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# Portrait of Women by the Relative Remoteness of their Communities, Series 1: Sociodemographic Profile

by Karine Leclerc

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# Portrait of Women by the Relative Remoteness of their Communities, Series 1: Sociodemographic Profile

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## Highlights

- Women and girls in Canada comprised just over half of Canada's population with over two-thirds living in easily accessible areas (based on proximity to service accessibility). However, the distribution of the female population across communities with varying degrees of remoteness differed greatly from one province or territory to another.
- The distribution of the female population across the remoteness area categories also varied depending on characteristics such as Indigenous identity, immigration background and ethnocultural characteristics.
  - ▶ The majority of Indigenous women and girls (58.2%) lived in easily accessible or accessible areas. However, they were underrepresented in these areas relative to non-Indigenous women and girls and were increasingly overrepresented as the communities were more remote. For example, while Indigenous women and girls represented 4.9% of the female population in Canada, they accounted for 72.5% of the female population living in very remote areas.
  - ▶ The vast majority (91.5%) of the female population designated as visible minorities lived in easily accessible areas and only a very small proportion lived in remote and very remote areas.
  - ▶ While the majority (88.0%) of the female immigrant population lived in easily accessible areas, very recent immigrant women and girls, i.e. those who arrived in Canada as permanent residents between 2011 and 2016, were slightly more likely than more established immigrant women and girls to be living outside these easily accessible areas (14.9% vs 11.6%).
- In 2016, the median age of the female population was 41.6 years. This median age, however, varied by the characteristics of the groups. The Indigenous women and girls population, which was overrepresented in very remote areas, had the youngest median age (30.3 years) of all female populations. The median age of women and girls designated as visible minorities was also lower (34.9 years) than the overall female population (41.6 years). In contrast, the median age of immigrant women and girls was higher (48.7 years).
- Population aging and the aging of the workforce have been evident in Canada's overall population. However, given that the age structure of the female population differed by varying levels of remoteness, the aging intensity varied from one remoteness area category to another. Less accessible and remote areas had a more pronounced aging phenomenon than the rest of Canada (with higher female median ages and percentages of senior women combined with lower proportions of women in the core working age), while very remote areas had the youngest female median age, the lowest proportion of women aged 65 years and over and were the only areas where the proportion of potential labour force entrants was higher than potential retirees.
- The average number of people per family as well as the distribution of the census family types varied from one region to another – with very remote areas being especially distinct from other areas; very remote areas had the lowest proportion of couples without children, highest proportion of couples with three children or more, and highest percentage of lone-parent families when compared with areas with other levels of remoteness.

## Introduction

Worldwide, living in a rural area remains one of the most significant drivers of inequality for women (Lévesque, 2018). Women in rural areas experience difficulties in engaging in economic activities, shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and household work, and are at high risk of experiencing different forms of gender-based violence (UNCSW, 2018; ILO, 2019). Rural women make up over a quarter of the world's population, but they are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion and they fared worse than rural men and urban women in virtually every gender and development indicator for which data were available in 2018, including literacy, education, health and sanitation, and poverty (UNCSW, 2018). Globally, gender inequalities in rural areas are pervasive in every dimension of sustainable development and, in many areas, the progress has been so limited that international bodies assess that these Sustainable Development Goals will likely not be achieved by 2030 (UNCSW, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

In Canada, previous studies have shown that women living in rural areas had lower educational attainment than their urban counterparts and had lower labour force participation rates, lower employment rates, and were overrepresented in low-income situations (SWC, 2016). Generally speaking, rural areas play an important role in Canada's prosperity. They supply food, water and energy, provide important recreational opportunities, and they contribute to nearly 30% of the country's total gross domestic product (Infrastructure Canada, 2019; FCM, 2018). However, rural incomes tend to lag behind those of urban communities, and unemployment levels tend to be higher (Infrastructure Canada, 2019). Paradoxically, the higher unemployment rate in rural communities coexists with significant labour shortages – particularly for skilled workers (including those with the skill sets needed to work in the digital economy) – which, in turn, limits growth (Infrastructure Canada, 2019). With limited fiscal capacity, rural governments also face important challenges in providing the needed infrastructure and services to their communities. The limited access to the communications infrastructure and the lack of broadband connectivity,<sup>2</sup> for example, may impede rural industries and communities from taking full advantage of innovative technologies (to do business and to better run public services) in order to grow or remain competitive (CRTC, 2020).

The overrepresentation of rural women in low-income situations and their lower labour force participation rates are not without effects on their health outcomes. Research suggests that poverty and health are closely connected (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016 and 2014). Social determinants such as income, education, and gender may impact health outcomes, which, in turn, may impact individuals' well-being, their capacity to participate in the economy, and their engagement in their communities. Rural women in Canada report poorer health outcomes (Leipert, 2005; Sibley and Weiner, 2011). While rural location in itself does not necessarily lead to poor health, previous research has shown that rural living affects women's health, not only because of geographic isolation or limited access to health services, but also due to sociocultural characteristics that influence health-seeking behaviours (Lavergne and Kephart, 2012; Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, 2004). As such, rurality appears as “a powerful determinant of women's health, as both a geographic and sociocultural influence” (Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, 2004).

Rural women in Canada are also at higher risk of different forms of gender-based violence. For example, in 2019, women living in rural areas experienced the highest overall rates of intimate partner violence in Canada with rates that were significantly higher than their urban counterparts (860 versus 467 per 100,000 population) (Conroy, 2021). Police-reported data also shows that, in 2017, rates of sexual offences were higher in rural areas than urban areas for girls aged 11 years and younger (303 versus 153 per 100,000 population, respectively) as well as for girls aged 12 to 17 years (1,274 versus 835 per 100,000 population) (Conroy, 2018).

Overall, previous research suggests that women living in rural areas are characterized by different sociocultural, socioeconomic and demographic trajectories that distinguish their experiences from urban women. The experience of all rural women is not the same and there is noticeable heterogeneity within and between rural communities in Canada in terms of population size, density, geographic characteristics and degree of remoteness or proximity to urban centres. Even the definition of “rural” is not clear. While the ideas of distance and density are generally accepted, the precise definition and the standards are widely debated and vary depending on a country's geopolitical

1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – set in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and adopted by 193 countries – “[...] are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. The 17 Goals are all interconnected, and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve them all by 2030.” Gender equality is recognized as a driver of development progress and SDG 5 is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. For more information on the SDGs, please consult: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>.
2. In 2018, only 40.8% of rural households had access to high speed internet (a service of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload) compared to 97.7% of urban homes (CRTC, 2020).

and sociodemographic composition (Subedi et al., 2020). Statistics Canada has defined urban areas as population centres with a population size of at least 1,000 and a density of 400 persons per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2016a). With this definition, however, no clear distinction is made between rural and remote areas in Canada.

Recently, Statistics Canada developed a new remoteness index (RI) which refines these categories by further differentiating communities by their remoteness. It assigns a relative remoteness value to each census subdivision – based on proximity to census agglomerations as a proxy for services accessibility (Alasia et al., 2017).<sup>3</sup> Paired with the new RI classification, this tool allows the grouping of census subdivisions by their relative remoteness into five categories: easily accessible; accessible; less accessible; remote; and, very remote areas (Subedi et al., 2020). These refined categories have the potential for a better differentiation, description and understanding of the very different realities of diverse rural communities.

Using this new RI classification, this statistical report is the first of a series of four papers on the socioeconomic and sociodemographic profile of women living in communities at varying levels of remoteness. This first report of the series focuses specifically on the distribution and profile (such as age, family type, and identity characteristics) of women and girls by the relative remoteness of their communities. A second report, to be published at a later date, will focus on women’s educational attainment. The third one will study and compare the health and well-being of women. Finally, the last report will be on the economic participation of women. All of these reports will present the results by varying levels of remoteness.

## Distribution of the female population in Canada

Women and girls in Canada comprised just over half of Canada’s population (50.8%)<sup>4,5</sup> in 2016 and they mainly lived in easily accessible areas (68.5%), followed by accessible areas (19.2%), less accessible areas (7.7%), remote areas (3.8%) and very remote areas (0.8%) (Chart 1).<sup>6</sup>

However, the distribution of the female population across the remoteness area categories varied greatly from one province or territory to another. Ontario, Québec and Alberta were the provinces with the highest share of women and girls in easily accessible areas – with very few women and girls in remote and very remote areas (Chart 1). In contrast, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Newfoundland and Labrador were the provinces or territories with the highest share of the female population in remote and very remote areas (Chart 1).

The distribution of the female population across the remoteness area categories also varied significantly depending on the specific characteristics of the groups, such as Indigenous, visible minority or immigrant status.

