

Application of the United Nations Human Development Index to Registered Indians¹ in Canada, 2006–2016

Why we did this

The Human Development Index (HDI) has been published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) since 1990. It provides a framework for examining countries' progress on 3 components: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and material standard of living. Canada is among the highest ranking countries on the HDI with “very high” levels of human development. Previous applications of the HDI found substantial gaps in HDI scores between Registered Indians and other Canadians².

At the request of the Assembly of First Nations, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) commissioned the update of the application of the HDI to Registered Indians in Canada in 2006 and 2016.

What we did

It was necessary to adapt the 2018 UNDP HDI methodology to the Canadian context to compare the human development of Registered Indians to other Canadians on the 3 HDI components between 2006 and 2016:

- Health is measured by life expectancy at birth³
- Education is measured by the average years of schooling for those aged 25 and older and the percentage of the population aged 15 to 34 attending school⁴
- Income is measured by average (per capita) income for the entire population with and without income⁴

The component scores and national HDI score were scaled to allow for international comparisons. These comparisons highlighted the ranking of Registered Indians (both on and off reserve) with that of other Canadians among 189 other countries in 2018.

Due to many changes in the UNDP calculation of the HDI, its components and available data sources, this report cannot be compared to previous HDI scores or rankings.

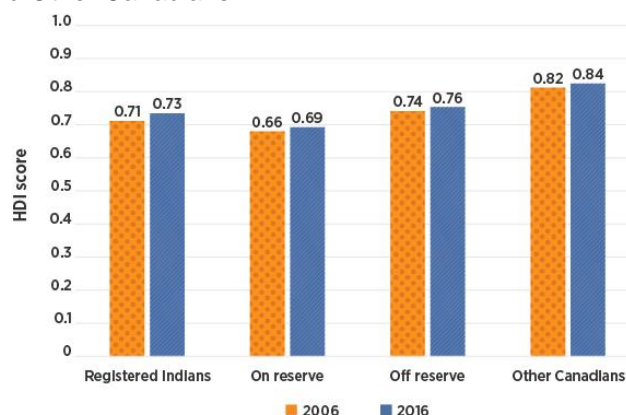
What we found

While national HDI scores for all groups increased between 2006 and 2016, the gap in HDI scores between Registered Indians and other Canadians remained stable.

Registered Indian HDI scores were lowest in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and highest in Quebec, the Atlantic region and the territories. Registered Indian HDI scores increased slightly or were stable in all provinces, except Manitoba.

When examining each of the HDI components over this period for Registered Indians, the largest improvement noted was for income. Little change was observed on education and health.

Figure 1. 2006 and 2016 HDI scores, Registered Indians and Other Canadians



Despite improvement to the individual components, the gaps between Registered Indians and other Canadians remained stable (income, education) or widened (health) between 2006 and 2016.

While Canada ranked 12th internationally in 2016, the Registered Indian population would have ranked 52nd among countries with “very high” human development, compared to a ranking of 63rd in 2006. The off-reserve Registered Indian population would rank 42nd in 2016 among countries with “high” human development compared to 47th in 2006. The 2016 on-reserve Registered Indian population would rank 78th, while the 2006 on-reserve population would rank 89th, among those with “high” human development.

What it means

These study findings are similar to others such as the Community Well-being Index. Although there are small improvements in the quality of life experienced by all Canadians, between 2006 and 2016, the gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians has not reduced.

For more information

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, *Cooke, M. (2019). Application of the United Nations Human Development Index to Registered Indians in Canada, 2006–2016. Ottawa: Indigenous Service Canada*, or for other inquiries, please e-mail [aadnc.recherche-research.aandc@canada.ca](mailto:aandc.recherche-research.aandc@canada.ca)

¹ Registered Indians are persons who are registered under the *Indian Act*.

² Other Canadians includes non-Indigenous people as well as Inuit, Métis and non-Status First Nations.

³ Life expectancy estimates provided by Statistics Canada (2019).

⁴ Statistics Canada (2019). Data tables, 2016 Census.

