

Article

Inuit in Canada: Selected findings of the 2006 Census



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by Linda Gionet

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Readers should note that all estimates are based on the Aboriginal identity population. For definitions of terms, please see **"What you should know about this study"** at the end of this article.

For over 5,000 years, Inuit have inhabited the northern reaches of Canada. In 2006, almost 4% of people who identified themselves as an Aboriginal person – 50,485 – reported that they were Inuit.

The great majority live in the huge area stretching across Canada's North from Labrador to the Northwest Territories, known as Inuit Nunaat, the expression for "Inuit homeland" in the Inuit language. While Inuit share a common culture and traditions, the four regions of Inuit Nunaat are marked by considerable linguistic and geographic diversity.

The largest of these four regions is Nunavut, formed in 1999 from the eastern part of the Northwest Territories. Nearly half (49%) of Inuit in Canada live in Nunavut. Almost one in five Inuit (19%) live in Nunavik, an area comprising 660,000 square kilometres in northern Quebec (Chart 1).

About 6% of the Inuit population resides in the Inuvialuit region, located on almost 91,000 square kilometres in the Northwest Territories. People of this region are known as Inuvialuit, Inuit of the western Arctic. The smallest region in Inuit Nunaat is Nunatsiavut, along the northern coast of Labrador and home to 4% of the Inuit population.

Just over one in five (22%) Inuit did not live in Inuit Nunaat in 2006. Among this group, over three quarters (76%) were settled in urban areas. According to the 2006 Census, the urban centres with the largest Inuit populations were Ottawa-Gatineau (725), Yellowknife (640), Edmonton (590), Montréal (570), and Winnipeg (355). In addition, Iqaluit was the community within Inuit Nunaat with the largest Inuit population, at 3,540.

A young and growing population

The Inuit population grew 26% between 1996 and 2006, three times faster than Canada's non-Aboriginal population (8%). The increase was greatest in Nunavik (25%) and Nunavut (20%), the two most populous regions of Inuit Nunaat.

The higher fertility rate of Inuit women has also contributed to making the Inuit population very young. In 2006, more than one-third (35%) of Inuit were children under the age of 15. Inuit children accounted for almost 40% of the Inuit population in Nunavut and in Nunavik, 30% in Inuvialuit, 27% in Nunatsiavut and 28% outside Inuit Nunaat.

Census data show that the median age of the Inuit population was only

22 years, about half that of the non-Aboriginal population (40 years). Inuit were also younger than First Nations people, whose median age was 25 years, and the Métis, whose median age was 30 years.

This young, growing Inuit population may create a demand for services such as housing, education and health care for families with children, and skills training for young adults establishing families and seeking work in both the wage and traditional Inuit economies.¹

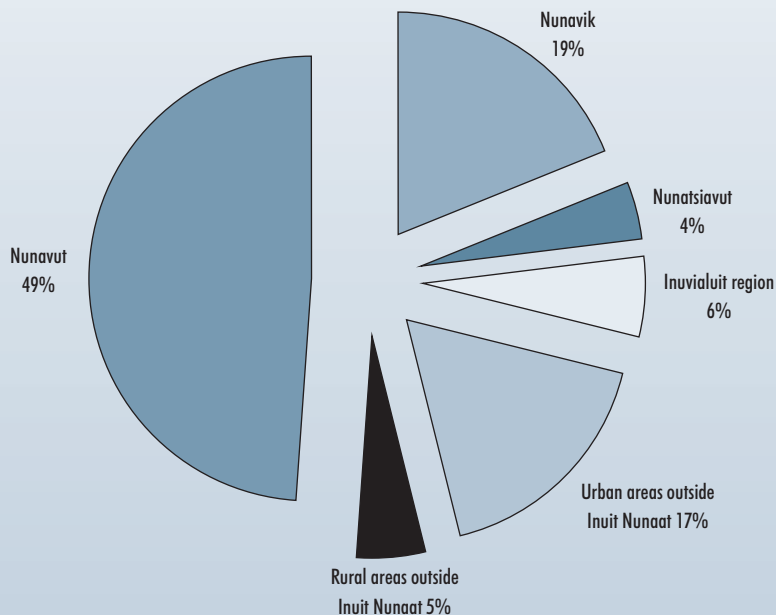
One-quarter of Inuit children live with a lone parent

In 2006, 69% of Inuit children under age 15 lived in a two-parent family. By comparison, 82% of non-Aboriginal children lived with both parents.

