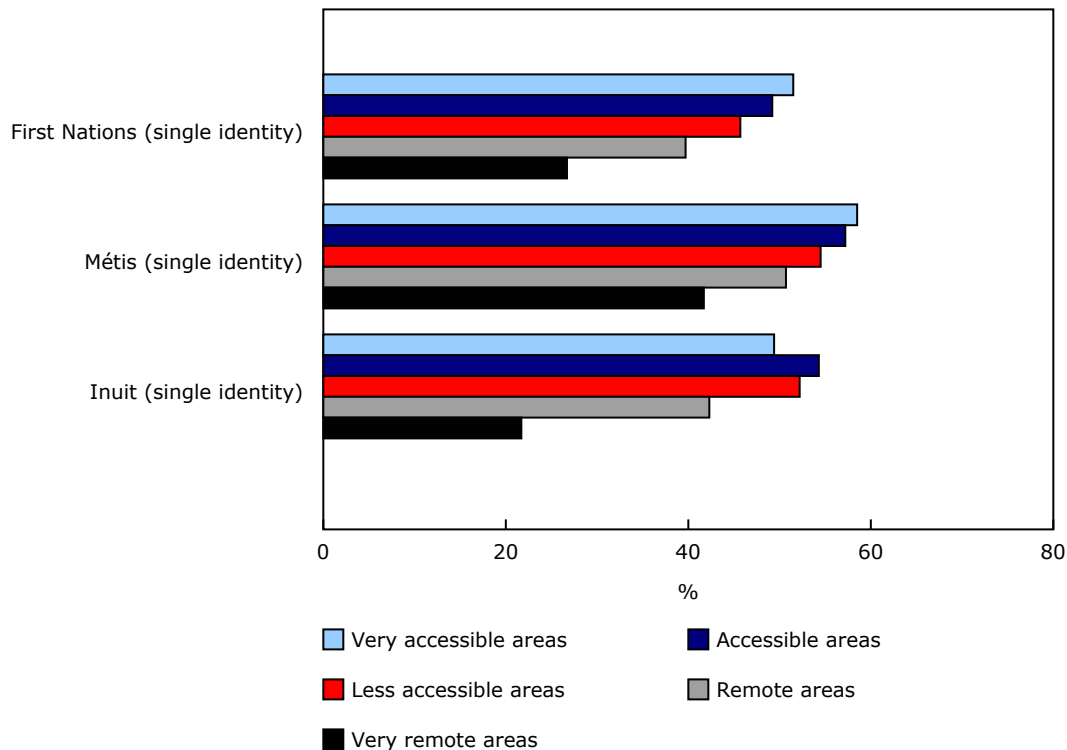


Among Indigenous people, the difference by remoteness was particularly pronounced among Inuit. In 2021, Inuit living in easily accessible areas were more than twice as likely to have a postsecondary qualification than their counterparts in very remote areas (49.4% versus 21.7%) (see Chart 1).

Much of the variation in overall postsecondary attainment among Inuit can be attributed to the large share of Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat, where all areas are classified as remote or very remote. In 2021, over two-thirds (69.0%) of Inuit lived in Inuit Nunangat. With limited opportunities to participate in higher levels of education in their own communities, the share of Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat with a postsecondary qualification (23.7%) was much lower than the proportion (52.8%) of Inuit with a postsecondary qualification living outside Inuit Nunangat.

First Nations people also saw notable differences in educational attainment by level of remoteness. Among First Nations people with Registered or Treaty Indian status, 47.6% of those living off reserve held a postsecondary qualification in 2021, compared with 34.0% of those living on reserve. The overall lower rate of postsecondary attainment among First Nations people with Registered or Treaty Indian status living on reserve partially reflects the geographic distribution of those living on reserve, as approximately three in five (60.4%) First Nations people living on reserve were located in a remote or very remote area, where there may be limited or no access to postsecondary opportunities.

Chart 1
Percent of adults aged 25 to 64 years with a postsecondary qualification, by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021



Source(s): Census of Population (3901), 2021.

Classification of remoteness index

The 2021 update of the [classification of remoteness index](#) is now available for all communities (i.e., census subdivisions) of Canada. This classification builds on the [index of remoteness 2021](#) and classifies Canadian census subdivisions into five categories of relative remoteness, namely, easily accessible areas, accessible areas, less accessible areas, remote areas and very remote areas, using five classification methods (i.e., Manual, Equal Interval, Quintile, Jenks Natural Breaks and K-Means Cluster). Data and documentation are available upon request from the Centre for Health Data Integration of the Health Statistics Branch at Statistics Canada (hd-ds@statcan.gc.ca).