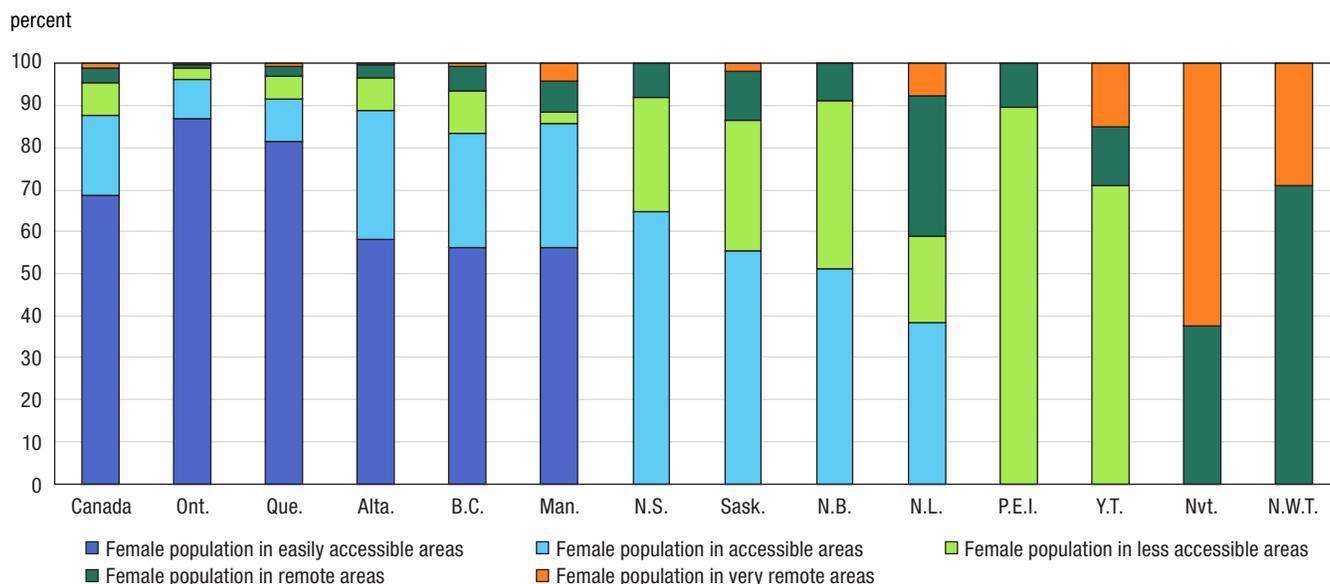
3. For more details, please consult the Data, sources, methods and definitions section.

4. According to the 2016 Census, about 17.5 million women and girls accounted for 50.8% of the total population – continuing a slim female majority that has held for close to four decades (Milan, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2019).

5. Along with the Remoteness Index Classification, this study uses data from the 2016 Long-Form Census of Population (as opposed to the short-form questionnaire). More details can be found in the section Data sources, methods and definitions. For details about the coverage of the 2016 Census, please consult Bérard-Chagnon and Parent, 2021.

6. The overall population and the male population followed the same pattern as the female population: 68.3% of the Canadian population and 68.0% of the male population were living in easily accessible areas in 2016; 19.2% and 19.3%, respectively, in accessible areas; 7.8% and 7.9% in less accessible areas; 3.9% and 4.0% in remote areas; and, 0.8% and 0.8% in very remote areas.

**Chart 1**  
**Distribution of the female population by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

## Indigenous women and girls are overrepresented in very remote areas

The distribution of Indigenous women and girls<sup>7</sup> across the remoteness area categories followed a similar pattern, albeit to a lesser extent, to the overall population in Canada. The majority of Indigenous women and girls (58.2%) lived in easily accessible or accessible areas and 26.7% of Indigenous women and girls lived in remote or very remote areas (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Indigenous women and girls, women and girls, and non-Indigenous women and girls across the different remoteness area categories**

Regions	Population - Indigenous women and girls		Population - Women and girls		Population - Non-Indigenous women and girls	
	number	Percentage - Indigenous women and girls percent	number	Percentage - Women and girls percent	number	Percentage - Non-Indigenous women and girls percent
Canada	860,265	100.0	17,488,485	100.0	16,628,225	100.0
Easily accessible areas	278,445	32.4	11,985,985	68.5	11,707,540	70.4
Accessible areas	221,870	25.8	3,352,080	19.2	3,130,210	18.8
Less accessible areas	129,640	15.1	1,354,690	7.7	1,225,055	7.4
Remote areas	134,490	15.6	663,630	3.8	529,140	3.2
Very remote areas	95,815	11.1	132,100	0.8	36,280	0.2

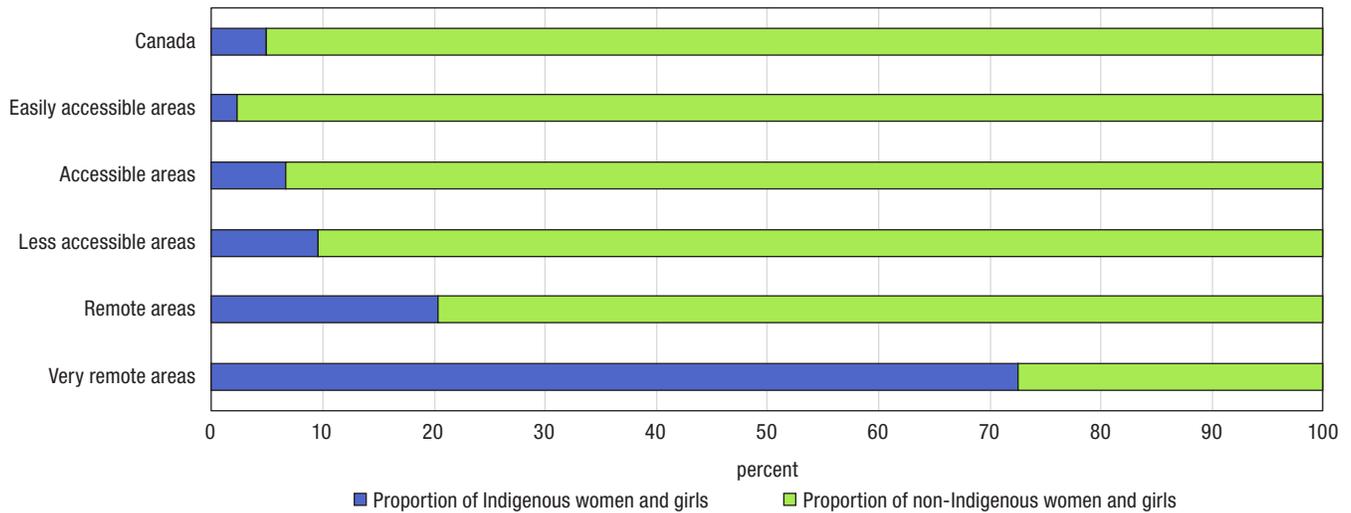
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

However, the representation of Indigenous women and girls increased with the remoteness of the communities. As a result, while Indigenous women and girls represented 4.9% of the female population in Canada, they were underrepresented in easily accessible areas, where they accounted for only 2.3% of the female population living in these regions, and were increasingly overrepresented as the communities became more remote. Indigenous women and girls accounted for 6.6% of the female population in accessible areas, 9.6% in less accessible areas, 20.3% in remote areas, and 72.5% in very remote areas (Chart 2).<sup>8</sup>

7. In this paper, no distinctions are made between Indigenous groups (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and whether or not they lived on reserve, as a forthcoming paper will focus precisely on the socioeconomic conditions of First Nation, Métis and Inuit women and girls living in different remoteness area categories.

8. The male Indigenous population followed the same pattern. In 2016, the male Indigenous population, which represented 4.8% of the male population in Canada, accounted for 2.2% of the male population living in easily accessible areas, 6.4% in accessible areas, 9.3% in less accessible areas, 19.6% in remote areas, and 72.0% in very remote areas.

