

**Inuit in Canada: Regional Distribution and Demographic
Changes from 1981 to 2001**

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December, 2006

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

Published under the authority of the
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern
Development and Federal Interlocutor for
Métis and Non-Status Indians
Ottawa, 2006

www.ainc-inac.gc.ca

1-800-567-9604

TTY only 1-866-553-0554

QS-7081-000-EE-A1

Catalogue: R2-450/2006E-PDF

ISBN: 0-662-44549-X

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Services Canada

Cette publication peut aussi être obtenue

en français sous le titre : **Les Inuit au Canada : répartition selon la région et évolution
démographique, de 1981 à 2001.**

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1. Background

This report is second in a series that looks at some of the social, demographic and economic changes experienced by Inuit in Canada over the past 20 years. Based on census information from 1981 to 2001, it examines changes in the Inuit population and the age and regional distribution of Inuit across the country.

This report is based on research initially carried out by Jeremy Hull (2002) and has been developed by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in collaboration with the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate (SRAD) of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

2. The Size of the Inuit Population

In 2001, there were about 56,000 people in Canada with Inuit ancestry.¹ As can be seen in Table 1, this is more than double the 1981 population of 24,290.

The ***Inuit ancestry population*** includes those whose ancestors were all Inuit and those who reported having Inuit and non-Inuit ancestors on the census.

¹ There are many ways to define the Inuit population. For this report and for others in this series, the focus is on those of Inuit ancestry. Another way to define the population is by focusing on those whose ancestors were solely Inuit (no non-Inuit ancestors). There are important differences between these two populations. For further information, please see the report entitled "Determining the Inuit Population: Definitional Issues and Differences" (INAC, 2006). The Inuit identity definition is not used, as data for the identity concept were not available from the census until 1996. The counts in this report exclude institutional residents.

Table 1
Inuit Ancestry Population by Sex, 1981-2001

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
Males	12,380	18,270	24,640	24,765	27,785
Females	11,905	17,775	24,245	24,865	28,410
Total, Both Sexes	24,290	36,040	48,885	49,630	56,190
% Change		48.4	35.6	1.5	13.2

Over this 20-year period, population growth was uneven as it increased rapidly from 1981 to 1991 and then slowed considerably during the 1991 to 1996 period. This unusual pattern can largely be attributed to changes in the way the census question was asked. In 1981, the census did not encourage people to provide more than one response to the question on ancestry. As a result, the Inuit population included only those who had only Inuit ancestors. However, in 1986, multiple ancestries were encouraged. Those that had Inuit and non-Inuit ancestors who were not previously included in the counts for the Inuit population were now included. This change was in part responsible for a 48% increase in the Inuit ancestry population from 1981-1986.

In subsequent censuses, there were some additional minor changes to the question on ancestry and changes in the way that the question was answered. These also contributed to some irregularities in the counts in 1986 and 1991.²

3. Where Inuit Live

Inuit have lived in what is now known as Canada for 5,000 years. Today, although Inuit live in all provinces and territories across the country, the large majority are still concentrated in the Canadian North.

For the purposes of this report, “**north**” includes Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Northern Québec and Labrador. The area that remains is considered “south”.

² For example, on the 1991 Census form, check boxes were provided for those answering the ancestry question. An unusually large number of Ontario residents checked all boxes provided. This resulted in a large increase in the number of people reporting mixed Inuit ancestry in 1991.

In 2001, nearly three-quarters (72%) of Inuit lived in the north of Canada, primarily in coastal communities not accessible by road, and were concentrated in four main regions established through the settlement of land claims agreements: the northern coastal region of Labrador (the Nunatsiavut region), northern Québec along Hudson and Ungava Bay (in the area known as Nunavik), the territory of Nunavut and the northwestern corner of the Northwest Territories (also known as the Inuvialuit region). These regions are shown in the following map.

Map 1
Inuit Regions in Canada



Source: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2005.

