

The Elders of Nunavik – A Snapshot of the Socio-Economic Situation

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1. OBJECTIVES AND SOURCES

The aim of this analysis is to briefly present the principal demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the elders living in Nunavik. When possible, these are compared with the socio-economic and demographic characteristics observed in Quebec as a whole. The elders of Nunavik are here defined as comprising the Aboriginal population aged 65 and over. The main source of data is the 2016 Canadian Census is, along with other data from previous census cycles and other Statistics Canada publications.

2. A GROWING POPULATION

In 20 years, the Aboriginal population aged 65 and over has more than doubled in Nunavik: from 200 persons in 1996, the number of elders increased to 415 in 2016 (Figure 1). Of these, the number of women was slightly lower than the number of men. The proportion of elders in Nunavik’s population underwent a slightly higher annual growth rate compared to that of Quebec as a whole (Table 1).^[2] Nevertheless, the proportion of elders in Nunavik’s population remained six times lower in 2016 than that in Quebec overall.

3. LARGE NUMBER OF LONE PARENTS

Half of the elders in Nunavik live with a spouse or a common-law partner, a slightly lower proportion than that observed among seniors in Quebec as a whole. However, one in five elders in the region heads a single-parent family, a proportion that is five times higher than that found among seniors in Quebec as a whole (Table 1). Among these single-parent families headed by an elder, 75% are headed by a woman. Relatively few elders in Nunavik live alone. In fact, this situation is almost four times less frequent in Nunavik than it is among seniors in Quebec overall.

4. FREQUENCY OF HOUSING IN POOR CONDITION

Like the rest of the region’s Aboriginal population, a large proportion of Nunavik’s elders live in poor housing conditions. Compared with seniors in Quebec as a whole, Nunavik’s elders are eight times more likely to live in housing that is unsuitable^[3] for the size of their household and four times more likely to occupy a dwelling that requires major repairs.

Figure 1
Structure of the Aboriginal population of Nunavik, 1996 and 2016

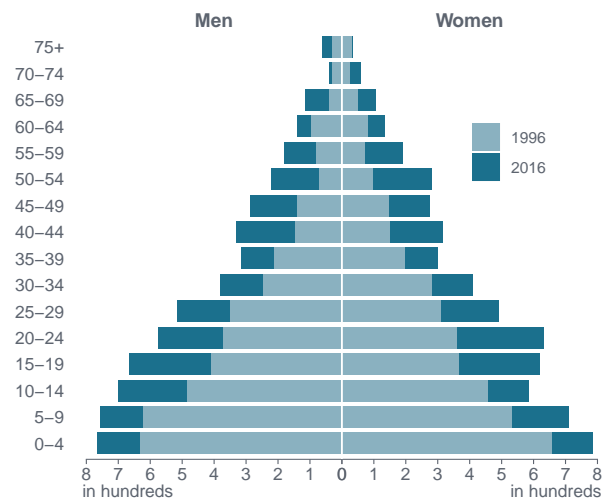
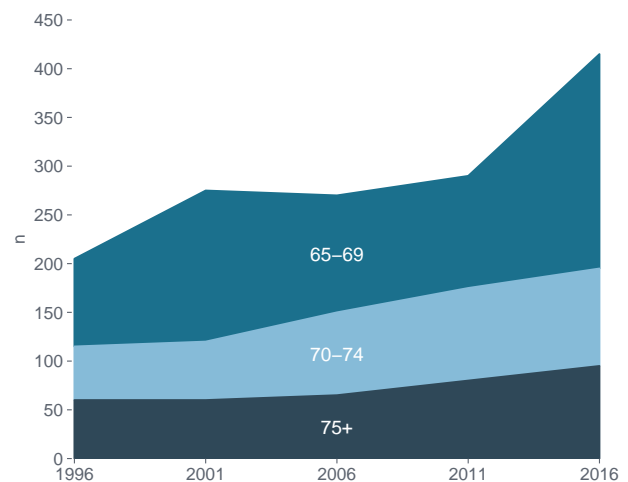


Figure 2
Persons aged 65 and over in the Aboriginal population of Nunavik, 1996-2016



5. WIDESPREAD BILINGUALISM AND LOW LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION

Inuktitut is the mother tongue of almost all of Nunavik’s elders (98.8%), as well as the language most commonly

spoken at home (97.6%). In addition to Inuktitut, a majority of elders (60.2%) say that they know English well enough to be able to hold a conversation. In terms of formal education, about three-quarters of the elders in Nunavik have no diploma, a proportion 2.3 times higher than among seniors 65 and over in Quebec as a whole (Table 1).