Many Inuit lived in other family arrangements. Some 4,700 children, representing 26% of all Inuit children, lived with a lone parent, most often with their mother. Another 4% lived with a grandparent or other relative, a proportion that may be explained by the practice of traditional or custom adoption among Inuit. Children are sometimes given by their birth parents to a relative to raise as their own, a tradition that has been practised for thousands of years.²

Chart 1 Almost four of five Inuit live in Inuit Nunaat, with the majority settled in Nunavut

% of total Inuit population



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

Within Inuit Nunaat, certain regions had higher proportions of lone-parent families. In the Inuvialuit and Nunavik regions, almost one-third of Inuit children under age 15 lived with a lone parent; in Nunavut and Nunatsiavut, less than one-quarter were in lone-parent families. Outside Inuit Nunaat, Inuit children in census metropolitan areas (CMAs) were twice as likely to live with a lone parent as non-Aboriginal children, at 36% compared with 18%.

About 7 in 10 Inuit have knowledge of the Inuit language

There are five primary dialects collectively known as the Inuit language.³ While some of these dialects have many speakers, others have very few.

In 2006, 69% of the Inuit population in Canada reported having knowledge of the Inuit language. This represents a slight decrease from 72% in 1996.

In Inuit Nunaat, 84% of the Inuit population could converse in the Inuit

language. These figures mask regional variation, however. Knowledge of the Inuit language is almost universal among Inuit in Nunavik (99%) and Nunavut (91%). By contrast, in Nunatsiavut, over one-quarter (27%) of Inuit could speak the language well enough to converse. In the Inuvialuit region, the figure was one-fifth (20%).

Outside Inuit Nunaat, 15% of Inuit spoke the Inuit language. The rate increased to 19% in CMAs.

According to a report published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs⁴, overall, "the [Inuit] language remains strong today despite many forces contributing to its erosion."⁵ The report mentions factors such as a limited Inuit language curriculum in the classroom and an ever-growing southern media presence, which "make it more challenging to pass the language from one generation to the next."⁶

Housing in Inuit Nunaat is crowded and in need of major repairs

While Inuit have traditionally lived in multi-family groupings, a number of reports have suggested that the high rate of families sharing a home may be due to the serious shortage of housing in many communities throughout Inuit Nunaat.^{7,8}

In 2006, Inuit were 10 times more likely than the non-Aboriginal population to be living in crowded homes, at 31% compared to 3%. This rate of crowding among Inuit is somewhat reduced from 1996.

Crowding was common in Inuit Nunaat, where just over 15,000 Inuit, or 38% of the total Inuit population, lived in crowded conditions in 2006. In 2006, crowding was much more common in Nunavik (49%) and Nunavut (39%) compared with the Inuvialuit region (19%) and Nunatsiavut (13%). The lower rates in Nunatsiavut may be due to new housing construction funded by the government of Newfoundland and Labrador.⁹

Although 38% of Inuit in Inuit Nunaat were living in crowded conditions, this represented a decline from 43% in 1996.

The state of living conditions is also partly determined by the need for major repairs to the home a family is occupying. In 2006, about 28% of the total Inuit population reported living in a home needing major repairs such as plumbing or electrical work. The figure was 7% for the non-Aboriginal population across Canada.

In Inuit Nunaat, where extreme weather conditions can result in much wear and tear on a house, 31% of Inuit lived in homes that needed major repairs. This was a rise from 19% in 1996. The rate increased during the same period in all regions except Nunatsiavut; it increased by 38 percentage points (to 46%) in Nunavik¹⁰, 5 percentage points (to 28%) in the Inuvialuit region and 5 percentage points (to 26%) in Nunavut. In Nunatsiavut, the proportion of Inuit housing in need of

major repairs declined 7 percentage points to 34% in 2006. This decrease coincides with an increase in housing construction, as noted on the previous page.

