

Housing needs in Nunavik: Portrait and Trends

Roberson Édouard, Sébastien Lévesque^[1] and Gérard Duhaime

Translated by Elliott Macklovitch

1. INTRODUCTION

With a relatively young, growing population and better life expectancy at birth than in the past,^[2] the Nunavik region has always faced multiple challenges in terms of housing.^[3;4;5;6] The available literature reports a high level of dissatisfaction with the availability and condition of housing, coupled with the frustration generated by a feeling of powerlessness due to communities' lack of influence over their living conditions.^[7;8;9;10;11]

This report presents a portrait of the housing needs and challenges in Nunavik. It provides an up-to-date synthesis of the data^[12,13,14] and available knowledge on housing and living accommodations in the region.

2. TRENDS IN HOUSING SUPPLY

The development of Nunavik's housing stock has always been limited by geographical, climatic, political and socio-economic constraints. Nevertheless, in 2021, Nunavik had 4,190 private dwellings^[15] occupied by the region's residents;

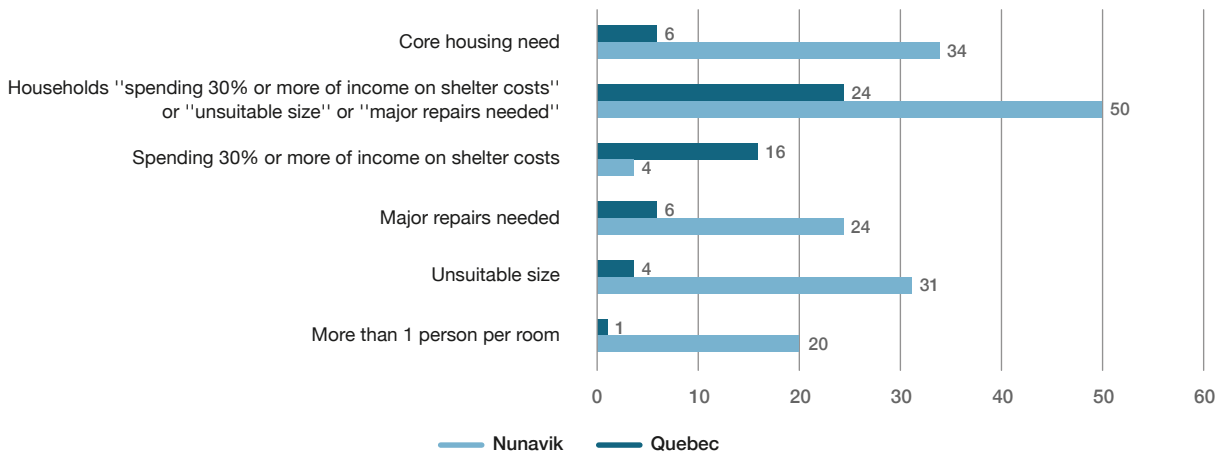
for a population of 14,045 people, that meant an average of 3.5 persons per dwelling. In Quebec as a whole, the average was 2.2 persons per dwelling. Furthermore, the composition of Nunavik's housing stock differs from that of Quebec, both in terms of the types of dwellings and their size.

Compared to the rest of the province, there are few housing options in Nunavik. According to data from the 2021 census, 97% of Nunavimmiut households rent their homes;^[16] less than 3% own them. In Quebec, the corresponding percentages are 40% and 60% respectively.

Nunavimmiut live almost exclusively in social housing, regardless of their family income. To this day, social housing is the most common type of personal residence in the region. In Quebec as a whole, social or subsidized housing is far less widespread.^[17]

In 2021, the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau managed a stock of 3,679 social housing units, of which only 139 were unoccupied and 23 had burned. The Bureau housed more than 80% of the region's families (all categories combined), 10% more than in 2010. In Quebec, as of December 31, 2020, less than 2% of all households (74,328) benefited from a low-rent housing program.^[18]

Figure 1
Distribution of private dwellings, by type of problem, Nunavik and Quebec, 2021 (%)



3. TRENDS IN HOUSING CONDITIONS

Over the years, the expansion of the private housing stock has improved housing conditions in Nunavik, although not sufficiently.

Nunavik continues to face problems in terms of the availability, quality and affordability of housing. In 2021, Statistics Canada estimated the core housing need rate in Nunavik at 34%; the equivalent rate for Quebec was 6% (Figure 1).

4. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Nunavik seems to be less affected by the problem of housing affordability than the rest of the province. In 2021, 4% of Nunavik households spent 30% or more of their income on housing costs, compared to 16% in Quebec (Figure 1). This is due to the fact that most of the residential housing stock in Nunavik consists of social housing.