It is important to note that with the exception of Nunavut, the Inuit regions discussed in this report and others in this series are **different** than those shown in the map. In these reports, data are not specifically for the Inuvialuit region but are for the Northwest Territories as a whole. The Labrador data are for Labrador in its entirety and not just for the Nunatsiavut land claim area. Similarly, the Nunavik boundaries are somewhat different than those for the whole of northern Québec. The boundaries used in these reports are not based on land claim boundaries but on census delineations. These census delineations are used as a proxy for those of the actual land claim regions.

Nunavut was home to the largest Inuit population with 22,610 Inuit residing there in 2001. This was followed by the province of Québec with 10,725 Inuit, the Atlantic provinces with 9,220 (with just over 5,000 in Labrador alone) and 4,130 in the Northwest Territories.

As can be seen in Table 2, over the 20-year period from 1981-2001, the number of Inuit in each region increased. The most rapid growth took place in the Atlantic region where the number of Inuit increased 360% from 2,005 to 9,220 people. This was followed by an increase of 280% in Ontario and Western Canada, 154% in Québec, 73% in Nunavut and 67% in the Northwest Territories. By comparison, over this 20-year period, the Canadian population as a whole increased 24%.

Table 2
Inuit Ancestry Population by Region, 1981-2001

Region	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	% change 1981-2001	% change 1996-2001
Canada	24,290	36,045	48,890	49,630	56,190	131	13
Atlantic	2,005	4,620	7,655	8,220	9,220	360	12
Québec	4,220	7,335	8,470	9,430	10,725	154	14
Nunavut	13,045	15,195	17,640	20,510	22,610	73	10
Northwest Territories	2,480	2,900	3,615	4,220	4,130	67	-2
Ontario and Western Canada	2,450	5,930	11,345	7,140	9,300	280	30

Rapid population growth in the Atlantic region and Ontario and Western Canada can in part be attributed to the increased reporting of the population with mixed Inuit and non-Inuit ancestry. For example, in the Atlantic in 2001, 63% of the total Inuit population was of mixed ancestry. The corresponding percentage for the Ontario and Western Canadian Inuit population was 80%. From 1996-2001, there was a slight decline in the Inuit population for the Northwest Territories. This was primarily due to an undercount of the population of this territory as some people were missed by the census in 2001.³

³ In 2001, net undercoverage for Canada as a whole was 3%, compared with just over 8% for the Northwest Territories. This was the highest rate of net undercoverage among all provinces and territories in the country (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Canada's large urban areas⁴ were home to 10,865 Inuit in 2001, up from 2,110 in 1981 an increase of over 400%.⁵ Southern cities with large Inuit populations included St. John's, Montréal, Ottawa, Edmonton and Toronto. Each of these was home to between 700 and 800 people of Inuit ancestry.

Women were more likely than men to live in large urban areas as 54% of those living in these urban centres were Inuit women and 46% were Inuit men. In the north, the percentage of women and men was about equal.

4. The Age Structure of the Inuit Population

As shown in Table 3, the Inuit population was very young in 1981 with 44% of Inuit under the age of 15. By 2001, the Inuit population had aged somewhat, with 38% less than age 15. Despite this decline, the Inuit population remains one of the youngest in the country. By comparison, in 2001, 19% of the non-Inuit population was less than 15 years of age.

Table 3
Percentage of Inuit and Other Canadians that Are Children and Seniors, 1981-2001

	Inuit		Non-Inuit	
	0-14	65+	0-14	65+
1981	43.6	2.6	22.9	9.0
1986	39.7	2.5	21.6	9.9
1991	38.7	2.5	21.2	10.8
1996	40.1	2.5	20.7	11.5
2001	38.4	3.0	19.4	12.2

⁴ In this report, large urban centres are urban areas within census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs). CMAs have urban cores of at least 100,000 people. For census agglomerations, the urban core must have a population of at least 10,000 (Statistics Canada, 2002).

