

Indigenous population growing rapidly, languages surging: census ^[1]

Data also reveals on-reserve First Nation housing getting worse

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EXCERPTS

The Indigenous population in Canada continues to rapidly outpace the growth of the rest of the country while Indigenous languages are showing a strong resurgence, according to census data released Tuesday by Statistics Canada.

The Stats Can data also revealed on-reserve First Nation housing is getting worse.

The data paints a picture of a young and growing Indigenous population - First Nation, Inuit and Métis - which is increasingly learning Indigenous languages and is reshaping the face of Western Canada.

Between 2006 and 2016, the self-identified Indigenous population grew by 42.5 per cent - from 1,172,790 to 1,673,785. This represented a growth rate four times the rest of the population, according to Stats Can. The agency is projecting the Indigenous population to hit 2.5 million within the next two decades.

While a longer life expectancy and high fertility rates played factors, an increase of people self-identifying as Indigenous - particularly as Métis and non-status First Nation - propelled the continued growth rate in the population, said Johanne Denis, director general of Stats Can's social and demographic statistics.

Indigenous population younger

At 587,545, the Métis population is the fastest-growing sub-segment of the Indigenous population, rising to 51 per cent of the total over the last 10 years. The status and non-status First Nation population grew to 977,230, increasing by 39 per cent between 2006 and 2016, and the Inuit population rose to 65,025, a change of 29.1 per cent over the same time span.

Children under the age of four comprise a larger portion of the Indigenous population than children in the non-Indigenous population. The census data found that Indigenous children under age four accounted for 8.7 per cent of the population while seniors aged 65 and over made up 7.3 per cent, up from 4.8 per cent in 2006. In the non-Indigenous population, seniors accounted for a higher proportion than children under the age of four at 16.3 per cent to 5.3 per cent in 2016.

The data revealed the Inuit had the youngest population with those 14 years of age and younger making 33 per cent of the total, First Nations came next with 29.2 per cent and Métis at 22.3 per cent.

The rate of growth in the total Indigenous population is projected to substantially alter the make-up of two Western provinces in particular: Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Stats Can projects the Indigenous population will make up between 18.5 per cent and 22.7 per cent of the total population in Saskatchewan and between 17.6 per cent and 21.3 per cent in Manitoba.

More Indigenous children in foster care

The Stats Can data registered a slight increase in Indigenous children under the age of four living in foster care. In 2016, there were about 4,300 Indigenous children under age four living in foster care, making up more than half of all children - non-Indigenous and Indigenous - in foster care. In 2011, Indigenous children accounted for 49.1 per cent of all children in foster care.

First Nation children made up 41.4 per cent of all children under four - non-Indigenous and Indigenous - in foster care, followed by Métis children, which accounted for 6.7 per cent, and Inuit children at 2 per cent.

Languages rising

The Stats Can census registered 70 Indigenous languages spoken across the country. The data found that 260,550 people reported being able to speak an Indigenous language, which was an increase of 3.1 per cent since 2006. There was a decrease of people who reported

being able to converse in an Indigenous language, dropping to 15.6 per cent in 2016 from 21.4 per cent in 2006.

The data also found that more people had learned an Indigenous language than reported it - 260,550 people - as their mother tongue - 208,720.

"That suggests that many people, especially young people, are learning (Indigenous) languages as second languages," said the Stats Can report.

Nearly two thirds of Inuit, about 64 per cent, reported being able to speak Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun and other Inuit languages, said Stats Can. The percentage was higher for Inuit living in the homelands of Inuit Nunangat with 83.9 per cent reporting an ability to speak their language.

The Indigenous languages with the most speakers fell under the Algonquian language group - Cree and Ojibway - with 175,825 reporting an ability to speak the tongue.

Housing deteriorating

Indigenous people continue to face housing challenges across the country, the census found. One in five Indigenous people, 19.4 per cent, reported living in a dwelling in need of repair. Only about 6 per cent of Canada's non-Indigenous population reported living in substandard housing.

While there was a slight decrease in the global housing number, the census data showed that housing continued to deteriorate on-reserve with an 0.8 per cent increase of people living in housing in need of repair. Of the total on-status First Nation population that reported living in substandard housing, 44.2 per cent lived on-reserve.

Off-reserve First Nation population larger

The status First Nations population saw off-reserve and on-reserve growth with a 30.8 per cent increase from 2006 to 2016. There were 744,866 First Nations people with status in 2016, accounting for 76.2 per cent of the First Nation population. The non-status First Nation population grew by 75.1 per cent to 232,375 over the same time span.

More status First Nation people are now living off-reserve. Only 44.2 per cent reported living on reserve. However, the on-reserve population saw a 12.8 per cent increase in growth, but it was outpaced by a 49.1 per cent increase in the off-reserve status population from 2006 to 2016.

Over half of First Nations people live in Western Canada with 17.7 per cent living in British Columbia, followed by Alberta with 14 per cent, Manitoba with 14 per cent and Saskatchewan by 11.7 per cent. Proportionally, First Nations people accounted for 10.7 per cent of the total population in Saskatchewan, 10.5 per cent in Manitoba and 32.1 per cent in the Northwest Territories.

Ontario, the country's most populous province, also had the highest number of First Nation people living within its borders. Nearly one quarter, 24.2 per cent, of First Nation people lived in Ontario, while 9.5 per cent lived in Quebec followed by Atlantic Canada with 7.5 per cent. Atlantic Canada saw its First Nation population double from 2006 to 2016, rising by 101.6 per cent to 73,655, according to the Stats Can data.

Ontario also registered the highest Métis population with 120,585 making up one-fifth of the total Métis population in the country. Alberta had the highest Métis population in Western Canada accounting for 19.5 per cent of the total population.

The Inuit population remained concentrated in their homeland of Inuit Nunangat, which extends from the Western Arctic to the eastern Labrador coast. About 72.8 per cent of Inuit lived in Inuit Nunangat, according to Stats Can.

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