

Catalogue no. 41-20-0002
ISBN 978-0-660-69824-3



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Release date: April 18, 2024

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Highlights

- There was an increase in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children among foster children in private households from 2011 to 2021; 47.8% of all foster children in 2011, to 51.7% in 2016, and to 53.7% in 2021.
- Disparity in rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children increased from 2011 to 2021, with the largest increase seen among Inuit children.
- Among the provinces and territories, Manitoba had the highest rate of Indigenous foster children (per 1,000 Indigenous children) from 2011 to 2021 with a decrease in rates observed between 2016 (63.9 per 1,000) and 2021 (61.8 per 1,000).
- Disparity between rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children increased from 2011 to 2021 for most provinces and territories, with the highest disparity observed in the Western provinces and specifically Alberta.
- Disparity in rates was higher among Indigenous foster children living in large urban population centres compared to rural areas in 2021.
- Rates of foster children were higher among First Nations children living off reserve compared to on reserve and among Inuit children living outside Inuit Nunangat compared to inside Inuit Nunangat in 2021.
- In 2021, the foster child rate among First Nations and non-Indigenous children was highest for those aged 10 to 14. Among Métis, it was highest for children aged 0 to 4 and 5 to 9 while, among Inuit children, it was highest for those aged 5 to 9.
- Just over half of First Nations (50.6%) and Inuit children (51.6%) and three-fifths (63.4%) of Métis children in foster care lived with non-Indigenous foster parents in 2021; this proportion was higher in large urban population centres.

Introduction

Indigenous children are vastly overrepresented among foster children in Canada. In 2021, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of all children under age 15 in the general population, but 53.8% of children in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2022).¹ The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (2021) has reported on how this overrepresentation within the child welfare system is a legacy of the residential school system and a perpetuation of a history of colonial policies and practices that have separated Indigenous children from their families and communities.

Any analysis of the current day overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is incomplete without a more detailed discussion of the Sixties Scoop that came into effect with the phasing out of the residential school system. Between the 1960s and 1980s, many Indigenous children were taken or “scooped” from their families by provincial authorities and put into the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2011; Johnson, 1983). This resulted in the vast majority of Indigenous children being placed into non-Indigenous homes (Fallon et al., 2021; Sinclair, 2007), where they were separated from their culture and knowledge of their identity (Pooyak & Gomez, 2009; Sinclair, 2007). Many of these children documented experiences of abuse and neglect (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a), while even those placed in homes with well-intentioned carers were met with “assimilationist expectations” especially around their Indigenous identity (White & Jacobs, 1992, p. 22).

1. To account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time, only census subdivisions completely enumerated in all three cycles of interest (2011, 2016 and 2021) are included in this analysis. Due to this adjustment, counts and percentages in this paper differ slightly from previously released statistics.

The Sixties Scoop was propelled by many factors, including legislative changes that permitted provincial child welfare authorities to enact child welfare policies in Indigenous communities (Fallon et al., 2021). These changes and subsequent actions by way of child welfare authorities demonstrated a lack of sensitivity, “understanding and respect” for Indigenous culture and parenting practices, which combined with the longstanding structural inequalities and an underfunding of key services, paved the way for the Sixties Scoop (Fallon et al., 2021, p. 15). Despite the work of Indigenous communities to institute their own culturally appropriate child welfare services between the 1970s and 1980s, their reach was limited due to the overarching control of the government over child welfare legislation and funding (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2017b).

In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) the historical and ongoing forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities, and thereby their culture and identity, is documented as a systemic cultural genocide with harmful intergenerational consequences. The on-going overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system has now been called the “Millennial Scoop” (Fallon et al., 2021) such that there are now more Indigenous children in the child welfare system than there were in the residential school system at its height (Fallon et al., 2021; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a).

With the current overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, instituting changes to this system was deemed the highest priority in the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). Specifically, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b) called upon governments in Canada to commit to reducing the number of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, to develop principles that affirm the right of Indigenous governments to establish and maintain their own child welfare agencies, and to ensure the production of more statistics that speak to differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in foster care to highlight and then address disparities. Recently, new legislation has affirmed the inherent, constitutional, and treaty rights of Indigenous groups to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services and to choose the best options for their own children and families (Government of Canada, 2019). This has led to the development and delivery of culturally appropriate and safe child and family services through Indigenous governing bodies (Government of Canada, 2019; Pollock et al., 2024).

With respect to information gaps, including those around disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in foster care, the lack of a comprehensive federal-level child welfare database makes it difficult to track the number of children in foster care and provide other relevant information, including details on when they were placed, duration in care and information on the households in which they were placed. This is, in part, an issue of jurisdictional diversity, as there are over 300 provincial and territorial child welfare agencies across 13 provinces and territories with over 100 agencies specifically delivering services to First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous children (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). As different terms, inclusion criteria, reporting criteria, and data collection methods are used it is challenging to effectively compile and analyze data reported by child welfare agencies across regions (Trocmé, Roy, & Esposito, 2016). Such data would help to inform the optimization of child welfare services (Fallon, Filippelli, Black, Trocmé, & Esposito, 2017) so that foster children who face substantial early life challenges, including instability and lack of support, are provided the care needed to thrive, especially care that is culturally appropriate in the case of Indigenous children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). The hardships experienced by foster children are associated with short- and long-term psychological, emotional, social and behavioural challenges (Brownell et al., 2010; Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016; Homeless Hub, 2021; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Jee, Barth, Szilagyi, & Szilagyi, 2006) as well as other adverse outcomes such as lower educational attainment (Goyette, Blanchet, Esposito, & Delaye, 2021).

While data are limited at the national level, the Census of Population can offer some insight into the number of Indigenous children in foster care in Canada. For the first time in 2011, “foster child” was added as a response category in the household roster of the National Household Survey (NHS) questionnaire and the 2016 and 2021 Censuses followed suit (Turner, 2016; Wray & Sinha, 2015). This paper uses the 2011 NHS and 2016 and 2021 Censuses to provide foster child rates and disparity between rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children in private households across cycles. Subsequently, the 2021 Census is used to examine sociodemographic characteristics of children who have been identified as foster children and the characteristics of the private foster households in which they are living. In line with previous studies, this research is focused on children in foster care who were aged 14 years or younger.

Methods

Data Source

For this analysis, data from the 2021 and 2016 Censuses and 2011 National Household Survey were used. The Census remains the most comprehensive source of data for the Indigenous population in Canada and robust data are available for First Nations people living both on and off reserve, Métis and Inuit. The 2021 Census was particularly challenging to conduct due to the COVID-19 pandemic with associated travel restrictions, border closures, as well as natural disasters such as regional forest fires. Dwelling enumeration was either not permitted or could not be completed in 63 of the 1,026 Census Subdivisions (CSDs)² that are classified as First Nations reserves.³ Response rates for the 2021 Census were also lower for Nunavut when compared with those at the national level.⁴

Population and concept definitions

This section describes/defines concepts used in the analysis. These include concepts relating to Indigenous identity, sociodemographic characteristics, and household level measures.