⁵ Much of this growth can be attributed to changes in the census question from 1981 to 2001 that brought Inuit of mixed ancestry into the population. Inuit in urban areas are more likely than those in the North to report mixed Inuit and non-Inuit origins. Similarly, it is likely that increased migration south and intermarriage have also contributed to this growth.

The difference in the age structure of the Inuit and non-Inuit populations over time is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. From the pyramids, two important features can be observed. Seniors made up a slightly larger proportion of the 2001 Inuit population than in 1981, growing from 2.6% to 3.0% over the 20-year period. By comparison, from 1981-2001, the non-Inuit senior population grew from 9.0% to 12.2%.

The first involves changes to the age structure of the Inuit population between 1981 and 2001. For Inuit, the base of the pyramid was much narrower in 2001 than in 1981. This points to a decreasing percentage of Inuit in the youngest age groups resulting from a drop in fertility.

Figure 1
Inuit and Non-Inuit Populations by Age and Sex, Canada, 1981

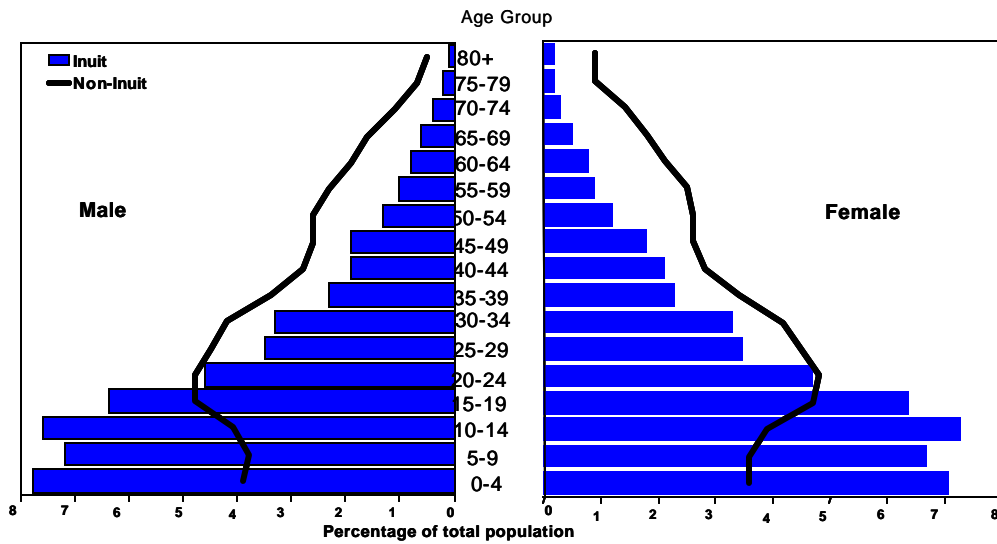
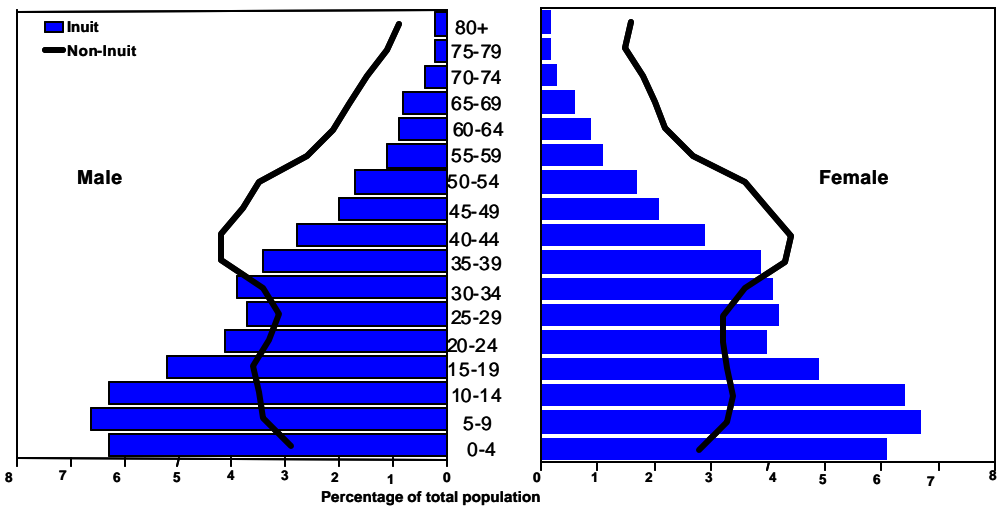