Health experts maintain that inadequate housing can be associated with a host of health problems. For instance, hospitalization rates for Inuit children with severe lower respiratory tract infections are the highest in the world, and recent research has shown that crowding, along with poor ventilation, in Inuit homes contributes to these rates.¹¹ Such living conditions can also lead to the transmission of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis¹² and hepatitis A, as well as increase risk for injuries, mental health problems and family tensions.^{13,14}

In 2006, 30% of Inuit in Canada owned their homes. By contrast, 75% of the non-Aboriginal population owned their homes. The rate of homeownership among Inuit varies by region with rates of 65% in Newfoundland and Labrador, 41% in the Northwest Territories, 26% in Nunavut and 9% in Quebec.

More than one-third of the Inuit adult population has a postsecondary qualification

Although half of the Inuit population (51%) aged 25 to 64 years had less than a high school diploma in 2006, 36% had a postsecondary diploma or degree. By comparison, the majority of the non-Aboriginal population (61%) had completed a postsecondary education program. While the importance of informal learning among Inuit cannot be overstated, the focus of this article is the formal education that takes place within the school system.

According to a recent report by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, there are many reasons for the lack of formal schooling among the Inuit population.¹⁵ Until the recent past, much learning for Inuit took place on the land in an informal setting. Traditional knowledge and life skills were gained by observing actions,

listening to, and discussing things with elders and other community members.¹⁶ In contrast, many of today's Inuit are exposed to a curriculum developed in the South that may lack cultural relevance. However, some positive Inuit-specific education models do exist.¹⁷

Of the 36% of Inuit adults with postsecondary graduation, most had obtained either a college diploma (17%) or a trades certificate (13%) while 4% had earned a university degree. However, there is a strong geographic component to educational attainment in the Inuit population.

In 2006, almost half (49%) of Inuit adults living outside Inuit Nunaat had a postsecondary education; furthermore, 31% had a college diploma or university degree. In contrast, 32% of adults living in Inuit Nunaat had postsecondary credentials, with 17% of them having college or university.

Even within Inuit Nunaat, levels of educational attainment differed by region. In Nunavut and Nunavik, about a third of the adult population had completed a postsecondary education: 21% of adults in Nunavut had college or university and 10% had a trades certification; in Nunavik the proportions were reversed, at 21% for trades and 8% for college or university. Nunatsiavut (40%) and the Inuvialuit region (35%) had higher rates of postsecondary completion.

Overall, Inuit men and women had similar rates of postsecondary completion. In 2006, 37% of Inuit men aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary education compared with 36% of adult Inuit women. However, women were more likely than men to have a college or university education – 24% compared with 18% for men – while men were twice as likely to hold a trade certificate, at 18% versus 9% of women.

Some improvement in the labour force, but the gap between the Inuit and the non-Aboriginal population remains

Between 2001 and 2006, the Canada-level employment rate for Inuit adults

aged 25 to 54 rose from 60.3% to 61.2%. Despite this improvement, the gap with non-Aboriginal people remained relatively unchanged: over the same period, employment rose from 80.3% to 81.6% for the non-Aboriginal population of core working age.

In Inuit Nunaat, the employment rate for Inuit actually declined from 60.9% in 2001 to 59.6% in 2006. Rates remained fairly stable in Nunavut, but slid in the other regions, with Nunatsiavut recording the lowest rate, at 45.8% (Chart 2).

By contrast, outside Inuit Nunaat, employment rates for core working-age Inuit adults rose considerably from 58.2% to 66.0%.

Employment rates for men and women in Inuit Nunaat are about the same in most regions, except Nunatsiavut where women have a higher rate (53.1%) than men (39.3%). Outside Inuit Nunaat, the employment rate is higher for men (69.8% versus 63.4%). This gender gap is more reflective of employment rates observed in the non-Aboriginal population, where women are less likely to take part in the labour force.