**Chart 2**  
**Proportion of the female population by Indigenous identity and remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

### Visible minority women and girls are almost absent in remote and very remote areas

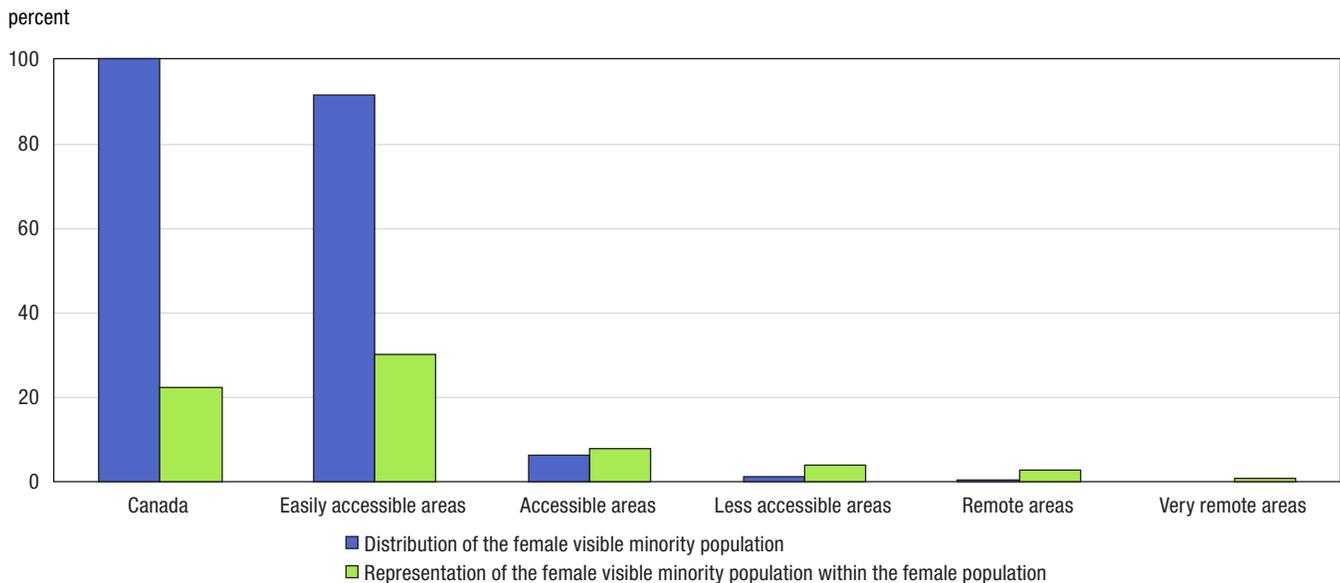
According to the 2016 Census, 22.3% of the population in Canada was a member of a population group designated as a visible minority – as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*<sup>9</sup> – and female visible minorities represented close to one quarter (22.6%) of the overall female population.

The vast majority (91.5%) of the female visible minority population lived in easily accessible areas, where they represented 30.2% of the female population. In contrast, less than 1.0% of the total female visible minority population in Canada lived in remote and very remote areas. Their shares of the female population in these areas were much smaller than the national proportion: 2.9% and 1.0%, respectively, for remote and very remote areas as opposed to 22.6% of the overall female population in Canada (Chart 3).<sup>10</sup>

9. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”

10. The male visible minority population followed the same pattern: 91.2% of them lived in easily accessible areas; 6.9% in accessible areas; 1.4% in less accessible areas; 0.5% in remote areas; and less than 0.1% in very remote areas.

**Chart 3**  
**Distribution and representation of the female visible minority population by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

### The make-up of the female population designated as visible minorities varies by community remoteness

In Canada, the population designated as visible minorities consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian; Chinese; Black; Filipino; Arab; Latin American; Southeast Asian; West Asian; Korean; and, Japanese.

The South Asian, Chinese and Black female populations represented the three largest female population groups designated as visible minorities in 2016 in Canada (Chart 4). However, the distribution of these groups varied by the relative remoteness of the communities.

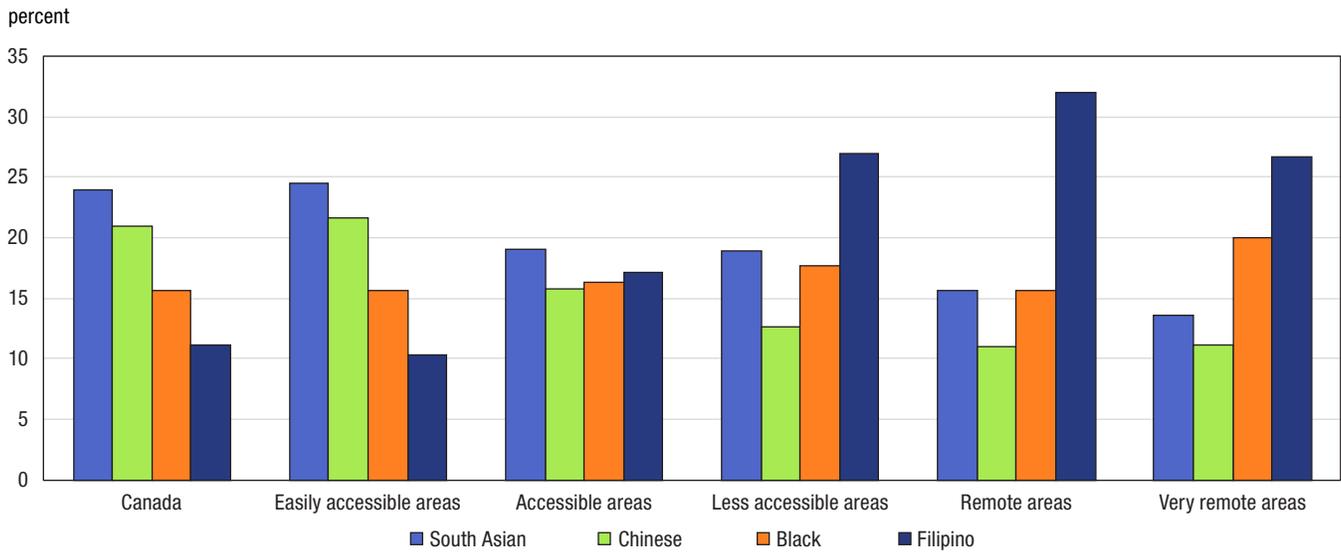
For example, South Asian women and girls were the largest female population group designated as visible minorities in easily accessible and accessible areas. About one in four (24.1%) visible minority women and girls were South Asian in these communities.

In comparison, in less accessible, remote and very remote areas, Filipino women and girls represented the largest share of the female visible minority population, where they accounted for 27.0%, 32.0% and 26.7% of the female population group designated as visible minorities, respectively (Chart 4).

The Chinese female population, which was the second largest visible minority group in Canada (21.0%) and in easily accessible areas (21.6%), dropped out of the top three largest visible minority groups in less accessible, remote and very remote areas (Chart 4).

Black women were overrepresented among the female visible minority population in very remote areas (20.0%), the second highest visible minority group after Filipino women. A table of the six largest visible minority groups by remoteness area categories can be found in Appendix A.

**Chart 4**  
**The largest female population groups designated as visible minorities by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Very recent immigrant women and girls are more likely than other female immigrants to be living outside easily accessible areas**

According to the 2016 Census, immigrants accounted for 21.9% of the population in Canada, and female immigrants accounted for 22.6% of the total female population. The vast majority (88.0%) of the female immigrant population lived in easily accessible areas, followed by accessible areas (8.9%), less accessible areas (2.1%), remote areas (0.9%) and very remote areas (0.1%) (Chart 5).<sup>11</sup>

The tendency of immigrants to settle mostly in urban areas – even in Canada’s three largest urban centres<sup>12</sup> – has been a long-standing trend in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018a). As Canada relies on immigration for population growth, the small share of immigrant women in less accessible, remote and very remote areas suggests that these communities benefit less from immigration, leaving these areas to shrink in both population and economic impact (Carter et al., 2008; Ouattara and Tranchant, 2007; Bruce, 2007).