Foster child

The 2011 NHS added the category of “foster child” to the response options for the question asking respondents to identify their relationship to persons who are regular residents within their home. The inclusion of this response option to the 2011 NHS and 2016 and 2021 Censuses enables a Canada-wide portrait of Indigenous children in foster care living in private households in comparison to non-Indigenous children.

On the census questionnaire, foster children are identified via a question about relationships between each member of the household and the designated household reference person (called “Person 1” as they are the first person listed on the household roster filled by the respondent). It is instructed that the household reference person should be “an adult, followed, if applicable, by that person’s spouse or common-law partner and by their children”. Foster children are therefore identified when a given household member’s relationship is selected as “Foster child of Person 1”. For this reason, it is not possible to identify foster relationships not involving Person 1, unless additional information is specified in a write-in comment.

The benefits of these data including their recency and coverage should be interpreted in the context of limitations. These data are for foster children in private households and do not account for information on children in other types of out-of-home care, such as specialized or residential care (group or treatment care) or children waiting for placement. Furthermore, the Census is based on self-identification/interpretation, thus, the counts of foster children will not be identical to those obtained from provincial/territorial administrative sources.

The response category of “foster child” may be interpreted differently by respondents as there was no definition of foster child provided on the questionnaire. For example, a child in “kinship care”⁵ which refers to the care of children by extended family or individuals emotionally connected to the child, may or may not be included as a “foster child.” Other research has noted that while the majority of Indigenous children live with their parents many also live in diverse arrangements, including larger families, with a relatively high percentage living with their grandparents, as foster children, and with other relatives in the form of kinship care (Hudon & O’Donnell, 2017; Turner, 2016).

Furthermore, it is unclear how COVID-19 may have impacted the foster care placement process which might be reflected in analysis using the 2021 Census.

2. For the definition of and more information on Census Subdivisions, see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Census subdivision \(CSD\) \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.com/statcan/dictionary/2021/census-subdivision-csd).

3. For more details on the incompletely enumerated reserves in 2021, see [Incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.com/statcan/incompletely-enumerated-reserves-and-settlements). In 2011 and 2016 there were respectively 13 and 14 incompletely enumerated reserves. For additional information on incompletely enumerated reserves in 2011 and 2016, see [Incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and Indian settlements \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.com/statcan/incompletely-enumerated-indian-reserves-and-indian-settlements).

4. For more details on 2021 Census response rates, see [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021, Chapter 9 – Data quality evaluation \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.com/statcan/guide-to-the-census-of-population-2021-chapter-9-data-quality-evaluation).

5. For the definition of kinship care, see Pollock et al. (2024).

The analysis also relies on data from the NHS, a voluntary survey conducted in 2011, and two census cycles, with variations in collection methodologies, response rates, and the availability of data for certain variables. In addition, the census data provide a portrait at a specific point in time, so it is not possible to know about the history of Indigenous foster children including when they were placed in care, the duration, and from where they were removed (e.g., from an Indigenous community) or other information such as their mental and physical well-being. The data and analysis do not capture the historical context or the long-term impact of policies on Indigenous children. Understanding historical trends is crucial for a comprehensive perspective on foster care.

Lastly, while this study aims to provide data on the socio-demographic characteristics of Indigenous children in foster care and the household in which they are placed, it may not capture the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors affecting Indigenous children in foster care.

Indigenous identity

Indigenous identity refers to whether the person reported being First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit in response to the Indigenous identity question on the long-form census questionnaire (question 24 in the 2021 Census and question 18 in the 2016 Census and 2011 NHS). In the case of foster children, responses were provided by proxy. Status and non-Status First Nations children are captured within the data. In 2021, over three-quarters of First Nations foster children were Status First Nations (76.1%) and one-quarter non-Status First Nations (23.9%).

Single responses to the Indigenous identity question are used when reporting data for the three Indigenous groups; however, multiple Indigenous identity responses and Indigenous responses not included elsewhere (n.i.e.)⁶ were included in the estimates for the total Indigenous child population.

Gender

Beginning in 2021, the census asked questions about both the sex at birth and gender⁷ of individuals while prior censuses asked about sex at birth exclusively (without the addition of the at birth specification). This paper uses gender which, as of the 2021 Census is the standard variable used in concepts and classifications.⁸

The non-binary population is small, with data aggregation to a two-category gender variable done to protect the confidentiality of responses. Individuals in the category “non-binary persons” are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the “+” symbol.

Population Centre

A population centre has a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre. Areas outside population centres are classified as rural areas. Population centres are classified into three groups: 1) small population centres, with a population between 1,000 and 29,999; 2) medium population centres, with a population between 30,000 and 99,999; 3) large urban population centres, with a population of 100,000 or more.

Housing suitability

Suitable housing⁹ has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of resident households according to [National Occupancy Standard \(NOS\)](#) requirements.

6. This category includes persons who do not identify as First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) but who report having Registered or Treaty Indian status and/or Membership in a First Nation or Indian band.

7. Gender refers to current gender which may be different from sex assigned at birth.

8. For more details on the new gender concept, see [Age, Sex at Birth and Gender Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#).

9. For more details on housing suitability and adequacy, see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016 - Core housing need \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

Housing adequacy

Adequate housing is indicated by the dwelling condition where the dwelling is reported by its residents as not requiring any major repairs.

Low Income Measure, after tax (LIM-AT)

The Low-Income Measure, after tax (LIM-AT)¹⁰ refers to a fixed percentage (50%) of median adjusted aftertax income of private households. It is calculated by adjusting total household income by dividing it by the square root of the number of household members and comparing it against a threshold of 50% of the median 'equivalent national household income'.

In 2021, for the first time, the LIM was made available in standard census tables for Census Subdivisions defined as being 'on reserve'.¹¹ The LIM-AT was used because the measure is defined for the territories and the population living on reserve which is not the case for the official poverty measure, namely the Market Basket Measure (MBM). That said, estimates associated with this measure are more affected than most by the incomplete enumeration of certain reserves and settlements in the Census of Population.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics are presented throughout this paper in the form of counts, percentages and rates or ratios of rates to show disparity in line with previous research (Wray & Sinha, 2015).

Foster child rates represent the number of children in foster care belonging to a particular Indigenous identity group, per every 1,000 children in the population total for that group. These foster children rates were calculated by the number of foster children within a specific identity group over the number of children within that identity group in the population as exemplified here for First Nations children:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of (First Nations) foster children}}{\text{Number of (First Nations) children in the population}} \right) \times 1,000$$

Rate ratios are presented to highlight difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates and are calculated by:

$$\frac{\text{Foster care rate for First Nations (Métis or Inuit) children}}{\text{Foster care rate for non-Indigenous children}}$$

This is a ratio of the Indigenous foster child rate to the non-Indigenous child foster rate, indicating the difference or disparity between the two populations. For example, a disparity value of 4 represents a rate of foster children within a specific Indigenous identity group as 4 times higher than the rate among non-Indigenous children.