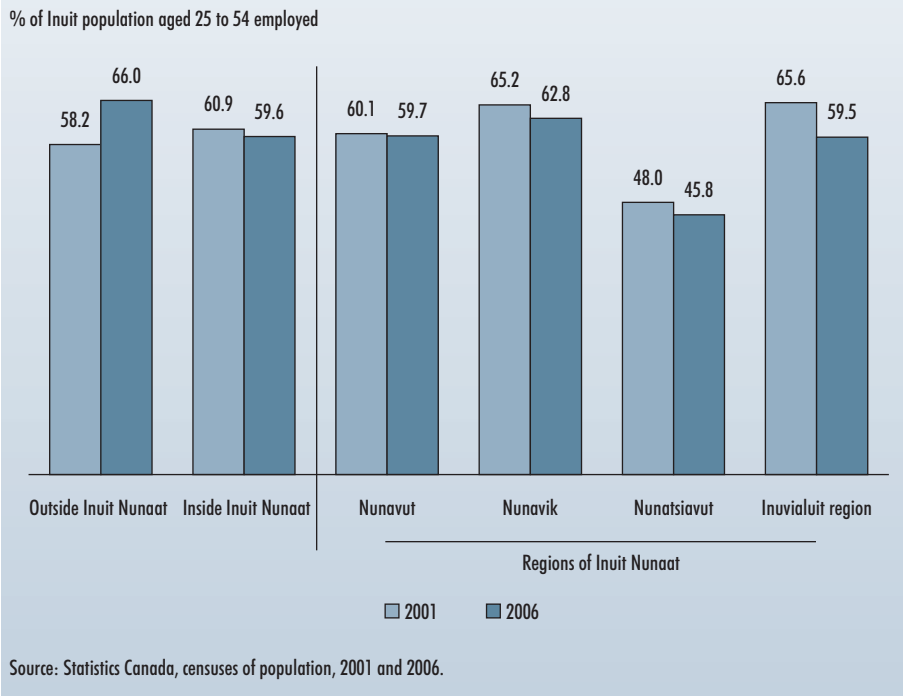
In 2006, the unemployment rate was almost four times higher for Inuit adults of core working age than for their non-Aboriginal counterparts, at 19.0% versus 5.2%. (Unemployment rates measure the proportion of people in the labour force who are looking for work, but cannot find it.)

Within Inuit Nunaat, unemployment rates in Nunavut (19.1%) and Nunavik (18.8%) mirrored the Canada-wide rate for the Inuit population. However, the rates were much higher in Nunatsiavut (33.6%) and the Inuvialuit region (24.6%).

Outside Inuit Nunaat, the unemployment rate for Inuit was lower than the Inuit national average (19.0%), at 14.9% in 2006.

Overall the unemployment rate was higher for Inuit men than for Inuit women – 23.0% compared with 15.1%. The rates within Inuit Nunaat

Chart 2 Between 2001 and 2006, employment rates improved for Inuit adults living outside Inuit Nunaat



Within Inuit Nunaat, the Inuit median income was lower than for the non-Aboriginal population. In 2005, the Inuit median income (\$16,669) was \$43,378 less than that of the non-Aboriginal population (\$60,047). Outside Inuit Nunaat, the median income was \$17,673. These gaps are similar to those between the median incomes of Inuit and the non-Aboriginal population in 2000.

In Inuit Nunaat, the highest median income (\$18,994) was in Nunavik, while the lowest was in Nunavut (\$15,939). In Nunatsiavut, the figure was \$16,576 and \$16,944 in the Inuvialuit region. Since 2000, all communities within Inuit Nunaat have experienced an increase in median income. The greatest increase occurred in Nunatsiavut where median income rose by \$3,000.

Summary

In 2006, almost 50,500 people identified themselves as Inuit. The large majority – over three-quarters of them – lived in Inuit Nunaat, the traditional Inuit homeland. Inuit are a very young population, with over one-third under the age of 15, and their numbers have grown 26% between 1996 and 2006.

Over two-thirds of the total Inuit population can conduct a conversation in the Inuit language.