6. CONTINUED PAID EMPLOYMENT

A quarter of the elders in Nunavik hold a job, a proportion that is twice as high as that exhibited by seniors in Quebec as a whole (Table 1). In fact, between the ages of 65 and 69, employment income continues to represent half of the total income of elders in Nunavik and a quarter of the income of those aged 70 to 74. In Nunavik, the contribution of employment income to elders' total income is proportionally twice as high as it is in Québec as a whole (Table 1).

7. INCOME COMPOSITION

In 2016, the median income of elders in Nunavik was \$28,821 after tax (Table 1). This income decreases with age (Figure 3). Elders' total income comes from three main sources: employment income, transfer income and other types of market income, including private pension plans. Employment income decreases with age. The opposite is the case with transfer income: it increases with age and at 70 it constitutes the main source of total income (Figure 6 and 7). Employment income represents a higher proportion of total income for men than for women, regardless of the age group. Among women, on the other hand, transfer income together with other types of market income, including private pension plans, represent a higher proportion of total income (Figures 4 and 5).

8. NUNAVIK'S SPECIFICITY

Comparing the income of elders in Nunavik to that of seniors in Quebec as a whole reveals certain characteristics that are specific to the region. Employment income is higher in Nunavik, regardless of the age group (Figure 6 and 7). As for income from government transfer payments, it is lower in Nunavik until age 69; but beyond that point, transfer income becomes higher in Nunavik. In addition, 12% of the elders in Nunavik receive benefits for dependent children, compared to 0.1% of seniors in Quebec. Furthermore, the Quebec solidarity tax credit is increased in Nunavik to offset the impact of the high cost of living. Finally, whatever the age group, other market income, including private pension plans, always contributes less to the make-up of the income of Nunavik's elders. More generally, the median income is slightly higher in Nunavik,

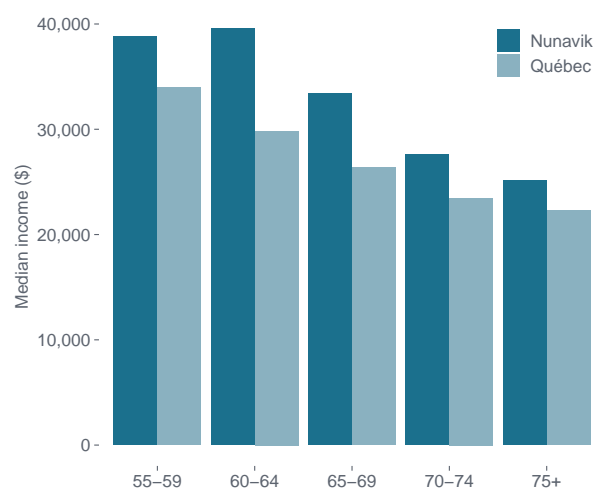
Table 1

Selected indicators for persons aged 65 and over, Aboriginal population of Nunavik and total population of Québec, 2016^[4]

Indicators	Nunavik	Québec
Share of the population (%)	3.5	18.3
Annual growth rate (%)	3.7	2.8
Lone parents (%)	19.3	3.9
Living with spouse (%)	51.8	59.6
Living alone (%)	8.4	30.2
In unsuitable housing (%)	31.3	3.9
Without degree (%)	77.1	32.6
Employment rate (%)	24.1	10.7
Employment share of income (%)	41.5	13.9
Median income (\$, after tax)	28,821	23,576
Adjusted median income (\$, after tax)	20,549	23,576

Figure 3

Total median income after tax by age, Aboriginal population of Nunavik and Québec as a whole, 2016



even if the gap between Nunavik and Quebec decreases with age (Figure 3). However, when adjusted to take into account the cost of living index in Nunavik, the median income of elders there is no longer higher than that of seniors in Quebec; on the contrary, it is about 13% lower (Table 1).