To account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time, only CSDs completely enumerated in all three cycles of interest (2011, 2016 and 2021) are included when conducting analyses. Due to this adjustment, counts and percentages may differ slightly from previously released statistics.

To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2011 NHS and 2016 and 2021 Censuses, while maintaining the quality of the results, counts are randomly rounded¹² up or down such that they end in either 0 or 5 and this is done independently for each count.

10. For more details on the LIM-AT, see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Low-income measure, after tax \(LIM-AT\) \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

11. Caution should be used when applying low-income concepts to certain geographic areas or to certain populations. The existence of substantial in-kind transfers could make the interpretation of low-income prevalence more difficult in certain instances, such as: subsidized housing, Nations band housing, sizeable barter economies, consumption from own production (such as products from hunting, farming or fishing). Statistics for people living in collective dwellings (e.g., shelters), people with no fixed address and people experiencing homelessness are not possible.

12. For more details on random rounding, see [Census Profile - Random rounding \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

Findings

There was an increase in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the foster care from 2011 to 2021

In 2021, among 5,987,430 children under the age of 15 living in private households, 27,455 were identified as foster children. Indigenous children were significantly overrepresented among foster children compared to their overall representation within the population (Table 1). While there were increases in the total population share of Indigenous children under 15 years of age from 6.9% of all children in 2011, to 7.5% in 2016, and to 7.6% in 2021, the representation of Indigenous children in foster care increased even more from 47.8% of all foster children in 2011, to 51.7% in 2016, and to 53.7% in 2021.

In 2021, First Nations children accounted for 42.5% of foster children, while Métis and Inuit accounted for 7.2% and 2.8% of foster children, respectively.

Table 1
Percentage distribution of all children and foster children aged 14 and under in private households by Indigenous identity, Canada, 2011, 2016 and 2021

	2011				2016				2021			
	All children		Children in foster care		All children		Children in foster care		All children		Children in foster care	
	count	percent	count	percent	count	percent	count	percent	count	percent	count	percent
Total	5,584,090	100.0	29,370	100.0	5,804,675	100.0	28,345	100.0	5,987,430	100.0	27,445	100.0
First Nations children	250,255	4.5	11,510	39.2	273,910	4.7	11,820	41.7	278,655	4.7	11,655	42.5
Métis children	104,385	1.9	1,795	6.1	130,900	2.3	1,975	7.0	137,590	2.3	1,975	7.2
Inuit children	20,155	0.4	570	1.9	21,480	0.4	540	1.9	22,660	0.4	760	2.8
Total Indigenous ¹	383,505	6.9	14,030	47.8	436,825	7.5	14,655	51.7	454,145	7.6	14,735	53.7
Non-Indigenous children	5,200,585	93.1	15,340	52.2	5,367,845	92.5	13,690	48.3	5,533,280	92.4	12,710	46.3

1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Notes: Due to random rounding of counts in this table, the sum of all percentages calculated using those counts may not equal 100%. Counts in this table have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time.

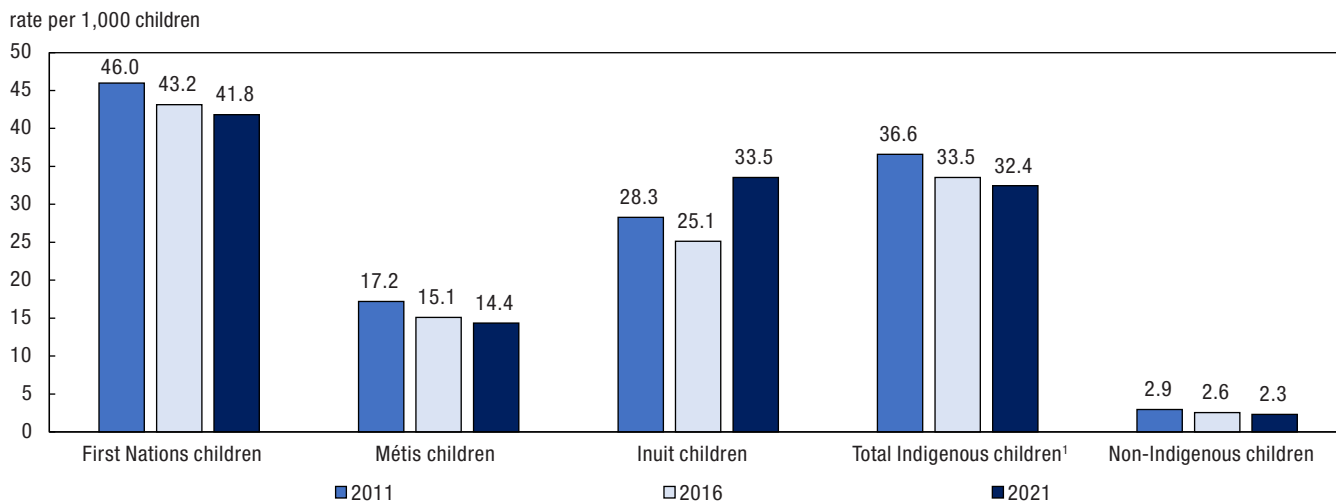
Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

The rate of children in foster care (per 1,000 children in the population) decreased for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children between 2011 and 2021

Chart 1 provides the rates of foster children per 1,000 children aged 0 to 14. In 2021, the rate of Indigenous foster children was 32.4 per 1,000, a slight decrease from the rates of 33.5 reported in 2016, and 36.6 in 2011. In comparison, the rate of non-Indigenous foster children per 1,000 children was much smaller at 2.3 in 2021, a decrease from 2.6 in 2016 and 2.9 in 2011.

In 2021, First Nations children had the highest rate with 41.8 children in foster care per 1,000 First Nations children in the Canadian population. While foster child rates generally declined between 2011 and 2021 for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, this was not the case for Inuit children. The rate of Inuit children in foster care in 2021 was 33.5 for every 1,000 Inuit children, an increase from 25.1 in 2016. While the foster child rates for First Nations and Métis have declined from 2011 to 2021, the number of foster children within these groups have increased during this time period. However, this coincides with a larger increase in the total child population among these groups resulting in rates that show a decline between 2011 and 2021. In contrast, among Inuit the increase in the number foster children is proportionally larger than the increase in the total child population leading to an increase in the foster child rate from 2016 to 2021.

Chart 1
Rate of children aged 14 and under in foster care (per 1,000 children in the population) in private households by Indigenous identity, Canada 2011, 2016 and 2021



1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Note: Rates in this chart have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

Disparity in Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster care rates increased from 2011 to 2021, with the largest increase seen among Inuit

Chart 2 presents disparities in foster child rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children using rate ratios.¹³ These disparity statistics represent the ratio of the total Indigenous, First Nations, Métis or Inuit foster child rate to the non-Indigenous foster child rate in Canada.

