

March 2023



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**CENTRE  
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STUDY OF  
LIVING  
STANDARDS**

**An Assessment of First Nations  
Economic and Social Performance in  
New Brunswick**

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CSLS Research Report 2023-02

March 2023

Report produced in collaboration with the Atlantic Institute for Policy  
Research at the University of New Brunswick

# **An Assessment of First Nations Economic and Social Performance in New Brunswick**

## **Abstract**

This report presents an analysis of a series of economic and social indicators for the First Nations population in New Brunswick using data from the 2016 and 2021 Population Censuses. The variables used include demographics, income and income composition, labour market outcomes, and educational attainment. Comparisons are made between First Nations and non-Indigenous people at the provincial and national levels, as well as between reserves in New Brunswick. Particular attention was given to the four largest reserves in New Brunswick (Elsipogtog, Esgenopetitj, St. Mary's and Tobique). There have been large relative improvements for First Nations people in New Brunswick from 2016 to 2021 compared to the non-Indigenous population trends over the same period. However, First Nations people still perform below the non-Indigenous averages. First Nations individuals off reserve have fared better than First Nations individuals on reserve. Finally, the report presents policy recommendations to increase First Nations economic and social performance in New Brunswick.

# **An Assessment of First Nations Economic and Social Performance in New Brunswick**

## **Executive Summary**

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards has established an expert panel on the future of the New Brunswick economy. The project includes a major research program on the economic characteristics and performance of the province's economy and population, including specific groups that have historically been marginalized, such as Indigenous New Brunswickers. This report contributes to this research program by assessing the economic and social performance of the First Nation population in New Brunswick.

There have been significant improvements in economic and social performance for First Nations people in New Brunswick in both absolute terms and compared to the non-Indigenous average from 2016 to 2021. However, the First Nation population still performs below the non-Indigenous averages. Further, First Nations people off reserve have fared better than First Nation individuals on reserve. Large relative improvements from 2016 to 2021 were seen with economic outcomes such as average total income and low-income after-tax rates. However, some metrics have not seen as much relative progress, such as post-secondary attainment levels, employment rates and the reliance on government transfers as a source of income.

Therefore, this report suggests a number of policy measures to increase the socioeconomic performance of the First Nation population in New Brunswick. These measures are focused on improving educational and employment outcomes, providing more economic opportunities on reserves, as well as increasing opportunities for First Nation communities to lead meaningful self-developed economic projects, all while respecting economic sovereignty.

## **Report Structure**

The report is divided into six sections. Each section focuses on a different aspect of the socio-economic performance of the First Nation population in New Brunswick. The first section presents a brief history of the First Nations in New Brunswick and contextualizes the report. The second section compares the performance of First Nations people on and off reserve with the non-Indigenous performance in New Brunswick. The third section uses Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Community Portraits to compare the performance of all reserves in New Brunswick. This section deals exclusively with 2016 census data. The fourth section updates the 2016 reserve-level data for the four largest reserves in New Brunswick (Elsipogtog, Esgenooetitj, St. Mary's and Tobique). The fifth section compares New Brunswick's First Nation population's performance to the rest of Canada. The final section briefly describes key players in New Brunswick and proposes broad policy recommendations supported by the data presented in this report.

## First Nations Economic and Social Indicators

Although the First Nation population in New Brunswick still has lower economic and social outcomes than the non-Indigenous population in 2021, there have been considerable relative improvements since the 2016 population census. Over the five years, there were some success stories for First Nations people in New Brunswick. These include:

- A First Nation population growth rate of 19% from 2016 to 2021 (17,575 to 20,960), while the non-Indigenous population grew by 4 % (700,630 to 725,900).
  - This growth was mostly seen off-reserve, with a growth rate of 30%, while the on-reserve population only increased by 5%.
- A 40% increase in average nominal total income from 2015 to 2020, up to \$39,040 for all First Nations people 15 and older in 2020. This represents 80% of the non-Indigenous average total income (up from a 60% share in 2015).
  - This growth was greater on reserves, with a 55% increase in average total nominal income from 2015 to 2020 on reserve.
- A decrease in First Nations after-tax low-income status from 31% in 2015 to 21% in 2020.
  - This rate was below the Canadian First Nation population average of 23% in 2020 but higher than the non-Indigenous average in New Brunswick (14%).
- An above-Canadian-average First Nation population participation rate (59.1%) and employment rate (49.1%) for the First Nation population in New Brunswick in 2021.
- An above-Canadian-average post-secondary diploma attainment level for First Nations people in New Brunswick in 2021 (40.9% vs 36.9%).
  - The First Nation population in New Brunswick also has lower high school incompleteness levels compared to the Canadian average in 2021 (27.0% vs 33.3%).

However, there are still some key areas that require attention as they did not improve substantially from 2016 to 2021:

- The employment rate for First Nations people in 2021 (49%) was five percentage points lower than non-Indigenous New Brunswickers (54%)
  - The employment rate on reserve (44%) was ten percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate.
- First Nations people in New Brunswick had the lowest median employment income compared to other provincial First Nation populations in 2020.
  - The median employment income for all First Nations people 15 and over in New Brunswick was \$22,800 in 2020, representing only 80% of the Canadian First Nation population's median employment income (\$28,400).