The picture changes when it comes to access to property. Access remains limited in the region owing to the high costs of building and maintaining housing.^[7] In 2017-2018, it costs an average of \$481,000 to build a new house in Nunavik. At that time, the cost per square foot was estimated at \$353.70. In 2020, the cost of building a one-bedroom dwelling was \$430,000, that of a studio \$510,000, and that of a two-bedroom dwelling \$660,000.^[19]

5. CONDITION OF THE HOUSING STOCK

Most of the private dwellings in Nunavik are in good condition.^[20] However, 24% of them, or 875 private dwellings, are in need of major repairs, a percentage considerably higher than that of Quebec (6%). Although it remains high, Nunavik's 2021 percentage indicates a clear improvement in the regional situation, as the proportion of housing units in need of major repairs has been steadily decreasing since 2006, before reaching the figure of 24% of the Aboriginal housing stock in 2021^[21] (Figure 2).

The data we analyzed also indicate an improvement in housing conditions in terms of overcrowding. In 2021, most homes in the region were of suitable size:^[22] 69% of the housing stock was suitable, compared to 96% in Quebec. The proportion of dwellings with one person or less per room has also increased, going from 67% in 2006 to 80% in 2021 (Figure 3).

Figure 2
Evolution of the condition of Indigenous housing requiring major repairs, Nunavik, 1996-2021 (%)

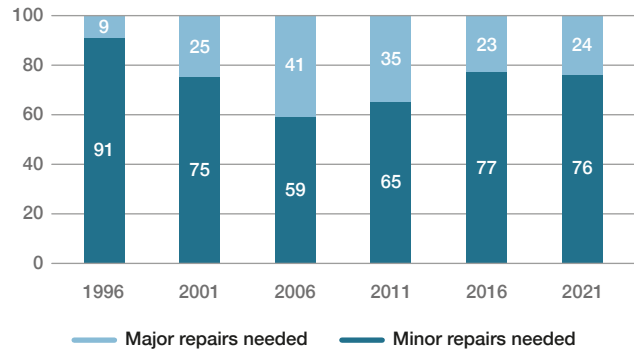


Figure 3
Evolution of Indigenous housing conditions, overcrowding ratio, Nunavik, 1996-2021 (%)

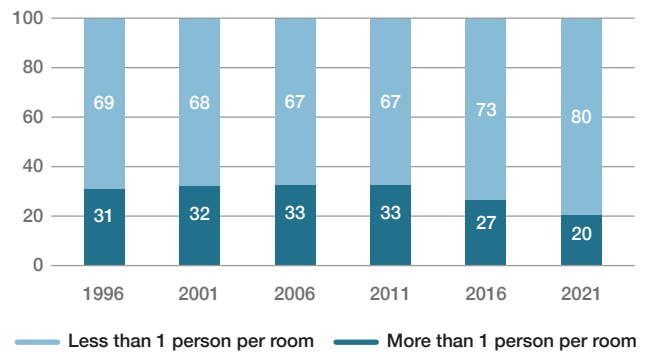
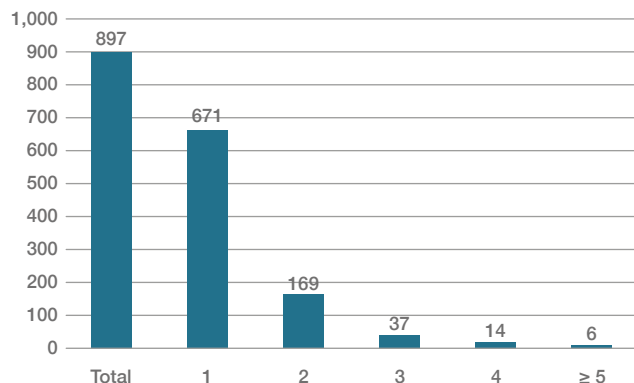


Figure 4
Shortage of housing units, by number of bedrooms, Nunavik, 2021



6. SHORTAGE OF HOUSING

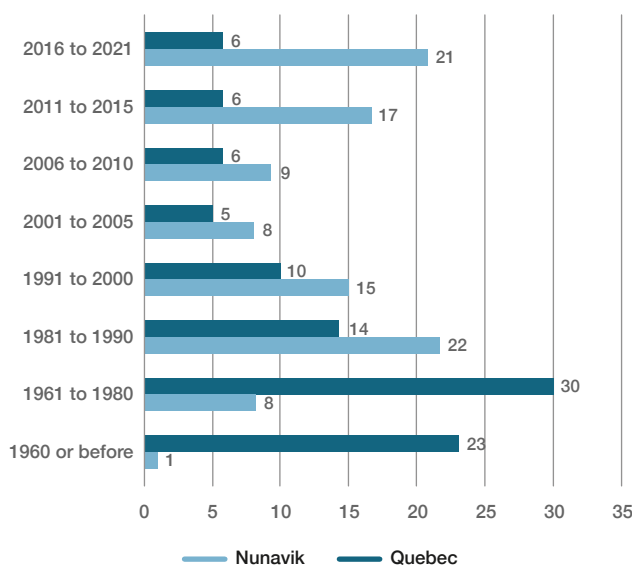
Despite this progress, Nunavik continues to face a housing shortage. In 2021, the ratio of this deficit^[23] decreased by 10 percentage points compared to that of 2010, bringing the shortfall to under 900 housing units^[12] (Table 1).