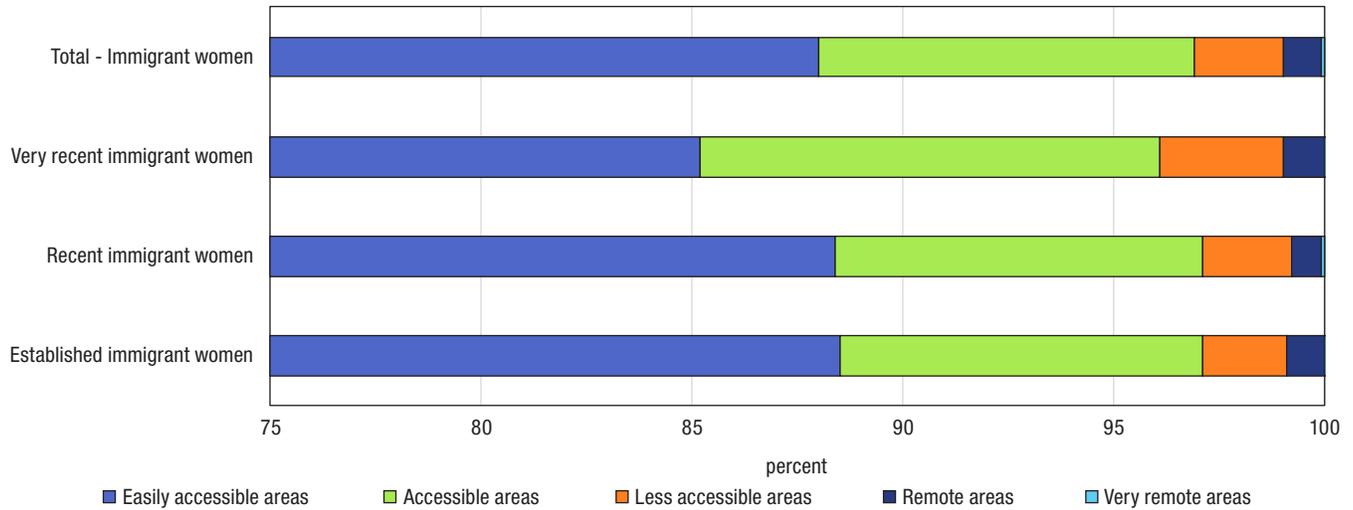
However, recent trends indicate that the settlement patterns of immigrants may be changing. The proportion of immigrants’ settlement in certain medium-size peripheral municipalities (also known as suburbanization) has grown in recent years (Vézina and Houle, 2017). Moreover, likely as a result of efforts and new policy and planning initiatives to attract immigrants outside of major cities,<sup>13</sup> some researchers have noted that there are more newcomers that are settling outside of the core areas in favour of small and rural towns (Patel et al., 2019; Carter et al., 2008).

In Canada, in 2016, among immigrant women and girls, 15.9% were very recent immigrants, 14.0% were recent immigrants and 70.0% were established immigrants.<sup>14</sup> The distribution of very recent, recent and established female immigrants across the remoteness categories followed the same pattern as all immigrant women; they lived mainly in easily accessible areas and their representation decreased as the remoteness index increased. However, very

11. The male immigrant population accounted for 21.1% of the male population in Canada and its distribution followed the same pattern as the female immigrant population: 87.6% of immigrant men lived in easily accessible areas; 9.2% in accessible areas; 2.2% in less accessible areas; 0.9% in remote areas; and, 0.1% in very remote areas.  
 12. For example, in 2016, Canada’s three largest census metropolitan areas – Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal – were the place of residence of 61.4% of all immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017c).  
 13. Many initiatives to attract and retain immigrants in rural areas have been introduced recently, such as: the Provincial Nominee Program; the Atlantic Immigration Pilot; the Agri-Food Pilot; Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot; Ontario’s Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario; and the Rural Employment Initiative to name a few.  
 14. Three groups of immigrants are identified based on the numbers of years since the immigrant first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status in Canada. These groups are: very recent immigrants, i.e. first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status in the five years prior to the Census (between January 1, 2011 and May 10, 2016); recent immigrants, i.e. first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status more than five to ten years; and, established immigrants, i.e. first obtained landed immigrant or permanent resident status for more than ten years at the time of the survey.

recent female immigrants were slightly more likely than recent and established female immigrants to be living in other areas – especially in accessible areas (which may correspond to the trend of suburbanization of immigrants), but also in less accessible and remote areas (Chart 5). This slightly higher proportion of very recent immigrant women in other remoteness area categories, nevertheless, is most likely not enough to make a significant impact on population growth and labour force renewal in these areas. The majority of newcomer women and girls still tended to settle in easily accessible areas.

**Chart 5**  
**Distribution of immigrant women by how long they had been landed immigrant and by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

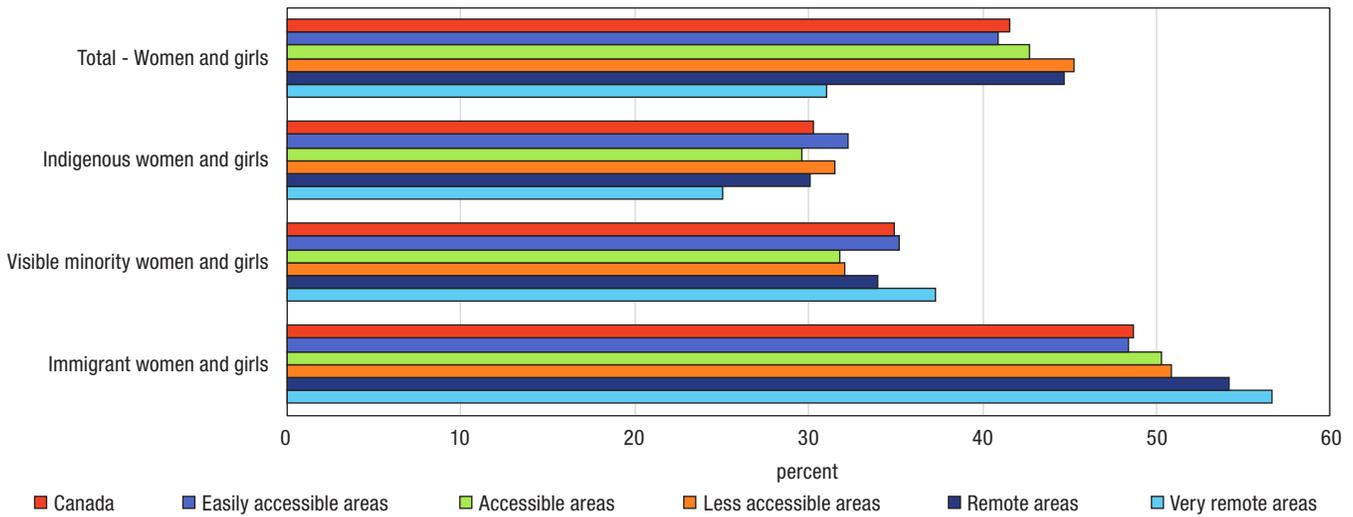
**Very remote areas have the lowest median age of all areas and less accessible areas the highest**

According to the 2016 Census, the female median age (the age at which 50% of the female population is older and 50% is younger) was 41.6 years in Canada (Chart 6). However, it varied significantly by the level of remoteness and by the characteristics of the groups.

The female median age was 40.9 years in easily accessible areas, 42.7 years in accessible areas, 45.3 years in less accessible areas, 44.7 years in remote areas and 31.0 in very remote areas (Chart 6).

The lower median age of women and girls in very remote areas can be explained, first, by the age composition (the number of persons in each age group) of the female population in these areas, where the two age groups with the highest number of persons were 5 to 9 years and 0 to 4 years (Appendix B). Second, it can also be explained by the overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls in these areas. Indeed, the median age of Indigenous women and girls was younger than the overall female population in Canada (30.3 years vs 41.6 years, respectively) (Chart 6).

**Chart 6**  
**Median age by characteristics and remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

### Indigenous women tend to be younger

The median age of Indigenous women and girls in Canada (30.3 years) was the youngest when compared to the total female population (41.6 years), visible minority women (34.9 years) and their immigrant counterparts (48.7 years) (Chart 6).

These median ages also varied by remoteness area categories. The median age of Indigenous women and girls was the lowest in very remote areas (25.0 years) and the highest in easily accessible areas (32.3 years) (Chart 6).

In contrast to the female Indigenous population, the median ages of visible minority and immigrant women and girls living in very remote areas (37.3 and 56.7 years, respectively) were not lower, but rather higher than those living in easily accessible areas (35.2 and 48.4 years, respectively) (Chart 6).

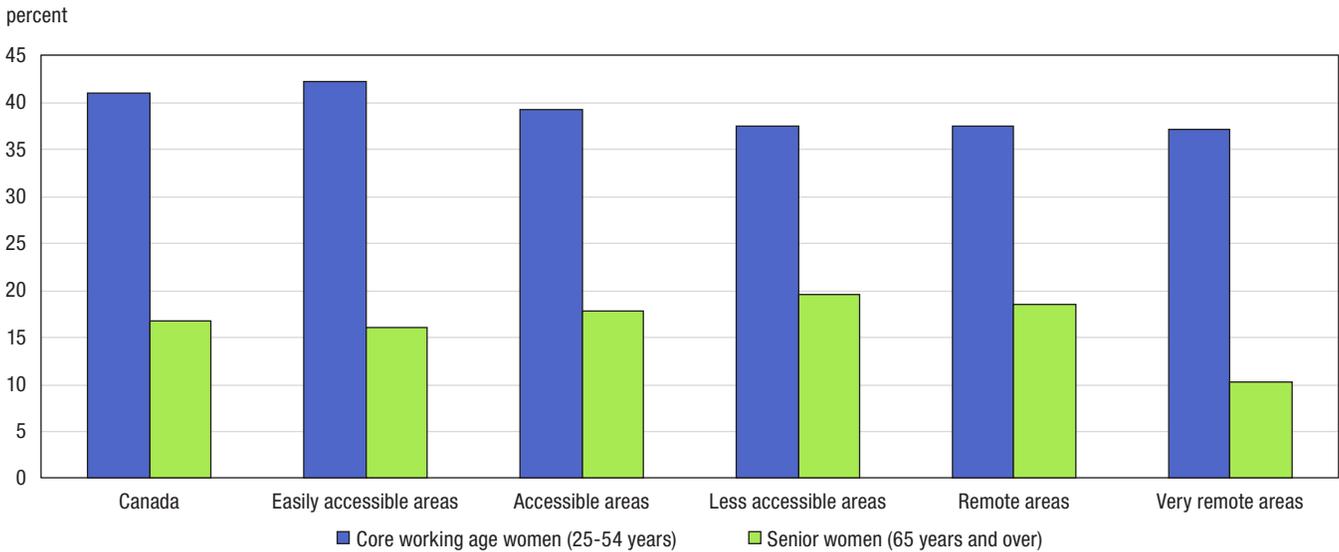
### The female population is aging faster in less accessible and remote areas