Over one-third of Inuit adults have completed a postsecondary education. However, Inuit employment rates remain lower than those for the non-Aboriginal population, especially in Inuit Nunaat. Unemployment is also higher inside Inuit Nunaat than outside.



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were slightly higher than the national average, at 24.4% for men and 16.0% for women. Outside Inuit Nunaat, unemployment rates in 2006 were 18.0% and 12.6%, respectively.

According to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, many factors affect the indicators of employment for northern Inuit and these factors are often very different from those in the South.¹⁸ For instance, across northern Canada people are faced with fewer employment opportunities¹⁹ coupled with a weak infrastructure to support industry and housing for employees.²⁰

Income of Inuit is lower than the non-Aboriginal population, particularly in Nunavut

In 2005, the median income of Inuit in Canada was lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population. Specifically, it was about \$9,000 less

than the median income of \$25,955 reported by the non-Aboriginal population. This gap was similar to the gap observed in 2000.

The lower incomes for Inuit, compared with the non-Aboriginal population, are significant when one considers the higher costs of living in the North. Expenses for basic needs such as food, housing, clothing and harvesting supplies are much higher than in the southern parts of Canada.²¹ For example, in most isolated northern communities, it may cost \$350-\$450 a week to provide a nutritious diet for a family of four, compared to about \$200 in the South.²² In addition, the Canadian Arctic is unique in that it is "mixed" with both traditional Inuit and wage economies. The traditional economy contributes to Inuit communities through the harvesting of country food, sewing of clothing and caring for community members.²³

Aboriginal identity: refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit; and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the *Indian Act* of Canada; and/or those who reported they were members of an Indian band or First Nation.

Census metropolitan area (CMA): is an area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A census metropolitan area must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core.

Crowding: more than one person per room. Not counted as rooms are bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms used solely for business purposes.

Dwellings in need of major repairs: in the judgment of the respondent, the housing they occupy requires the repair of defective plumbing or electrical wiring, structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings, etc.

Employed: during the reference week prior to Census Day, persons who had a paid job or was self-employed or worked without pay in a family farm, business or professional practice. Includes those absent from their workplace due to vacation, illness, work disruption or other reason.

Family: a married couple (with or without children of either or both spouses), a couple living common-law (with or without children of either or both partners) or a lone parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. 'Children' in a census family include grandchildren living with their grandparent(s) but with no parents present.

Knowledge of an Aboriginal language: the respondent is able to conduct a conversation in a given Aboriginal language.

Income: refers to the total money income received from various sources during calendar year 2005 by persons 15 years of age and over. For a list of total income sources, please refer to *2006 Census Dictionary*. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/pop020a.cfm>

Inuit: persons reporting a single response of "Inuit" to the Aboriginal identity question. Inuit of the western Arctic are

known as Inuvialuit; in this article, the term "Inuit" includes Inuvialuit.

Inuit Nunaat: 'Inuit Nunaat' is the Inuit language expression for 'Inuit homeland', an expanse comprising more than one-third of Canada's land mass, extending from northern Labrador to the Northwest Territories. Inuit have inhabited this vast region, in what is now known as Canada, for 5,000 years. In recent years, four Inuit land claims have been signed across Inuit Nunaat.

While Inuit in each of these regions share a common culture and many traditions, each region is, at the same time, distinct. For example, traditions can sometimes vary and there is much linguistic and geographic diversity from one region (and sometimes from one community within the same region) to the next. The four regions within Inuit Nunaat are: Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region. For more information on these four regions, please refer to *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 97-558-X: p. 21-22.

Median age: the point where exactly one-half of the population is older and the other half is younger.

Median income: the point where exactly one-half of income recipients aged 15 years and over has more income and the other half has less income.

Postsecondary education: educational attainment above the level of secondary (high school) completion. This includes apprenticeship or trades certificate; college or CEGEP diploma; university certificate or diploma below bachelor level; university degree at bachelor's degree and above.

Unemployed: during the reference week prior to Census Day, persons who did not have paid work or self-employment work and was available for work, and was looking for employment, was on temporary lay-off, or expected to start work within 4 weeks.