Figure 2
Inuit and Non-Inuit Populations by Age and Sex, Canada, 2001



The shapes of the Inuit and non-Inuit pyramids are very different for both 1981 and 2001. In general, the Inuit pyramid reflects a population with a larger percentage of young people and a smaller percentage of seniors, as previously mentioned.

Among Inuit, men made up a larger percentage of the senior population than did women. For example, Inuit men made up 53% of the Inuit seniors population with Inuit women comprising 47%. The opposite was true for the non-Inuit population: 44% of non-Inuit seniors were men and 56% were women. This is in part explained by higher maternal mortality rates that prevailed when these senior women were in their childbearing years (Choinière et al, 1988).

There are some important differences in the age structure of the populations of each of the 4 Inuit regions (Table 4). Labrador had the oldest population in 2001 with 30% of Inuit less than 15 and 6% aged 65 and over. In contrast, Northern Québec and Nunavut had nearly identical age structures. In both of these regions, 42% were under the age of 15 while 3% were aged 65 and over.

Table 4
Percentage of Inuit Ancestry Population by Age Group and Region, 2001

Age Group	Labrador	Northern Québec	Nunavut	Northwest Territories
	Percent			
0-14	30.3	42.1	41.6	37.9
15-24	17.4	18.6	18.6	19.2
25-44	30.8	26.2	26.6	28.0
45-64	15.8	9.9	10.4	11.7
65+	6.0	3.1	2.8	3.4

As mentioned earlier, in 2001, roughly three quarters of Inuit or 37,400, lived in the Canadian north. Here, the population was younger as 40% of Inuit in the north were less than 15 (Table 5). This can be compared to 34% of Inuit living in the rest of Canada and the same percentage in large urban centres in southern Canada.

Table 5
Percentage of Inuit Population by Age Group and Region, Canada, 2001

Region	Age Group				
	0 - 4	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65+
	Percent				
Inuit - Total North	40.0	18.5	27.2	11.1	3.3
Inuit - Total South	34.1	17.5	33.5	12.5	2.3
Inuit - Large Urban Areas	34.1	17.3	35.7	11.0	2.0
Non-Inuit - total	19.4	13.4	30.5	24.5	12.2

Note: "Total South" includes large urban centres.

In the north, Inuit seniors made up a larger percentage of the population than in the other two areas: 3.3% of the total northern Inuit population compared to 2.0% in large urban centres and 2.3% in the south as a whole.

There was a much higher percentage of working age adults living in the south (and in large urban centres specifically) than in the north. For example, while 27% of the northern Inuit population was comprised of adults aged 25-44, this rose to 36% in large urban centres in the south.

5. Summary

The Inuit population has grown rapidly since 1981. Although growth has slowed in recent years, nearly 4 in 10 Inuit were under the age of 15 in 2001 in contrast to 2 in 10 non-Inuit. Three-quarters of Inuit lived in the north, with the largest number residing in the territory of Nunavut. The number of Inuit in large urban centres in the south has grown significantly since 1981. In 2001, nearly 11,000 Inuit lived in these urban areas. The region of Labrador had the oldest Inuit population, as 6% of the population was aged 65 and over in 2001. In contrast, 3% of Inuit in Northern Québec, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories were seniors. By comparison, the figure for the non-Inuit population was 12%.

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Special thanks to Rosalinda Costa, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada for her technical assistance.