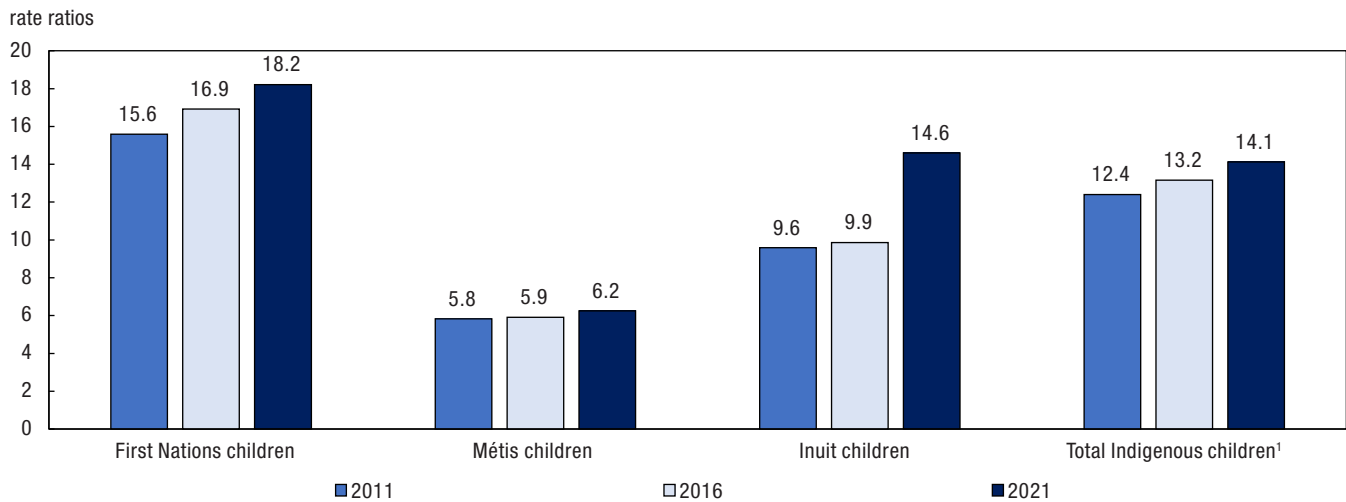
For example, the First Nations foster child rate was 15.6 times greater than the non-Indigenous foster child rate in 2011, but it was 18.2 times greater in 2021. The greatest increase in disparity between 2011 and 2021 was seen among Inuit children where the Inuit foster child rate was 9.6 and 9.9 times higher than the non-Indigenous foster child rate in 2011 and 2016, respectively, and 14.6 higher in 2021.

While the foster care rates generally decreased for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children since 2011, the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster care rates increased over this time as a result of greater decreasing rates of non-Indigenous foster children.

13. Rate ratios have been used in other research to highlight disparities (see Fallon et al., 2021; Wray & Sinha, 2015).

Chart 2

Disparity in foster child rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children aged 14 and under in private households by Indigenous identity, Canada, 2011, 2016, 2021



1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Note: Disparity statistics in this chart have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

Rates of Indigenous foster children were highest from 2011 to 2021 in Manitoba with a slight decline in rates from 2016 to 2021

The rates of Indigenous foster children varied across years with declining rates from 2011 to 2021 observed among select provinces and territories including Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and Yukon (Table 2). Yukon had the steepest decline from 44.4 per 1,000 children in 2016 to 27.0 per 1,000 children in 2021. Between 2016 and 2021, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Nunavut saw increased foster child rates among Indigenous children. Manitoba had the highest rate of Indigenous foster children across the three temporal periods with a decrease in rates observed between 2016 (63.9 per 1,000) and 2021 (61.8 per 1,000).

The ratio of the Indigenous foster child rate to the non-Indigenous rate (i.e., disparity) also varied by province and territory (Table 3). Across the three temporal periods from 2011 to 2021, the disparity increased with the rate of Indigenous children in foster care being 12.4 times higher in 2011, 13.2 times higher in 2016 and 14.1 times higher in 2021.

Table 2
Rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children (per 1,000 children in the population) in private households by province and territory, Canada, 2011, 2016 and 2021

	Children in foster care					
	2011		2016		2021	
	Total Indigenous children ¹	Non-Indigenous children	Total Indigenous children ¹	Non-Indigenous children	Total Indigenous children ¹	Non-Indigenous children
	rate per 1,000 children					
Canada	36.6	2.9	33.5	2.6	32.4	2.3
Newfoundland and Labrador	18.4	5.7	20.1	6.0	24.6	4.9
Prince Edward Island	0.0	2.7	13.5	4.6	12.5	1.5
Nova Scotia	20.2	4.1	13.0	3.5	7.8	3.3
New Brunswick	16.6	2.2	11.8	3.5	19.3	5.2
Quebec	26.4	4.1	24.4	3.7	28.9	4.6
Ontario	24.6	2.5	19.8	2.0	19.1	1.3
Manitoba	58.7	3.9	63.9	4.0	61.8	2.3
Saskatchewan	31.8	1.8	25.4	2.0	28.5	1.5
Alberta	46.9	1.8	37.8	1.7	35.1	1.2
British Columbia	39.3	3.0	40.3	2.1	32.0	1.3
Yukon	44.2	0.0	44.4	0.0	27.0	2.1
Northwest Territories	24.8	0.0	19.8	0.0	21.3	2.8
Nunavut	12.5	0.0	9.1	0.0	10.2	0.0

1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Note: Rates in this table have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

Table 3
Disparity in foster child rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children aged 14 and under in private households by province and territory, Canada, 2011, 2016 and 2021

	Disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates		
	2011	2016	2021
	rate ratios		
Canada	12.4	13.2	14.1
Newfoundland and Labrador	3.3	3.3	5.0
Prince Edward Island	0.0	3.0	8.1
Nova Scotia	5.0	3.7	2.3
New Brunswick	7.6	3.4	3.7
Quebec	6.5	6.6	6.2
Ontario	9.9	10.0	15.0
Manitoba	14.9	16.2	26.3
Saskatchewan	17.4	12.8	19.6
Alberta	25.6	22.8	28.9
British Columbia	12.9	19.0	23.7
Yukon	..	..	12.9
Northwest Territories	..	..	7.5
Nunavut	..	..	..

.. not available for a specific reference period

Notes: Disparity statistics in this table have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time. Disparity statistics were calculated using total Indigenous children which includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

Disparity in foster child rates between First Nations and Métis children and non-Indigenous children was highest in the Western provinces in 2021

In 2021, the rates of First Nations and Métis children in foster care were highest in Manitoba where 1 in 13 First Nations children, and 1 in 30 Métis children were in foster care (Table 4). The disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates differed significantly across provinces (Table 5). For example, the disparity between the foster child rates of First Nations and non-Indigenous children was lowest in Nova Scotia (3.5 times higher for Indigenous children), while the disparity was highest in Alberta where the foster child rate of First Nations children was 43.4 times higher than the rate of non-Indigenous children.

