

Demographic Changes in Nunavik 2006-2016

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1. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The aim of this analysis is to outline the trends in the demographic evolution of the population of Nunavik over the last ten years and to compare these trends with those observed in Quebec as a whole. The main sources used for this analysis are the Statistics Canada censuses of 2006 and 2016, supplemented by other sources of demographic data, notably the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

2. POPULATION GROWTH CONTINUES

Between 2006 and 2016, the population of Nunavik grew by 2,385, an increase of 22% (Table 1). The main reason for this increase is in all likelihood the region's high birth rate, which, in 2016, was 25.4 live births per 1,000 people. In comparison, the birth rate in the province of Quebec is 10.4, and population growth between 2006 and 2016 was 8.2%. Thus, if Quebec's population had increased at the same rate as Nunavik's over the last ten years, the province's population would already have passed the 9 million mark. This trend among the Nunavik Inuit is also observed in other groups of indigenous people in Canada: taken together, indigenous peoples constitute the segment of the Canadian population with the highest population growth [1].

3. A YOUNG POPULATION

This marked difference between the birth rates in Nunavik and in Quebec as a whole results in very different population structures. Quebec's population structure adheres to the trend observed in many so-called "western" countries: youth make up a small proportion of the population, while older people tend to occupy an increasing proportion (Figure 1). Thus, Quebec's age pyramid looks something like a barrel; and if the aging of the population continues, it will gradually assume the form of an inverted pear under the combined effect of the shrinking proportion of young people and the increasing proportion of the elderly [2]. In Quebec, young people under the age of 15 accounted for 16% of the population in 2016, while people aged 60 and over accounted for 25% of the population. The population structure of Nunavik is altogether different;

it more closely resembles that of certain "southern countries" than that of Quebec (Figure 2). The proportion of young people is much greater: one third of the population of Nunavik is under 15 years of age, while those aged 60 and over account for only 6% of the total population. Thus, owing to this youthful population and the low demographic weight of the elderly, Nunavik's age pyramid looks more like a real pyramid.

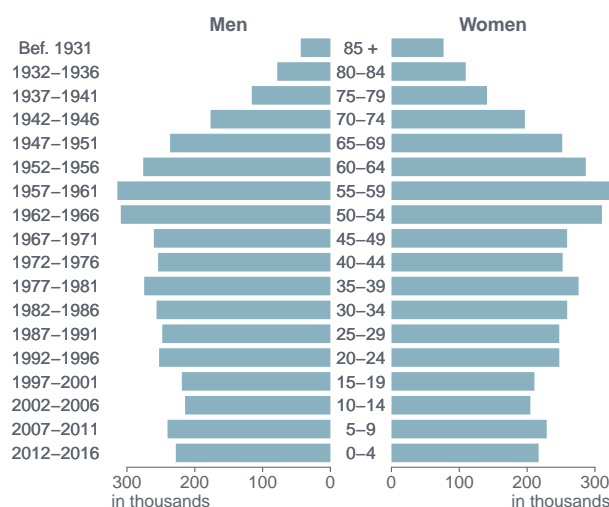
4. GROWING VILLAGES

The population of every village in Nunavik increased between 2006 and 2016 (Table 1). The largest growth was observed in Tasiujaq (49%), followed by Kuujuaq (29%), while the lowest growth was in Umiujaq (12.8%). The demographic data by village also show that Nunavik's population tends to be concentrated: the five most populous villages account for two-thirds of the region's entire population.