While population aging and the aging of the workforce are evident in Canada’s overall population, the aging intensity varied from one remoteness area category to another. In addition to the median age, other indicators, such as the proportion of the population in the core working age group (25 to 54 years), the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over, as well as the proportion of potential labour market entrants and retirees, can be used to measure the extent to which a population, including its workforce, is aging.

According to the 2016 Census, women aged 25 to 54 years (in the core working age group) accounted for 41.0% of the female population, and those aged 65 years and over accounted for 16.7% in Canada (Chart 7). In parallel, the proportion of potential female entrants in the labour market (those aged 15 to 24 years) was lower than those potentially or preparing to exit the labour market (those aged 55 to 64 years) (11.8% vs 14.2%, respectively), suggesting that more women may exit the labour market than enter it in the coming years (Charts 7 and 8).

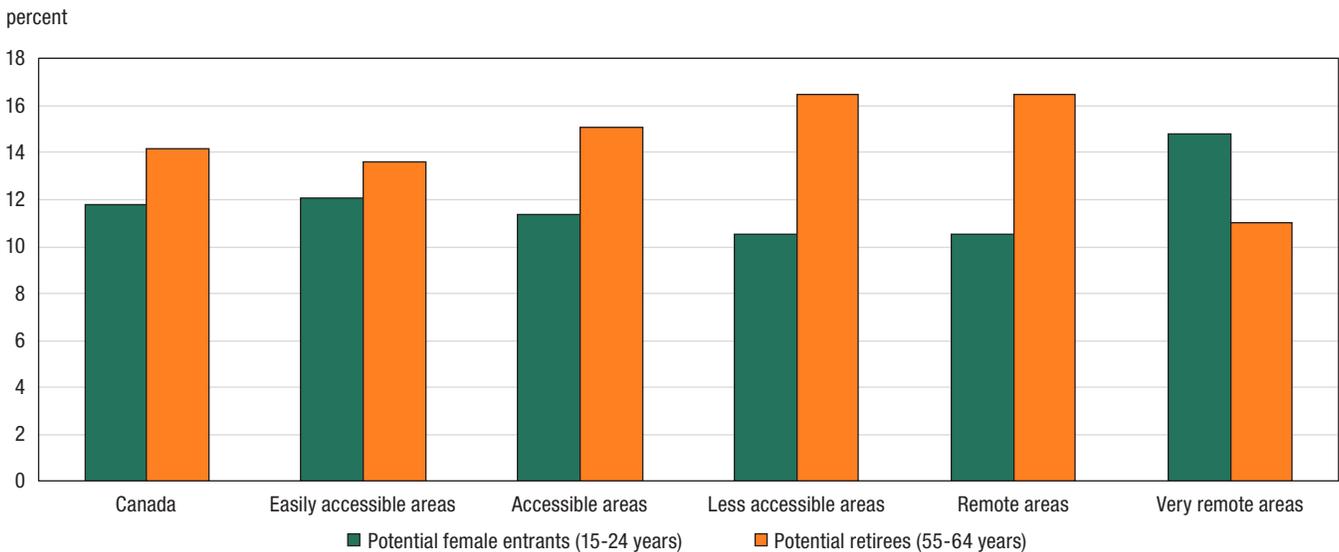
The easily accessible areas were the areas with the largest proportion of women in the core working age (42.2%), when compared with all other remoteness area categories (Chart 7). At the same time, young women who were about to enter the labour market (those aged 15 to 24 years) accounted for 12.1% of the female population in the easily accessible areas and those who were about to exit the labour market (women aged 55 to 64 years) made up 13.6% of the female population (Chart 8). While better than the Canadian labour force replacement ratio, this result still suggests that more women may exit the labour market than enter it in the coming years in easily accessible areas.

**Chart 7**  
**Core working age and senior women as a percentage of the female population by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart 8**  
**Potential labour market entrants and retirees as a percentage of the female population by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

Less accessible and remote areas were the areas with the lowest proportions of potential labour market entrants (10.5% for both areas) and the highest proportions of potential retirees (16.5% for both), suggesting that less accessible and remote areas had the biggest challenge in terms of labour force replacement ratio if these areas could not attract more labour market entrants or women of core working age from outside their communities (Chart 8).

These two remoteness area categories were also where the female median age was the oldest of all remoteness area categories (Chart 6) and where the proportions of women aged 65 years and over were the highest (Chart 7). Finally, the proportions of women in the core working age were lower in less accessible areas and remote areas than the national average – but was not the lowest of all areas (Chart 7).

In summary, less accessible and remote areas fared worse than any other remoteness area categories on all but one indicator used to measure the extent to which a population is aging. This higher share of senior women, combined with a low proportion of working age women, likely puts pressure on the workforce and on the federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal public programs and services (senior dependency),<sup>15</sup> such as health and pension systems.

### **Very remote areas are the only regions where there are proportionally more potential labour market entrants than potential retirees**

The very remote area category stood in contrast to the two other non-urban areas (less accessible and remote areas) with the youngest female median age (31.0 years) and the lowest proportion of women aged 65 years and over (10.2%) of all areas (Charts 6 and 7). The higher fertility rate and shorter life expectancy of Indigenous women, who were overrepresented in these areas, largely contributed to having young populations in these areas (Arriagada, 2016; Morency et al., 2015; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018).

The very remote areas were also the only areas where the difference between the potential labour market entrants and retirees was positive, i.e. the proportion of potential entrants (14.8%) was higher than potential retirees (11.0%) (Chart 8). However, its proportion of women in the core working age was not the highest. On the contrary, core working age women accounted for only 37.2% of the female population, the lowest proportion of all remoteness area categories (Chart 7), which suggests that the workforce and public services and programs may also be under pressure, but for different kind of programs and services (e.g. education system, daycares, versus a need for more services geared towards older women such as the pension system) (youth dependency).<sup>16</sup>

While a lot of attention is paid to the consequences of population aging, it seems that very remote areas are facing the opposite issue of age dependency (i.e. youth dependency versus senior dependency). While both put pressure on the workforce, the consequences and the pressures on the public system and institutions are different (e.g. education system versus pension system).

### **Family characteristics**

According to the 2016 Census, the average size of census families<sup>17</sup> in Canada was 2.9 persons. The average number of people per family varied from one region to another, especially for the very remote areas. It was: 2.9 in easily accessible areas; 2.8 in accessible areas; 2.7 in less accessible areas; 2.8 in remote areas; and, 3.2 in very remote areas. This higher average size of census families in very remote areas can be explained by the overrepresentation of Indigenous women (and especially Inuit women) in these areas and their higher fertility rates than the non-Indigenous population (Morency et al., 2015).

### **Very remote areas have the highest proportions of couples with three children or more and lone-parent families**

In 2016, 40.9% of the census families in Canada were couples without children; another 42.7% were couples with children; and, 16.4% were lone-parent families (Chart 11). The distribution of the family types varied across the remoteness area categories, with the largest contrasts found for the very remote areas.