The disparity between First Nations and non-Indigenous foster child rates was particularly high in the Western provinces (Table 5). Similarly, disparity between Métis and non-Indigenous foster child rates was highest in Western provinces, namely Manitoba, British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. While the foster child rate was higher among Indigenous children in Manitoba (61.8 per 1,000), the disparity was 28.9 times higher in Alberta (higher than in Manitoba at 26.3), which is the result of Alberta having the second highest rate of Indigenous children in foster care combined with the lowest non-Indigenous foster child rates in Canada. In addition, the disparity between Inuit and non-Indigenous foster child rates was highest in Manitoba (the rate among Inuit children being 65.5 times higher than that among their non-Indigenous counterparts). However, this is based on a smaller number (30) of Inuit foster children in Manitoba; thus, caution should be exercised in interpreting this finding.

The disparity in rates was higher among Indigenous foster children living in large urban population centres compared to rural areas

When examining the population centre size, the foster child rates were generally higher for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children living in large urban population centres (population of 100,000 or more), while among non-Indigenous children the foster child rate was higher among those living in rural areas (population of less than 1,000) (Table 4). Specifically, the rate of First Nations foster children was 44.4 per 1,000 children in larger urban areas, whereas it was 40.7 per 1,000 children living in rural areas. The same pattern emerged for Métis where the rate of Métis foster children was 16.6 per 1,000 children in large urban population centres and 15.2 per 1,000 children living in rural areas. The rate of Inuit foster children was highest at 80.1 per 1,000 children in larger urban areas compared with 27.1 per 1,000 children in rural areas. The opposite was the case for non-Indigenous children, with a rate of 1.5 per 1,000 children in large urban population centres compared with 4.7 per 1,000 children in rural areas.

When exploring disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates by population centre size, similar trends emerged across Indigenous groups (Table 5). The disparity in rates in 2021 was higher in large urban population centres compared to rural areas and was more pronounced for Inuit and First Nations children. The Inuit foster child rate in large urban population centres was 54.5 times higher than the corresponding non-Indigenous foster child rate; whereas it was 5.8 times higher in rural areas compared with the non-Indigenous rate. Similarly, among First Nations children, the foster child rate in large urban population centres was 30.2 times higher than the corresponding non-Indigenous rate whereas, it was 8.7 times higher in rural areas.

Rates of foster children were higher among First Nations children living off reserve and among Inuit children living outside Inuit Nunangat

The foster child rate among First Nations children living off reserve (49.9 per 1,000) was double the rate seen among those living on reserve (24.6 per 1,000) (Table 4). The disparity between the foster child rates for First Nations children living off reserve and non-Indigenous children was also notable, where the rate among the former was 21.7 times higher (Table 5). Rates of Inuit and Métis foster children living on reserve should be interpreted with caution as they are based on low counts that suggest a higher percentage living in foster homes located on reserve rather than off reserve than is actually the case.

Among Inuit, the foster child rate for children living outside Inuit Nunangat (79.1 per 1,000) was 4.2 times higher than that among those living inside Inuit Nunangat (18.8 per 1,000) (Table 4). While disparity in Inuit and non-Indigenous foster child rates cannot be calculated for inside Inuit Nunangat where there were no non-Indigenous foster children, Table 4 shows that the Inuit foster child rate was 34.4 times greater than non-Indigenous foster child rate outside Inuit Nunangat.

Foster child rates were highest among First Nations children aged 10 to 14, Inuit children aged 5 to 9, and Métis children aged 0 to 4 and 5 to 9

Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates varied across age groups in 2021 (Table 4). The First Nations foster child rate was highest for those aged 10 to 14 (45.6 per 1,000) and similarly higher among non-Indigenous foster children in this age group (2.6 per 1,000) relative to the other age groups. In contrast, the foster child rate for

Métis was highest among those aged 0 to 4 (15.6 per 1,000) and 5 to 9 (15.6 per 1,000) and for Inuit among those aged 5 to 9 (39.2 per 1,000). As seen in Table 4, the rates of foster children by gender were similar across groups aside for Inuit children where there were more girls (35.6 per 1,000) than boys in foster care (32.0 per 1,000).

The disparity in foster child rates between First Nations and Métis children compared to non-Indigenous children was similar across genders whereas the disparity in foster child rates between Inuit and non-Indigenous children was higher among girls (15.6) than among boys (13.8) (Table 5).

Across all Indigenous identity groups, the disparity in foster child rates when compared with non-Indigenous children was greater among Indigenous children aged 5 to 9, compared to children aged 0 to 4 and 10 to 14. For example, the foster child rate for Inuit children aged 5 to 9 was 19.6 times higher than the foster child rate for non-Indigenous children within the same age group, whereas the rates for Inuit children aged 0 to 4 and 10 to 14 were 14.8 and 10.6 times higher than the non-Indigenous foster child rate, respectively.

Table 4. Rate of foster children (per 1,000 children) aged 14 and under in private households by Indigenous identity and select sociodemographic characteristics, Canada, 2021

	Children in foster care				
	First Nations children	Métis children	Inuit children	Total Indigenous children ¹	Non-Indigenous children
	rate per 1,000 children				
Provinces and Territories					
Newfoundland and Labrador	18.1	0.0	75.4	24.6	4.9
Prince Edward Island	19.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	1.5
Nova Scotia	11.7	0.0	0.0	7.8	3.3
New Brunswick	24.1	13.6	0.0	19.3	5.2
Quebec	29.1	7.0	78.4	28.9	4.6
Ontario	24.7	6.2	31.0	19.1	1.3
Manitoba	76.7	33.5	153.8	61.8	2.3
Saskatchewan	34.3	13.8	0.0	28.5	1.5
Alberta	52.8	11.7	10.9	35.1	1.2
British Columbia	40.8	14.9	0.0	32.0	1.3
Yukon	30.9	0.0	0.0	27.0	2.1
Northwest Territories	25.5	16.1	12.9	21.3	2.8
Nunavut	0.0	..	10.4	10.2	0.0
Population Centre					
Rural area	40.7	15.2	27.1	33.6	4.7
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)	41.0	13.5	31.6	31.6	3.0
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)	37.5	8.3	25.2	26.4	2.8
Large urban population centre (100,000 or greater)	44.4	16.6	80.1	33.5	1.5
Residence on or off reserve					
On reserve	24.6	23.4	222.2	24.9	4.8
Off reserve	49.9	14.3	32.6	34.3	2.3
Inside or outside Inuit Nunangat					
Inside Inuit Nunangat	0.0	0.0	18.8	18.0	0.0
Outside Inuit Nunangat	41.4	14.4	79.1	32.8	2.3
Gender²					
Boy+	41.4	14.4	32.0	32.4	2.3
Girl+	41.4	14.4	35.6	32.2	2.3
Age group					
0 to 4 years	35.2	15.6	34.2	29.1	2.3
5 to 9 years	42.3	15.6	39.2	33.5	2.0
10 to 14 years	45.6	12.2	27.1	33.9	2.6

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

2. Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Boy+" includes boys as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Girl+" includes girls as well as some non-binary persons.