9. DISCUSSION

Elders in Nunavik will continue to make up an increasingly large part of the region's population, due in large

Figure 4

Income composition by age, Aboriginal population of Nunavik, 2016

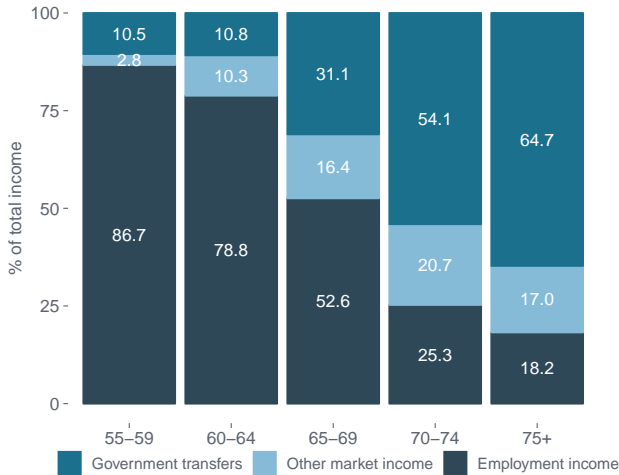


Figure 5

Income composition by age, Québec as a whole, 2016

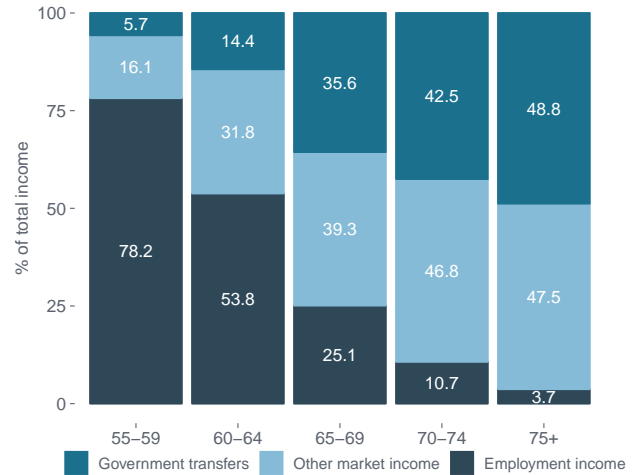


Figure 6

Income composition of women by age, Aboriginal population, Nunavik, 2016

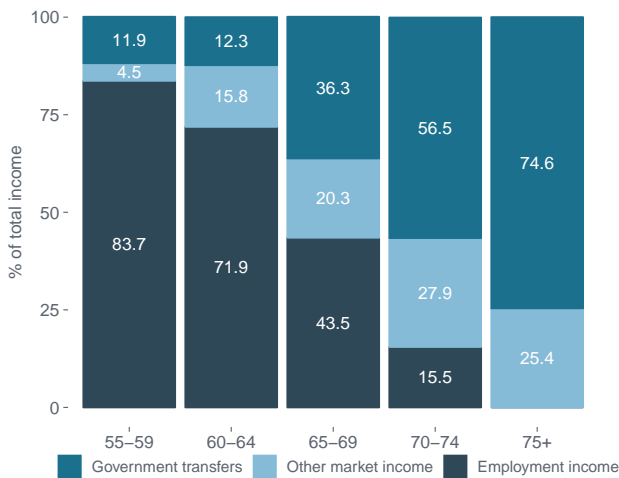
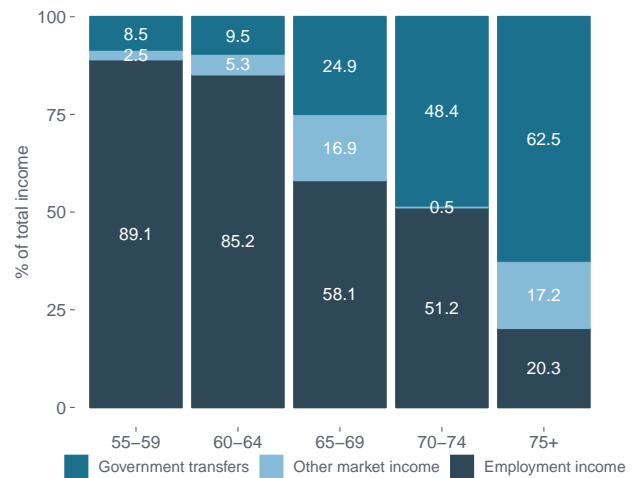