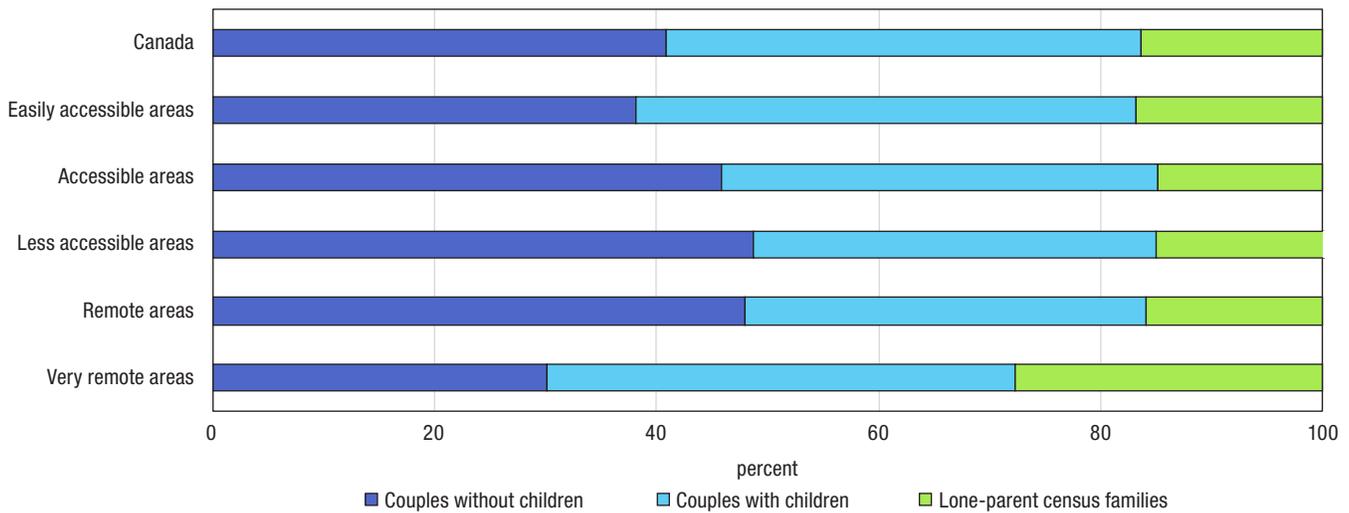
The very remote areas were the regions with the smallest proportion of couples without children of all remoteness area categories, but were not the areas with the highest proportion of couples with children (it was easily accessible areas) – likely because of the high percentage of lone-parent families in very remote areas (Chart 9).

15. The dependency ratio is the ratio of the combined youth population (0 to 19 years) and senior population (65 years and older) to the working-age population (20 to 64 years). It is expressed as the number of “dependents” for every 100 “workers.” The senior dependency ratio is the ratio of seniors to the working-age population. For more information on dependency ratio, please consult: Statistics Canada. 2016. “Dependency ratio” in *Healthy People, Healthy Places*, Statistics Canada Catalogue 82-229-X. Online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-229-x/2009001/demo/dep-eng.htm>.

16. The youth dependency ratio is the ratio of the youth population (0 to 19 years) to the working-age population (20 to 64 years) (Statistics Canada, 2016d).

17. Census family is defined as a married couple, a common-law couple or a lone-parent with a child or youth who does not have his or her own spouse or child living in the household. Married couples and common-law couples (hereafter referred to as “couples”) may or may not have such children living with them.

**Chart 9**  
**Census family structure by remoteness area categories**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

Among couples with children, the very remote areas had the highest proportion of couples with three or more children and the lowest proportion of couples with only one child and with two children (Chart 9). These results are consistent with the higher total fertility rate of Indigenous women – who are overrepresented in very remote areas (Arriagada, 2016; Morency et al., 2015).

The very remote areas also had by far the highest proportion of lone-parent families (27.7% compared with 16.4% for the national average). This result is consistent with the higher proportion of lone-parents, especially lone-mothers, among the Indigenous population (Arriagada, 2016; O'Donnell and Wallace, 2011). In Canada, among lone-parent families, 78.3% were headed by women in 2016. While the majority of lone-parent families largely remained headed by women across all remoteness area categories, the percentage varied from one area to another. Women accounted for 79.2% of lone-parent families in easily accessible areas, 76.9% in accessible areas, 76.1% in less accessible areas, 74.3% in remote areas, and 72.2% in very remote areas.

Finally, the proportion of women and girls not living in a census family, i.e. those living alone, with other relatives or with non-relatives,<sup>18</sup> was lower in very remote (12.3%) and remote areas (16.3%) but similar (about 18%) across the remaining remoteness area categories. The living arrangements of these women not living in a census family, however, varied by remoteness area categories. Women and girls not in a census family who lived in very remote areas were more likely to live with other relatives (39.8%) – compared with 15.7% for easily accessible, 11.7% for accessible, 11.5% for less accessible, and 14.5% for remote areas – and less likely to be living with non-relatives (11.0%) than women living in any other areas (18.3% in easily accessible, 18.6% in accessible, 15.2% in accessible, and 13.8% in remote areas).

## Conclusion

Canada is a large and diverse country with diverse rural communities; some are coastal, others are northern, some are closer to urban centres while others are very remote. As shown in this report, there were significant sociodemographic differences between, on the one hand, women living in easily accessible and accessible areas and, on the other hand, those living in less accessible, remote and very remote areas. There were also important differences between these non-urban communities – especially between very remote areas and the other two non-urban communities, i.e. less accessible and remote areas.

18. The category “persons not in census families” includes persons who are not members of a census family. It is made up of persons living alone and of persons living in a household but who are not part of a couple family (i.e. who are not a married couple or common-law couple with or without children) or lone-parent family.

Indigenous women and girls were overrepresented and immigrant women and girls as well as those designated as visible minorities were underrepresented in less accessible, remote and very remote areas.

The age composition was also different across the remoteness area categories. The median ages of women and girls in less accessible and remote areas were higher, the proportions of core working age women were lower, and the proportions of senior women were higher than those in easily accessible and accessible areas. In contrast to these non-urban areas, very remote areas had the lowest female median age and they were the only regions where the proportion of potential labour market entrants was higher than potential retirees.

The family characteristics were also different across areas of various remoteness index. Less accessible areas had the highest proportion of couples without children, followed by remote areas. Among couples who had only one child, the remote areas had the highest proportion, followed by less accessible areas. In contrast, very remote areas had the lowest proportion of couples without children and the highest proportion of couples with three children or more of all remoteness area categories. The very remote areas also had the highest percentage of lone-parent families of all areas.

In this context of large variations from one remoteness area category to another, including between less accessible, remote and very remote areas, refined categorization of “rural” areas becomes essential to better describe and understand the specific and very different realities of diverse communities, as well as to effectively plan and develop programs and policy directed toward women and girls.

## Data sources, methods and definitions

### Data sources

Using the 2016 Long-Form Census of Population and the updated Remoteness Index Classification, this first paper of the series looks at the sociodemographic profile of women and girls by the relative remoteness of their communities.

### Definitions and Measures

#### Census of Population

Statistics Canada conducts the Census of Population every five years. It is designed to provide information about people and housing units in Canada by their demographic, social and economic characteristics. The census is the primary source of socioeconomic data for specific population groups and for detailed or small geographies. A sample of approximately 25% of Canadian households received a long-form questionnaire. All other households received a short-form questionnaire. It means that while demographic information is collected from 100% of the population,<sup>19</sup> a random sample of 1 in 4 private dwellings in Canada is selected systematically for the long-form questionnaire. For more information about the 2016 Census and the long-form and short-form questionnaire, please consult Statistics Canada’s [website](#).

#### Remoteness area categories definition and measure

The concepts of urban and rural areas are not clearly defined as several alternative definitions of “urban” and “rural” exist – depending on a country’s geopolitical and sociodemographic composition, but also on the questions or issues being studied (Du Plessis et al., 2001). In Canada, population centres (POPCTRs) or census metropolitan influenced zones (MIZs) have been widely used to distinguish urban and rural communities. POPCTRs classify all communities with a population of less than 1,000 and with a density of less than 400 people per square kilometer as rural (Statistics Canada, 2017a). MIZs subdivide statistical area classifications according to the degree of influence of a census metropolitan area or census agglomeration based on the percentage of the population that commutes to work in one or more of these areas (Statistics Canada, 2016b).

19. The intent of a census is to paint a comprehensive portrait of the population and all residents of Canada are legally required to complete the census questionnaire. Despite this requirement, it is hard to do a complete enumeration of the population. The level of coverage of Canadian censuses is very high and stable over time, however, some segments of the population are not covered as well as others. It should be noted that, in 2016, the census net undercoverage rates were higher among young adults (aged 20-34 years), especially men, as well as individuals who live in the territories, on Indian reserves, who are single, separated, or whose mother tongue is a language other than English or French. For more information about the coverage of the 2016 Census, please consult Bérard-Chagnon and Parent, 2021.

However, neither of these classifications clearly distinguish Canadian communities into urban, rural and remote areas. The concept of POPCTRs takes into account population size and density, but ignores proximity to large urban centres that may provide goods and services to small towns (Subedi et al., 2020). The concept of MIZ does not precisely measure the access to goods and services available within or in proximity to a community and, furthermore, it groups together all Canadian census subdivisions within the territories, despite the fact that some areas are more accessible than others (Subedi et al., 2020).