Trends in education attainment differ by credential type

In looking at changes in educational attainment from 2016 to 2021, there is considerable variation by type of postsecondary qualification. For instance, while the share of Indigenous people with a bachelor's degree or higher (+1.9 percentage points) has increased over that period, albeit to a smaller degree than the non-Indigenous population (+4.5 percentage points), this increase was not seen for other education credentials.

From 2016 to 2021, decreases were recorded in the share of Indigenous people with a postsecondary certificate or diploma below the bachelor level (-2.2 percentage points), including the proportion with a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma (-0.4 percentage points). Similar decreases were seen among the non-Indigenous population (-2.0 percentage points among those with a postsecondary certificate or diploma below the bachelor level; and -1.0 percentage points among those with a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma).

Gap in employment rates between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations narrows among those with higher levels of educational attainment

During the 2021 Census reference week, from May 2 to May 8, 2021, 61.2% of Indigenous adults aged 25 to 64 years were employed, with the proportions varying across Indigenous groups: 56.6% among First Nations people, 68.8% for Métis, and 55.2% for Inuit. While these employment rates all fell below the rate recorded for the non-Indigenous population (74.1%), the gap narrowed with increasing levels of education.

The greatest gap was seen among adults without a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree, where 38.1% of Indigenous adults aged 25 to 64 were employed, compared to 52.6% of non-Indigenous adults in the same age range. This employment gap disappears among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, where 82.6% of Indigenous adults were employed, compared to the nearly identical rate of 82.5% for non-Indigenous adults.

In addition, for Indigenous people with a bachelor's degree or higher, the difference in the employment rates across areas of remoteness was less pronounced, despite employment rates being lower among Indigenous people in more remote areas.

First Nations people (54.8%), Métis (56.7%) and Inuit (56.5%) with a bachelor's degree or higher were all more likely to work in professional occupations (that is, occupations typically requiring a bachelor's degree or higher) than non-Indigenous people (49.1%).

Furthermore, Indigenous adults aged 25 to 64 were less likely to experience overqualification than non-Indigenous adults in the same age range, that is, to have a higher level of education than what is typically required for the position they hold. In 2021, 9.4% of Indigenous adults aged 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher were overqualified, compared with 14.1% of the non-Indigenous population in the same age range.

Rates of overqualification of First Nations people (9.5%), Métis (9.4%) and Inuit (7.9%) aged 25 to 64 were all below that of the non-Indigenous population. Nevertheless, the higher rate of overqualification among the non-Indigenous population is explained by the inclusion of racialized and immigrant populations with foreign

credentials, populations that have higher rates of overqualification than the non-racialized or Canadian-born population. For example, when the rate of overqualification among the Indigenous population is compared with that of the Canadian-born, non-Indigenous population, the rates of overqualification are identical at 9.4%.

Note to readers

Results are based on the long-form 2021 Census of Population, with comparisons over time based on the 2016 Census. About one in four households in Canada completed the 2021 long-form census, providing information on a broad range of demographic, social and economic characteristics.

Methodology

Comparisons between the 2021 Census and 2016 Census were conducted by adjusting for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements from one cycle to another. For example, if a census subdivision (CSD) that is classified as a reserve or settlement was incompletely enumerated for the 2021 or 2016 Census, it should be excluded from the tabulations for both years when comparisons between the two are made. As a result, adjusted estimates used for historical comparison may differ from those based on unadjusted data. In the 2021 Census, there were 63 incompletely enumerated reserves out of a total of 1,026 CSDs in Canada that were classified as on reserve. This was up from 14 incompletely enumerated reserves in 2016.

To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2021 Census and 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%. Because of random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products such as the analytical documents, highlight tables and data tables.

Definitions

Indigenous: Indigenous refers to whether the person identified with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. This includes those who identify as First Nations (North American Indian), Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit), and/or those who report being Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada), and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band.

Data for Indigenous groups (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) refer to those who reported a single identity.

Remoteness: Statistics Canada's Index of Remoteness was used to quantify the extent to which a CSD is remote, or far from neighbouring population centres. For each CSD, the remoteness index 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 remoteness index 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 2021 update of the classification of remoteness index was used to categorize remoteness index values. The Manual classification thresholds were used to classify remoteness index values into five categories of remoteness: easily accessible, accessible, less accessible areas, remote and very remote areas.

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

The article entitled "[Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census](#)" 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) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).