Figure 7

Income composition of men by age, Aboriginal population, Nunavik, 2016



part to a declining trend in the birth rate, the aging of many other cohorts and an increase in life expectancy^[5;6]. This situation could have significant repercussions on the demand for public services, particularly in the areas of housing and health. Elders tend to remain within the family unit more often here than in the rest of Québec, a phenomenon that may be linked to intergenerational solidarity or to the housing situation in the region^[7;8]. The median income level of elders is likely associated with the fact that many of them continue to be employed. The

reasons for this involve factors related to both sides of the family budget: expenses and income. Regarding expenses, remaining employed is likely linked to the burden of family responsibilities, the costs of which are amplified by the high cost of living in Nunavik^[9]. On the income side, retaining a job may well be related to the significant limits of retirement pension plans. Private plans are not offered by all employers and, just as with the Québec Pension Plan, they are only available to those who have previously contributed. Moreover, these pensions do not

take into account the high cost of living in Nunavik. This situation is even more difficult within single-parent households, the majority of which are headed by female elders. In order to arrive at a more accurate portrait of the challenges all this poses for the future of Nunavik, an investigation based on a study of elders within their households would be necessary, taking into account the composition of the household by gender and by age, as well as the composition and strata of income.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] Nunivaat analyst, Research Professional, Canada Research Chair on Comparative Aboriginal Condition, and corresponding author
email: sebastien.levesque.11@ulaval.ca.
- [2] Compound annual growth rate based on census data from 1996 to 2016.
- [3] “Housing suitability” refers to whether a private household is living in suitable accommodations according to the National Occupancy Standard (NOS); that is, whether the dwelling has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household.”, see Statistics Canada, 2019.
- [4] The adjusted total income seeks to take into account the higher cost of living in Nunavik. It is calculated using the median total income after tax, reduced by 28.7%, which corresponds to the aggregate cost of living index in Nunavik, see Robitaille et al., 2018.
- [5] Statistics Canada. 2020. Life expectancy, at birth and at age 65, by sex, three-year average, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions and peer groups. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310006301>.
- [6] Institut de la statistique du Québec. 2018. Naissances, décès, accroissement naturel et mariages par région administrative, Québec. [http://www.bdso.gouv.qc.ca/pls/ken/ken213_afich_tabl.page_tabl?p_iden_tran=REPERVETGDF34-8002305210\]Le9&p_lang=1&p_id_raprt=703](http://www.bdso.gouv.qc.ca/pls/ken/ken213_afich_tabl.page_tabl?p_iden_tran=REPERVETGDF34-8002305210]Le9&p_lang=1&p_id_raprt=703).
- [7] Serge Déry and Hamado Zoungrana. 2009. *The housing situation in Nunavik: a public health priority*. Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, Kuujuaq. 15.
- [8] Sarah Rogers. 2017. Survey says Nunavik needs 813 more housing units. https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674survey_says_nunavik_is_short_813_new_housing_units/.
- [9] Jean Robitaille, Enrico Guénard, Sébastien Lévesque, and Gérard Duhaime. 2018. *The Cost of Living in Nunavik - Research Report, Revised and Expanded Version*. Canada Research Chair on Comparative Aboriginal Condition, Québec. 77.

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