Proximity to centres of economic activity and population agglomerations have long been recognized as important determinants of socioeconomic opportunities and outcomes of regions (Alasia et al., 2017). In Canada, which is a large country with urban, rural, remote and very remote areas, the urban, rural and remote classification becomes even more important to better describe and understand the specific and very different realities of diverse communities.

Statistics Canada recently developed a new remoteness index (RI) which assigns a relative remoteness value to each census subdivision, based on proximity to agglomerations, and which also captures the dimension of the accessibility of services in these communities (Alasia et al., 2017; Subedi et al., 2020). Indeed, the RI was developed by combining data from official statistical sources like the Census of Population with data from non-official statistical sources such as Google Map API (Alasia et al., 2017). The RI takes a census subdivision (CSD) as geographic units of analysis, and the index value was computed by combining the geographic layers of the CSD and the POPCTR (Alasia et al., 2017; Subedi et al., 2020). Each CSD's RI value was determined based on the CSD's relative proximity to all surrounding POPCTRs (Subedi et al., 2020). The population size of each POPCTR was used as a proxy for service availability. The RI calculation accounts for all POPCTRs that could be potential locations for goods, services and economic activities for the reference CSD (Alasia et al., 2017; Subedi et al., 2020). For this study, we used the updated RI, which includes index values for all CSDs in Canada that reported a population in 2016.

Although the RI is a continuous scale (from 0 to 1, where 0 is the most accessible (easily accessible) area and 1 is the least accessible (very remote) area), the new RI classification allows to group census subdivisions by their relative remoteness into five categories: easily accessible; accessible; less accessible; remote; and, very remote areas (Subedi et al., 2020).

## Appendix A

**Table A.1**

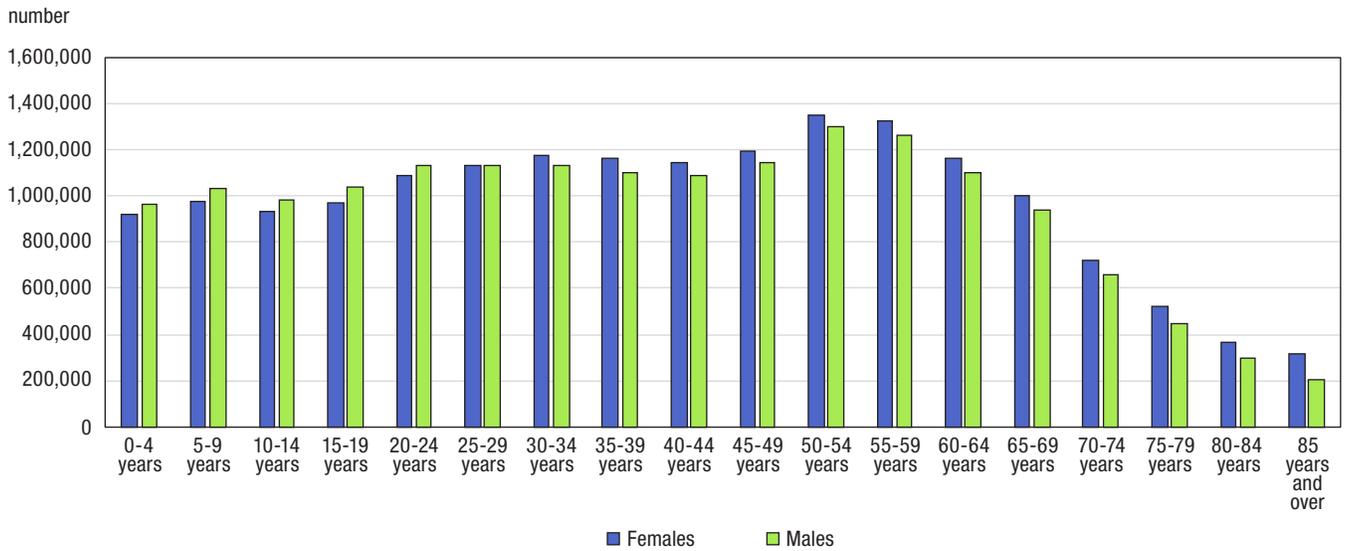
**Distribution of the six largest female population groups designated as visible minorities (as a proportion of the total female visible minority population) by remoteness area categories**

Regions	South Asian	Chinese	Black	Filipino	Arab	Latin American
	percent					
Canada	24.0	21.0	15.7	11.1	6.3	5.9
Easily accessible areas	24.5	21.6	15.6	10.3	6.2	5.8
Accessible areas	19.1	15.8	16.3	17.2	8.0	6.3
Less accessible areas	18.9	12.7	17.7	27.0	4.3	5.7
Remote areas	15.7	11.0	15.6	32.0	2.3	5.0
Very remote areas	13.6	11.2	20.0	26.7	6.4	5.6

**Source:** Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

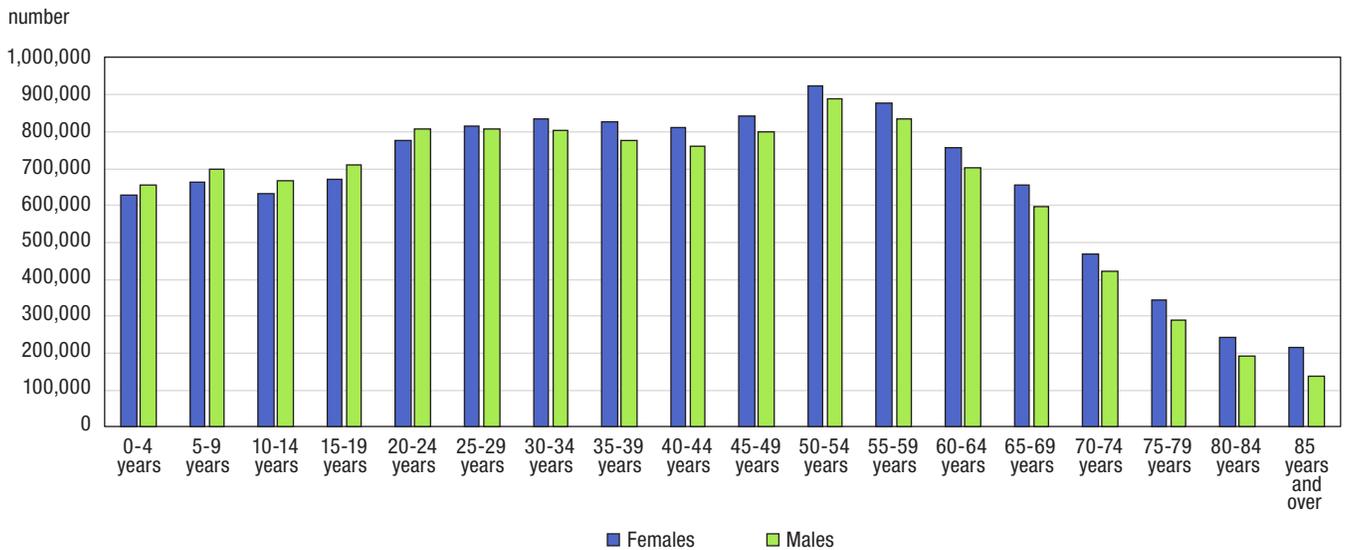
## Appendix B

**Chart B.1**  
Canadian population by age group and sex, Canada



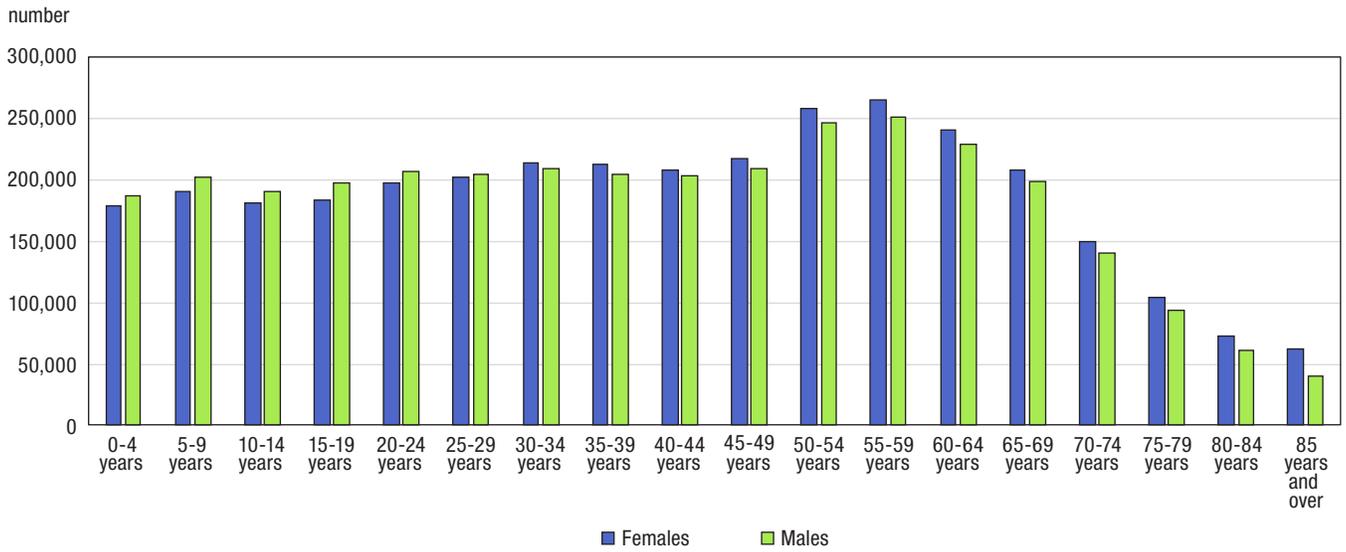
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart B.2**  
Canadian population by age group and sex in easily accessible areas