As illustrated in the following figure, the need is now greater for small dwellings (one to two bedrooms). This seems to indicate a new trend in the way of life in Nunavik, with people increasingly living in smaller, single-family units that are often made up of single-parent women.

Table 1
Changes in housing needs in Nunavik, 2010-2021

	2010	2013	2017	2019	2021
Number of housing units	2,294	2,539	3,061	3,384	3,517
Number of families	3,289	3,531	4,166	4,425	4,410
Ratios (%)	70	72	73	76	80
Housing unit needs	995	992	1,105	1,041	893

Figure 5
Distribution of occupied private dwellings, by construction period, Nunavik and Quebec, 2021 (%)



7. DISCUSSION

The population of Nunavik has faced poor living conditions dating back to the first permanent settlements created in the 1960s by the federal government. This, despite the fact that housing problems and overcrowding represent a significant risk factor for people's physical and psychosocial health, including high rates of tuberculosis, infant mortality, suicide (especially among young people), the risk of early pregnancies, the prevalence of domestic violence (physical and sexual) and other forms of crime, etc.^[7;24;25;26;27]

The data we analyzed indicate that while the housing problems are chronic, they are not irremediable. Over the past decade, we have seen several improvements, both in terms of the housing shortage and the condition of the housing units. However, this progress is limited in scope, notably owing to the demographic trends within the Nunavimmiut population and the lack of funding to develop the regional housing stock.

Population growth and changes in family structure (both in terms of size and composition) are exacerbating the need for housing in the region, especially smaller dwellings for single people or young couples.^[2;28]

While demographic changes have intensified the need for housing, the main reason that the housing shortage persists is because of insufficient public investment in this sector. Indeed, the progress that has been made recently is a consequence of an increase in these investments over the past decade (2010-2022).^[29] More than a third (37%) of the private dwellings occupied in the region in 2021 were built between 2011 and 2021, unlike Quebec where the housing stock is much older (Figure 5). Few private dwellings were built between 2001 and 2010 in Nunavik or between 1994 and 1998.^[30] The federal government, under different administrations, had decided to cut funding for the construction of residential dwellings, despite warnings from the Société d'habitation du Québec in 1993 that a slowdown in the construction of new dwellings would lead to a deterioration in housing conditions in the region.^[31]

Between 1981 and 2021, the SHQ and its various partners contributed to the construction, renovation and management of more than 3,500 housing units in the 14 villages of Nunavik. But these investments have not been sufficient to address the housing deficit. The trends that emerge from our analysis of the data suggest that the housing shortage in Nunavik will not significantly decline unless investments in the sector are intensified and housing construction projects are adapted to the changing needs of the population.

This major investment is necessary to improve the living conditions of the Nunavimmiut population, and thereby guarantee their right to housing, in accordance with Articles 21 and 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- [14] Statistics Canada. 2023. Nunavik [Inuit region], Quebec (table). Indigenous Population Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-510-X2021001. Ottawa. Released June 21, 2023.
- [15] Private dwelling refers to “a separate set of living rooms with a private entrance either from outside the building or from a common hall, corridor, vestibule or staircase located inside the building.” (Statistics Canada, 2017).
- [16] There is no private housing market and those dwellings provided by employers are rather limited in number.
- [17] ISQ (Institut de la statistique du Québec). 2021. *Les indicateurs de l'occupation et de la vitalité des territoires : Nombre de logements sociaux, communautaires et abordables. Québec 2006 à 2020*. [Online]: https://statistique.quebec.ca/docs-ken/vitrine/occupation-vitalite-territoire/documents/habitation_02.pdf
- [18] See: http://www.habitation.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/regroupements/parc_de_logements_sociaux/le_parc_de_logements_sociaux/menages_beneficiant_du_programme_de_logement_sans_but_lucratif_programme_hlm_en_2020_par_volets_et_par_clienteles.html
- [19] See the information leaflet for the Home Ownership Program for Residents of the Kativik Region: http://www.habitation.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/internet/documents/depliant_nunavik.pdf
- [20] In Nunavik, the condition of the housing stock is deteriorating rapidly, due in part to the arid, extreme climate of the northern regions and lack of maintenance.
- [21] In 2006, 35% of the dwellings in Nunavik were in need of major repairs, compared to only 8% in Quebec as a whole. In 2015, the corresponding percentages were 20% and 6% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2017).
- [22] A dwelling is said to be of suitable size if it has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household.

- [23] KMHB (2021) defines the housing deficit as the difference between the number of resident families and the number of housing units available, the objective being to have a private dwelling available for each family.
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- [30] Rather, the investments were devoted to the maintenance of the housing stock. Between 2000 and 2010, the Government of Quebec invested \$171 million in major renovations in Nunavik (SHQ 2014, p. 13).
- [31] Between 1994 and 1998, following the unilateral decision of the federal government to halt long-term funding to the social housing sector in Canada, few social housing units were built in Nunavik (Société d’habitation du Québec 2014).

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