Note: Foster child rates among Métis and Inuit children living on reserve should be interpreted with caution as they are based on small cell counts of 30 or less.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 5
Disparity in foster child rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children aged 14 and under in private households by Indigenous identity and select sociodemographic characteristics, Canada, 2021

	Disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates			
	First Nations children	Métis children	Inuit children	Total Indigenous children ¹
	rate ratios			
Provinces and Territories				
Newfoundland and Labrador	3.7	0.0	15.4	5.0
Prince Edward Island	12.4	0.0	0.0	8.1
Nova Scotia	3.5	0.0	0.0	2.3
New Brunswick	4.6	2.6	0.0	3.7
Quebec	6.3	1.5	16.9	6.2
Ontario	19.3	4.9	24.3	15.0
Manitoba	32.7	14.3	65.5	26.3
Saskatchewan	23.6	9.5	0.0	19.6
Alberta	43.4	9.6	8.9	28.9
British Columbia	30.2	11.1	0.0	23.7
Yukon	14.7	0.0	0.0	12.9
Northwest Territories	9.0	5.7	4.5	7.5
Nunavut	..	..	..	..
Population Centre				
Rural area	8.7	3.2	5.8	7.2
Small population centre (1,000 to 29,999)	13.8	4.5	10.6	10.6
Medium population centre (30,000 to 99,999)	13.3	3.0	9.0	9.4
Large urban population centre (100,000 or greater)	30.2	11.3	54.5	22.8
Residence on or off reserve				
On reserve	5.1	4.8	45.9	5.1
Off reserve	21.7	6.2	14.2	14.9
Inside or outside Inuit Nunangat				
Inside Inuit Nunangat	..	..	..	..
Outside Inuit Nunangat	18.0	6.3	34.4	14.3
Gender²				
Boy+	17.9	6.2	13.8	14.0
Girl+	18.2	6.3	15.6	14.1
Age group				
0 to 4 years	15.3	6.8	14.8	12.6
5 to 9 years	21.0	7.8	19.6	16.6
10 to 14 years	17.8	4.8	10.6	13.2

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

2. Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Boy+" includes boys as well as some non-binary persons, while the category "Girl+" includes girls as well as some non-binary persons.

Note: Disparity statistics for Métis and Inuit foster children living in foster households on reserve should be interpreted with caution as they are based on rates where the numerator is quite small (i.e., counts of 30 or below).

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Inuit children in foster care in 2021 were eight times more likely than non-Indigenous children in foster care to live in dwellings with bedroom shortfalls of three or more

Disparity in housing suitability between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children not in foster care, as documented in other research (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2017a), as reported here, persists among children in foster care. While 87.2% of non-Indigenous children in foster care lived in suitable dwellings, proportionally far fewer Inuit (69.9%), First Nations (73.8%), and Métis (79.3%) children in foster care lived in suitable housing in 2021 (Table 6). Compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, First Nations (4.0%) and Métis (4.0%) foster children were three times more likely to live in dwellings with bedroom shortfalls of three or more, while Inuit foster children were eight times (9.8%) more likely to do so. The higher percentages of unsuitable (crowded) housing among Indigenous children may reflect the housing disparities experienced by Indigenous people and specifically First Nations people living on reserve and Inuit in Inuit Nunangat (Assembly of

First Nations, 2018; Inuit Tapiriit Kantami, 2016; Perreault, Dufresne, Potvin, & Riva, 2022). Indeed, First Nations foster children living on reserve compared to off reserve and Inuit foster children living in Inuit Nunangat compared to outside Inuit Nunangat were more likely to live in dwellings with bedroom shortfalls and in need of major repairs (data not shown).

First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in foster care were roughly two times more likely to live in dwellings in need of major repairs in 2021 compared with non-Indigenous children in foster care

When examining dwelling adequacy, a higher percentage of First Nations (16.1%), Métis (11.4%) and Inuit (15.0%) children in foster care lived in inadequate dwellings (i.e., in need of major repairs) compared with non-Indigenous children (6.7%). Generally, Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in foster care were more likely to live in dwellings in need of regular maintenance or minor repairs than in dwellings in need of major repairs in 2021 (Table 6).

Table 6
Percentage distribution of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-Indigenous children aged 14 and under in foster care in private households, by housing suitability and housing adequacy, Canada, 2021

	Children in foster care				
	First Nations children	Métis children	Inuit children	Total Indigenous children ¹	Non-Indigenous children
	percent				
Housing suitability					
Suitable	73.8	79.3	69.9	74.6	87.2
Unsuitable	26.2	20.5	30.1	25.4	12.8
One bedroom shortfall	15.9	10.4	14.4	14.9	8.8
Two bedroom shortfall	6.3	6.3	5.9	6.2	2.6
Three or more bedroom shortfall	4.0	4.0	9.8	4.3	1.3
Housing adequacy					
Regular maintenance needed	49.6	61.4	54.9	51.8	62.7
Minor repairs are needed	34.3	27.0	30.1	33.1	30.5
Major repairs needed	16.1	11.4	15.0	15.1	6.7

1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Note: Due to random rounding of counts in this table, the sum of all percentages calculated using those counts may not equal 100%.

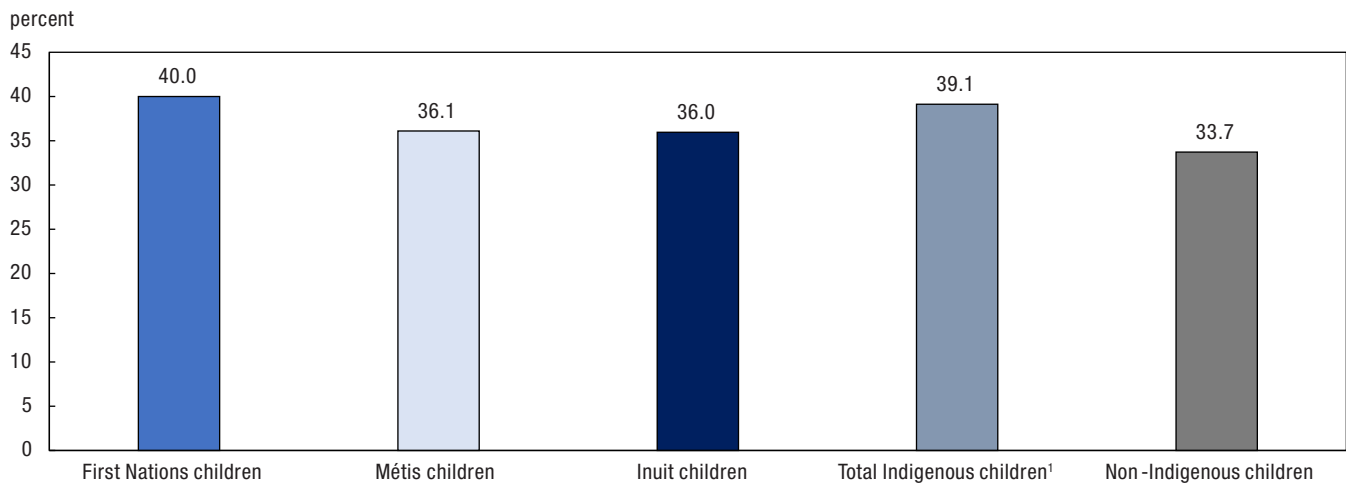
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Roughly two-fifths of Indigenous children in foster care lived in low-income households in 2021