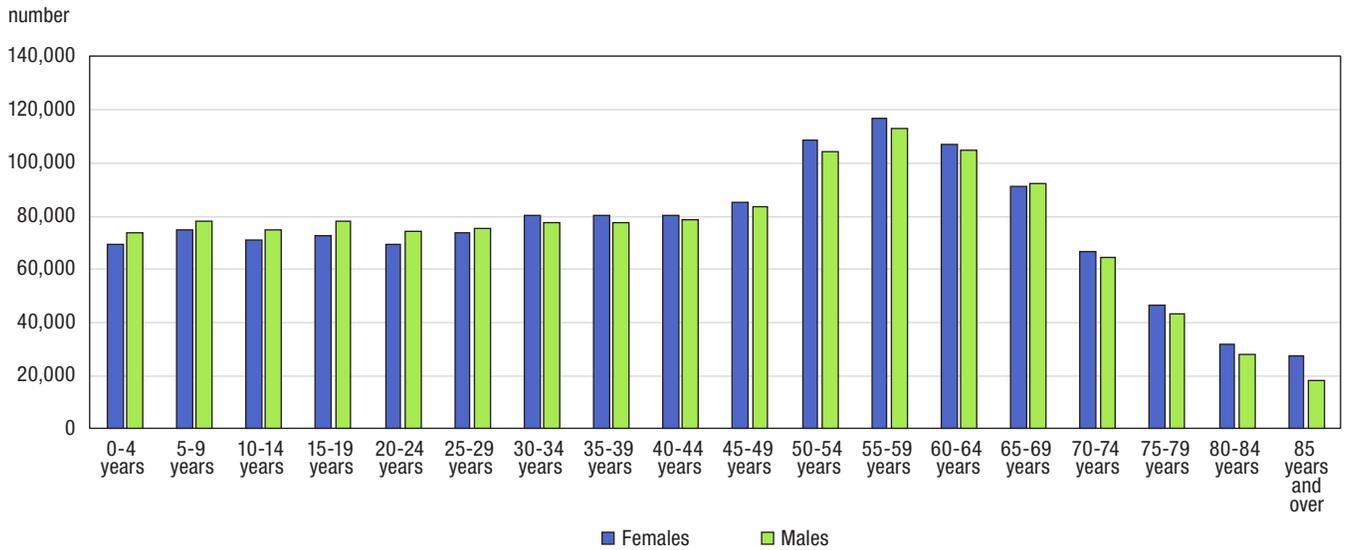
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart B.3**  
**Canadian population by age group and sex in accessible areas**



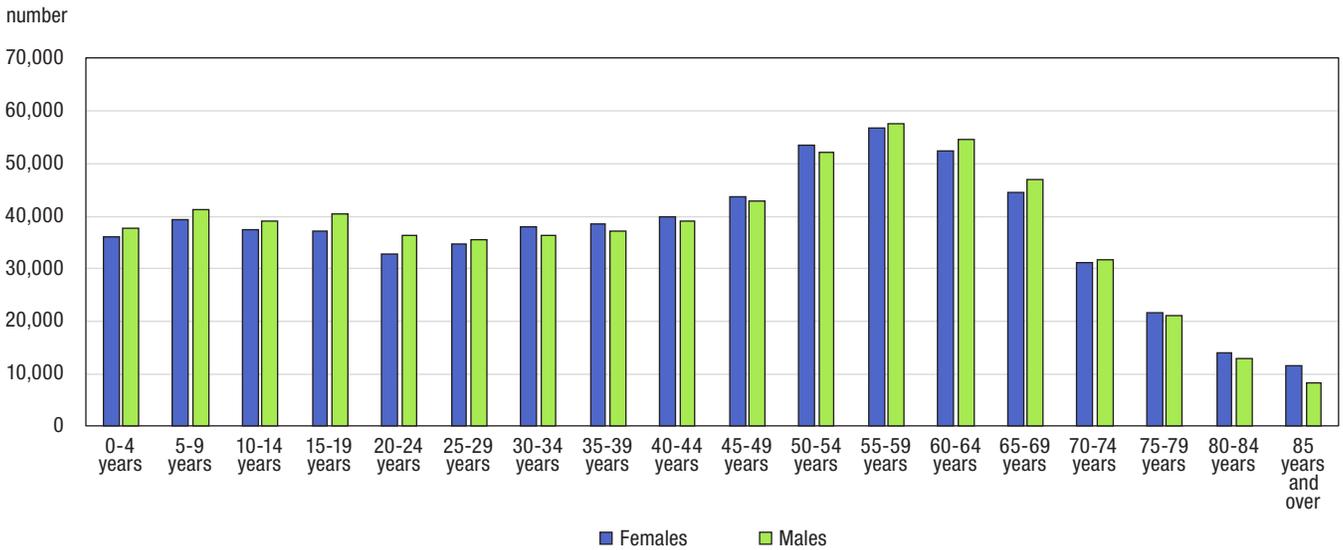
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart B.4**  
**Canadian population by age group and sex in less accessible areas**



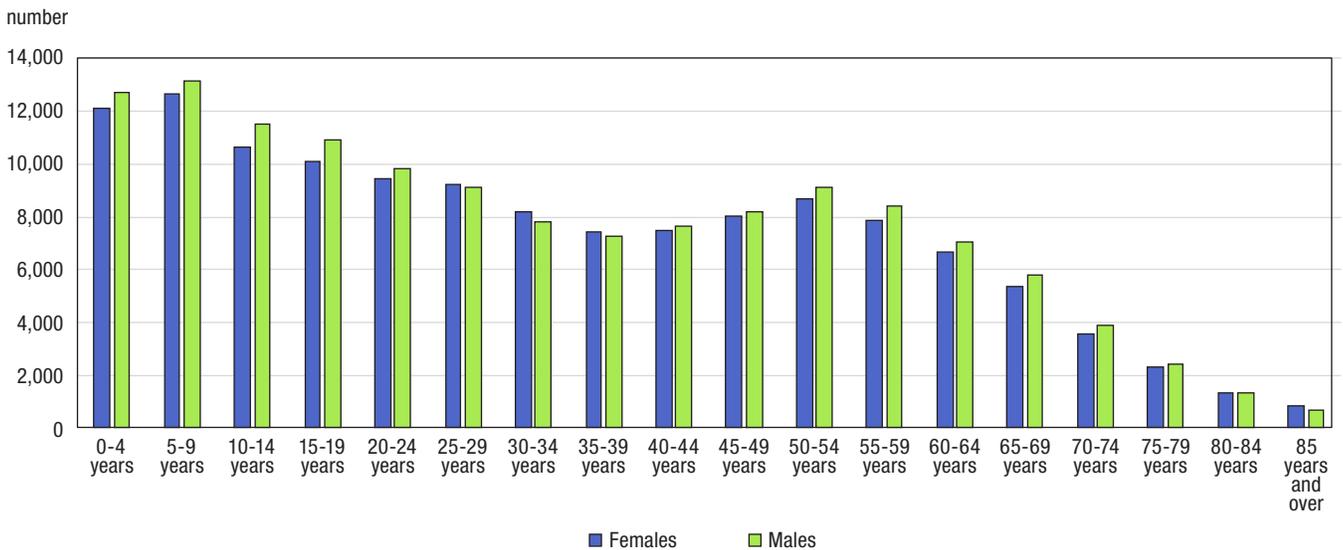
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart B.5**  
**Canadian population by age group and sex in remote areas**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

**Chart B.6**  
**Canadian population by age group and sex in very remote areas**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and Remoteness Index Classification.

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