Urban areas: have a population of at least 1,000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometre. They include both census metropolitan areas and urban non-census metropolitan areas.

1. Statistics Canada. (2008). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 97-558-XIE. Ottawa: Minister of Industry: p. 19.
2. Statistics Canada. (2008): p.27.
3. The five dialects within the Inuit language are: (a) Inuvialuktun, spoken in the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories; (b) Inuinnaqtun (primarily in some communities in western Nunavut); (c) Inuttitut (Eastern Nunavut); (d) Inuttitut (Nunavik); and (e) Inuttut (Nunatsiavut).
4. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007a). *Inuit Social Trends Series: Knowledge and use of Inuktitut among Inuit in Canada, 1981-2001*. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Catalogue R2-468/2007E-PDF. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
5. The report uses the term "Inuktitut" to describe a collection of Inuit dialects. This article, however, uses the term "Inuit language" as Inuktitut does not include all Inuit languages or dialects.
6. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007a): p.2.
7. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. (2006). *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*. http://www.pauktuutit.ca/pdf/publications/pauktuutit/InuitWay_e.pdf.
8. Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning. (November 2007). *You Just Blink and it Can Happen: A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60, Pan-Territorial Report*. Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council, YWCA Yellowknife, Yellowknife Women's Society, Yukon Status of Women's Council.
9. In 2000, \$7.7 million was allocated for the construction of new housing units and major repairs to existing housing stock through the Northern Coastal Labrador Strategic Initiative.
10. According to the 2006 Census, four-fifths of Nunavik's housing stock was over 15 years of age. This represents an increase of 10 percentage points from 1996.
11. Kovesi, T., Gilbert, N., Stocco, C., Fugler, D., Dales, R., Guay, M. and Miller, J.D. (2007). Indoor air quality and the risk of lower respiratory tract infections in young Canadian Inuit children. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 177 (2).
12. In 2003, the tuberculosis rate for Inuit was more than 10 times higher than that for the total Canadian population. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2003.) *Tuberculosis in Canada*. Public Health Agency of Canada, Catalogue no. HP37-5/2003. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.
13. Statistics Canada. (2003). *Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 – Initial Findings: Well-being of the Non-reserve Aboriginal Population*. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-589-XIE. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
14. Health Canada. (1999). *A Second Diagnostic on the Health of First Nations and Inuit People in Canada*. Ottawa: Health Canada.
15. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007b). *Inuit Social Trends Series: Gains made by Inuit in formal education and school attendance, 1981-2001*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Catalogue R2-452/2006E-PDF. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
16. National Inuit Youth Council. (2005). *Inuit Youth and Education*. <http://tapirisat.ca/inuit-youth/niyc-education.html>.
17. The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (Gouvernement du Québec et Hydro-Québec) created the Kativik School Board in 1975 to serve the people living in the 14 communities of Nunavik and to lead to greater Inuit control over formal education. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007b).
18. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007c). *Inuit Social Trends Series: Employment, Industry and Occupations of Inuit in Canada, 1981-2001*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Catalogue R2-455/2007E-PDF. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
19. Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP. (2003). *The Cost of Not Successfully Implementing. Article 23: Representative Employment for Inuit within the Government*. <http://tunngavik.com/publications>.
20. The Conference Board of Canada. (2002). *2002 Nunavut Economic Outlook: An Examination of the Nunavut Economy*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada. Prepared for the Nunavut Economic Development Strategy.
21. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007d). *Inuit Social Trends Series: Levels and Sources of Individual and Household Level Income for Inuit in Canada, 1980-2000*. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Catalogue R2-461/2007E-PDF. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
22. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2008). *Revised Northern Food Basket – Highlights of Price Survey Results for 2006-2007*. <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pa/nap/air/hpsr0607-eng.asp>
23. In this article, attention is focused solely on cash income measures from the census. However, readers should bear in mind that throughout much of the North, the economic and cultural benefits of hunting, fishing, gathering, sewing activities and so on are significant and not always captured through these indicators. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2007d).