To explore the socioeconomic conditions of the households in which foster children live, the after-tax low-income measure (LIM-AT) was used to assess whether the household income is below the low-income line. As seen in Chart 3, First Nation (40.0%), Métis (36.1%) and Inuit (36.0%) children in foster care were more likely to reside in households with income below the low-income cut-off compared with non-Indigenous children in foster care (33.7%). A similar pattern was seen in 2011 and 2016 among Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children (data not shown). This finding should be interpreted in the context of limitations around the LIM-AT measure in that the LIM is based on national median income and not the median income for the province or territory. Median incomes and rent and food costs vary considerably from one province to another and even between cities and regions with costs particularly high in the North.

Chart 3

Prevalence of after-tax low-income (LIM-AT) among private households with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-Indigenous foster children aged 14 and under, Canada, 2021



1. Total Indigenous children includes multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e.

Notes: Prevalence of after-tax low income includes households on-reserve and in the Territories (refer to methods section for more information). Estimates associated with this variable are more affected than most by the incomplete enumeration of certain reserves and settlements in the Census of Population. The reference period for low-income data is the calendar year 2020.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Just over half of First Nations and Inuit children and three-fifths of Métis children in foster care lived with non-Indigenous foster parent(s)

Knowledge of and connection to one’s cultural identity and historical background is critical to the well-being of Indigenous children (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012) and specifically those in foster care who benefit from a deep understanding of their culture and connections to their communities (McMahon, Reck, & Walker, 2007; Quinn, 2019, 2022). The importance of children living in culturally appropriate environments where they can gain cultural knowledge, develop a strong sense of belonging and cultural identity is well documented (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a; United Nations, 2007). In cases where a child must be removed from their home, a placement home should be “rooted in the traditions and values of the child’s Aboriginal community“ (Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, 2023), which might be best facilitated through a foster parent that shares the foster child’s cultural identity.

Among the 11,735 First Nations children in foster care in 2021, 40.7% were living with at least one First Nations foster parent, 8.6% were living with at least one Indigenous foster parent who was of a different Indigenous identity while over half (50.6%) were living with non-Indigenous foster parents (Table 7). Similar distributions were seen among Inuit children in foster care. Of the 765 Inuit foster children, 35.9% were living with at least one Inuit foster parent, 12.4% with at least one Indigenous foster parent of a different Indigenous identity, and over half (51.6%) were living with foster parents who were non-Indigenous. A smaller proportion (27.5%) of the 1,980 Métis children in foster care were living with at least one Métis foster parent, and more than three-fifths (63.4%) were living with non-Indigenous foster parents.

Table 7
Percentage of Indigenous foster children aged 14 and under in private households by Indigenous identity of foster parent, Canada, 2021

Children in foster care	Indigenous identity of foster parents	Percent
First Nations children	Total	100.0
	First Nations foster parent	40.7
	Indigenous foster parent ¹	8.6
	Non-Indigenous foster parent	50.6
Métis children	Total	100.0
	Métis foster parent	27.5
	Indigenous foster parent ¹	9.1
	Non-Indigenous foster parent	63.4
Inuit children	Total	100.0
	Inuit foster parent	35.9
	Indigenous foster parent ¹	12.4
	Non-Indigenous foster parent	51.6

1. Indigenous foster parent denotes a foster parent that had a different Indigenous identity from that of the Indigenous foster child. Indigenous foster parent includes cases where the foster parent had multiple identities regardless of whether these multiple identities included the same identity as that of the foster child. For example, if a foster child is First Nations, and their foster parent identified themselves as First Nations and Métis (multiple identities), then they are included in the "Indigenous foster parent" category.

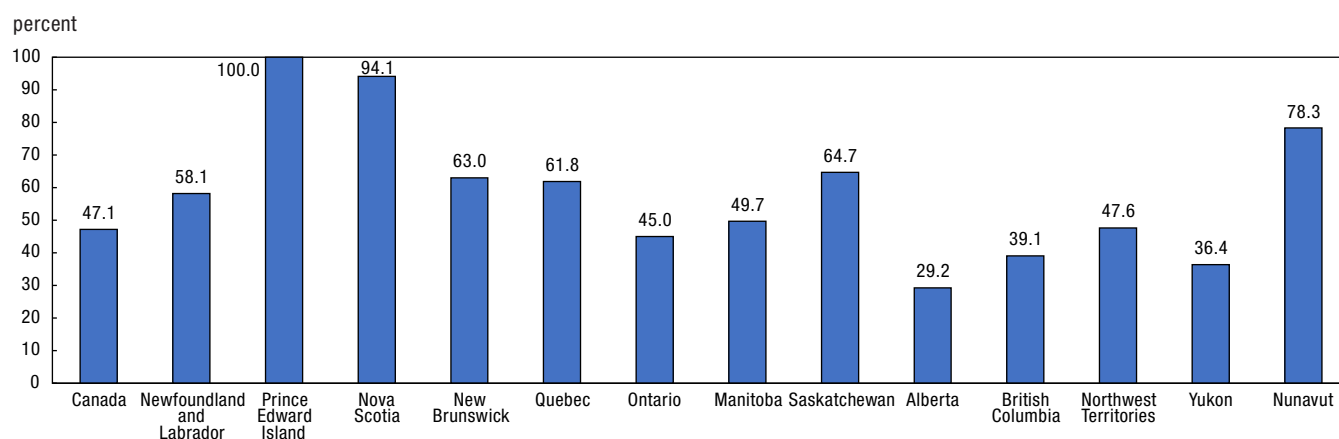
Note: Due to random rounding of counts in this table, the sum of all percentages calculated using those counts may not equal 100%.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021

A higher percentage of Indigenous children with at least one Indigenous foster parent lived outside of large urban population centres, in select Atlantic provinces and Nunavut

The percentage of Indigenous children living with at least one Indigenous foster parent, with or without the same Indigenous identity, varied across provinces and territories (Chart 4). Prince Edward Island (100%), Nova Scotia (94.1%) and Nunavut (78.3%) had the highest percentages of Indigenous foster children in the care of at least one Indigenous foster parent. Alberta (29.2%), Yukon (36.4%), and British Columbia (39.1%) had the lowest percentages of Indigenous children in the care of at least one Indigenous foster parent. Indigenous children in foster care were more likely to live with at least one Indigenous foster parent outside of large urban population centres. Over half of First Nations (57.8%), Métis (52.1%) and Inuit (53.1%) children in the care of at least one Indigenous foster parent lived in rural areas. Fewer First Nations (36.4%), Métis (18.6%) and Inuit (14.3%) children in the care of at least one Indigenous parent lived in large urban population centres (data not shown).