5. FLUCTUATIONS IN THE FEMALE POPULATION

The proportion of women in Nunavik in 2016 (49.3%) was lower than in Quebec as a whole (50.8%) (Table 1). The situation also varies from community to community:

Figure 1
Distribution of the population by five-year age groups, Quebec, 2016 (in thousands)



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Figure 2

Distribution of the population by five-year age groups, Nunavik, 2016 (in hundreds)

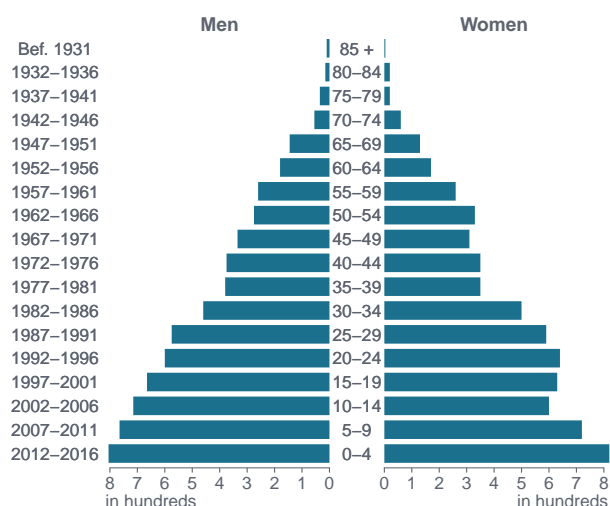


Table 1

Population by village in ascending order by population size and changes in the proportion of women, Nunavik, 2006 and 2016 (N and %)

Community	Population		Female
	2006	2016	2006-2016
	<i>N</i>		<i>PP</i>
Aupaluk	175	210	-3.3
Tasiujaq	245	365	-3.7
Quaqtaq	315	400	-0.8
Ivujivik	350	415	-3.5
Umiujaq	390	440	-0.1
Kangirsuk	465	570	-4.0
Akulivik	505	630	-1.7
Kuujuarapik	570	685	-0.7
Kangiqtujuq	605	750	-1.9
Kangiqtualujjuq	735	945	0.8
Salluit	1,245	1,480	0.5
Inukjuak	1,600	1,755	0.9
Puvirnituq	1,460	1,780	2.4
Kuujuaq	2,135	2,755	1.1
Nunavik	10,815	13,180	0.1

Umiujaq and the two most populous communities, Puvirnituq and Kuujuaq, all have a higher proportion of women than in Quebec. But all the other communities have a lower proportion of women than Quebec, and the gap is widening in Aupaluk, Kangirsuk, Kuujuarapik and Akulivik. What's more, the proportion of women seems to have evolved differently from one community to another between 2006 and 2016: it increased in the four most populous communities but generally declined in the smaller communities.

The differences observed in the proportion of women between Quebec and the Nunavik communities may be explained by several factors. One could be the difference in life expectancy, which is higher in Quebec (81.7 years) than in Nunavik (66.8 years) [3]–[5]. As women tend to live longer than men, they tend to be slightly over-represented in populations with higher life expectancy [6]. A second factor may be derived from the fact that Nunavik's population is young. In general, there are slightly more boys at birth than girls, which may slightly affect the ratio of women in Nunavik communities [7]. A third factor could be linked to the mobility of women: female migration patterns have been observed in some circumpolar Arctic communities [8]–[10]. These movements are said to be caused by several factors, but are generally motivated by the search for better living conditions. This may explain why the two largest communities are the ones where the proportion of women increased the most between 2006 and 2016: these communities also have the lowest unemployment rates in the region [11].

6. A POPULATION IN DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

The evolution of the population of Nunavik over the last 10 years continues to be characterized by significant growth compared to that of Quebec as a whole, but the long-term trend suggests that Nunavik's population growth is gradually slowing down: the birth rate was 26.0 in 2006, whereas it was 25.4 in 2016 [12]. As a result, Nunavik's population is slowly aging, with the median age rising from 21.8 in 2006 to 23.5 in 2016. The same transition can also be observed in the distribution of the population by age group: between 2006 and 2016, the proportion of young people under 15 decreased slightly, while the weight of other age groups increased slightly. These observations suggest that the population of Nunavik is gradually entering a new phase in the demographic transition process: while the population continues to grow under the combined effect of a high birth rate and low mortality, that growth is slowly decreasing owing to a decline in the birth rate [2].

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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