Chart 4
Percentage of Indigenous children aged 14 and under living with at least one Indigenous foster parent by province and territory, Canada, 2021



Notes: Indigenous foster parent denotes one or more foster parent(s) that had the same or a different Indigenous identity from that of the Indigenous foster child. This includes cases where the foster parent(s) had multiple identities regardless of whether these multiple identities included the same identity as that of the foster child. For example, if a foster child is First Nations, and their foster parent identifies as First Nations and Métis (multiple identities), then they are included in the "Indigenous foster parent" category. Multiple Indigenous responses and Indigenous responses n.i.e. are included in counts for Indigenous children. Due to random rounding of counts in this chart, the sum of all percentages calculated using those counts may not equal 100%.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Summary and Conclusion

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in foster care increased between 2011 and 2021. In particular, the total proportion of Indigenous children in care was nearly six percentage points higher in 2021 (53.7%) than in 2011 (47.8%). Disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates also increased during this period because of a decrease in the number of non-Indigenous foster children and an increase in the number of Indigenous foster children.

The increase in disparity from 2011 to 2021 was seen across all three Indigenous groups with the largest among Inuit. Foster child rates among Inuit children trended upwards between 2011 and 2021 as did disparity with their non-Indigenous counterparts. First Nations foster child rates were highest across all three time periods although a declining trend was seen from 2011 to 2021. However, the ratio of foster child rates between First Nations and non-Indigenous children, saw an upward trend between 2011 and 2021 with disparity in rates between First Nations and non-Indigenous children in foster care was 15.6 times greater in 2011 and 18.2 times greater in 2021. A similar pattern in disparity rates between Métis and non-Indigenous foster children was observed with a more moderate incline across cycles (i.e., disparity in rates were 5.8 times greater in 2011 and 6.2 times greater in 2021).

While the foster child rate was higher among Indigenous children in Manitoba (per 1,000 children), the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster child rates was highest in Alberta due to lower rates of non-Indigenous children in foster care relative to Indigenous children. Generally, disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children was highest in the Western provinces. Among First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, foster child rates were higher in large urban areas and higher among First Nations children living off reserve and Inuit children living outside Inuit Nunangat in 2021.

In 2021, foster child rates were highest among Métis children aged 0 to 4 and 5 to 9 and among Inuit children aged 5 to 9. Foster child rates among First Nations children were highest among the oldest age group, those aged 10 to 14.

Most Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children in 2021 were living in dwellings that were suitable and adequate; however, a higher percentage of non-Indigenous children in foster care lived in adequate and suitable housing compared with their Indigenous counterparts. The housing conditions of children are key to their developmental growth, health and well-being (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012) with disparities highlighting the need to ensure safe and healthy living environments (Blackstock, 2007; De Leeuw & Greenwood, 2017).

In 2021, higher percentages of Indigenous foster children (39.1%) compared to non-Indigenous foster children (33.7%) were living in households with income below the low-income cut-off. Previous research has found slightly higher rates of poverty among children living in foster homes compared with children living with their parents (Pac, Waldfogel, & Wimer, 2017). The study revealed that when excluding foster care and severance payments, the odds of being in poverty was significantly higher among children who lived in foster care than those who lived with their parents, highlighting the importance of foster care payments provided to families with foster children. Future research is needed to determine what factors underlie the low-income prevalence among private households found in this study and the possible implications thereof on the well-being of foster children. It is important to note that public health measures, during the COVID-19 pandemic, may have resulted in unemployment and reduced or eliminated material resources that may have impacted household income during this time period (Hanlon et al., 2022; Whitt-Woosley, Sprang, & Eslinger, 2022).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b) and the United Nations (2007) highlight the importance of traditional cultural values on child development. Placing Indigenous children with families who identify culturally with them can be one way to foster cultural identity and connection (Quinn, 2019; Simard, 2009). Findings show that over half of First Nations and Inuit children and three-fifths of Métis children lived with a non-Indigenous foster parents in 2021. In contrast to findings from a study using the 2011 NHS (Turner, 2016), the percentage of First Nations and Métis foster children who were living with at least one Indigenous foster parent in 2021 increased by 2 and 12 percentage points, respectively, while among Inuit where there was a 4 percentage point decrease in the percentage of children in the care of at least one Indigenous foster parent. More research is needed to explain what factors may underlie this decrease.

Reducing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is a critical reconciliation commitment as per the *Calls to Action* set forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b) as is the need for consistent and standardized data collection across jurisdictions. Researchers have noted the importance of evidence-based practice which requires reliable and valid data to better understand child welfare services and their impact (Fallon et al., 2017). While not without limitations, these data offer insights on persistent overrepresentation of Indigenous children in foster care.¹⁴ The Government of Canada (2019) and child welfare systems (see Schmid & Morgenshtern, 2022) have made formalized steps through recent legislation and policy to affirm Indigenous self-determination over child and family services. Indigenous groups are best placed to ensure the well-being of Indigenous children through adherence to principles such as cultural safety.¹⁵ Advocates note that more work is needed in the application of cultural safety practices and models to better serve Indigenous children (De Leeuw & Greenwood, 2017; National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2017b).

Acknowledgments

This study was funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). We extend our gratitude to colleagues, both internal and external to Statistics Canada, who lent their expertise in reviewing this paper. A very special thanks to the Assembly of First Nations and Congress of Aboriginal Peoples whose insights and perspectives have enriched this paper.

Statistics Canada recognizes the historical and ongoing processes of colonialism and the need for systemic changes to address the harmful impacts that have created and continue to create disparities and inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. We remain strongly committed to working collaboratively to shed light on the negative impacts of colonialism and to advance reconciliation in Canada.

14. A recent study by Pollock et al. (2024) used national child welfare administrative data to describe the child and youth population in out-of-home care in Canada. Although this research did not disaggregate data by Indigenous identity, it does provide a window into other sources of data that can be used to improve our understanding of the inequalities, inequities, and disparities within the child welfare system.

15. Cultural safety is borrowed here from De Leeuw and Greenwood (2017, p. 146) who define it as “a means of broadening and solidifying decolonizing discourses, especially in the realms of child welfare”. In the service delivery context it is defined as a form of “critical consciousness” where service providers and organizations engage in a continuous process of “self-reflection and self-awareness and hold themselves accountable” to culturally safe care as defined by those who receive services and their communities with the goal of reduced bias and improved equity (Curtis et al., 2019, p. 188).

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