- The proportion of First Nations people on reserve with no high school diploma increased by a percentage point from 33% in 2016 to 34% in 2021, which is almost twice the non-Indigenous average in 2021.
  - It is also 11 percentage points higher than the off-reserve First Nation population high school incompleteness level, which dropped from 26% to 23% from 2016 to 2021.
- There was a drop in the proportion of First Nation individuals 15 and over with a post-secondary degree, from 42% in 2016 to 41% in 2021.
  - This drop was mostly seen on reserve, decreasing from 38% in 2016 to 34% in 2021, even with low population growth for First Nations people on reserve.
- There was a higher than Canadian First Nation average reliance on social welfare and government transfers by First Nation individuals in New Brunswick in 2020 (24.5% of total income vs 21% of total income)

When comparing the performance of both First Nations (Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq), one group did not perform significantly better. Both First Nation's reserves performed below the non-Indigenous average. When only using the top four largest reserves (Elsipogtog, Esgenoopetitj, St. Mary's and Tobique) as a comparison, we can see that:

- The Mi'kmaq population on reserve represented about 2/3 of the total First Nation on-reserve population in 2021, as well as the two largest reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj).
- The Wolastoqey population grew at about twice the rate of the Mi'kmaq population from 2016 to 2021 (19% and 10% growth, respectively).
- The Mi'kmaq reserves had a much higher reliance on government transfers (40%) as a share of total income compared to the Wolastoqey reserves (30%).
- Employment rates were lower on the two largest Mi'kmaq reserves (30% and 36%) than on the two largest Wolastoqey reserves (44% and 44%).

## **Policy Proposals**

This report proposes different policies to encourage socioeconomic growth and resiliency. These policies include:

1. Respecting treaty rights and advancing economic reconciliation.
2. Developing partnerships and trust between First Nations, governments, and private enterprises
3. Investing in industries that synergize with economic sovereignty on reserves, such as natural resources (Fishing, aquaculture, other uses of land), tourism and cannabis
4. Developing culturally responsive curriculums that reflect labour-force goals for First Nations seeking to lead new economic developments on reserve.

5. Preparing individuals for increased labour force participation by developing skills for the future and working with employers to removing barriers to entry for First Nations individuals.
6. Supporting small and medium size reserves with reliable and long-term capital funding.

# **An Assessment of First Nations Economic and Social Performance in New Brunswick**

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# **An Assessment of First Nations Economic and Social Performance in New Brunswick<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. Introduction**

This report presents an analysis of a series of economic and social indicators for the First Nation population in New Brunswick using data from the 2016 and 2021 Population Census. There have been large relative improvements for First Nations people in New Brunswick compared to the non-Indigenous average from 2016 to 2021. However, First Nations individuals still perform below the non-Indigenous averages. Further, the First Nation population off-reserve has fared better than First Nation individuals on-reserve.

The report is divided into six sections. Each section focuses on a different aspect of the socio-economic performance of First Nations people in New Brunswick. The first section presents a brief history of the First Nations in New Brunswick and contextualizes the report. This history helps inform the data and the subsequent policy proposals.

The second section compares the performance of the First Nation populations on and off reserve with the non-Indigenous performance in New Brunswick. First Nation individuals generally underperformed compared to the non-Indigenous statistics but have improved relative to the non-Indigenous average since 2016.

The third section uses Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Community Portraits to compare the performance of all reserves in New Brunswick. This section deals exclusively with 2016 census data, as the 2021 data is difficult to assemble as some census subdivision data has been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

The fourth section updates to 2021 the 2016 reserve-level data for the four largest reserves in New Brunswick (Elsipogtog, Esgenoopetitj, St. Mary's and Tobique) as they are composed of census subdivisions that are not suppressed due to confidentiality. These reserves represent the two largest reserves by First Nation (Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj are Mi'kmaq, and St. Mary's and Tobique are Wolastoqey).

The fifth section compares New Brunswick's First Nation population's performance to First Nation populations in Canada and other provinces.

The final section briefly describes key players in New Brunswick and proposes policy recommendations supported by the data presented in this report. The recommendations echo other policy proposals from different stakeholders, such as the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) and the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB).

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<sup>1</sup> This report was written by Pascal Morimanno, an undergraduate economics student at the University of Ottawa, for the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) as part of the Directed Research Program offered by the Department of Economics at the University of Ottawa. CSLS Executive Director Dr. Andrew Sharpe supervised the research.

## II. New Brunswick Indigenous History<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous people have lived in the territories that are now called the Maritimes for thousands of years. There were three different First Nations across the territory. The Mi'kmaq lived on the eastern coast and were found across the three Maritime provinces. The Wolastoqey (formerly referred to as Maliseet) First Nations were located along the Saint John (Wolastoqiyik) River and in central New Brunswick. The Pekotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy) First Nation territory was located between Southern New Brunswick and Northern Maine along the St. Croix River.

Land and community played central parts in pre-colonial ways of life, with a significant emphasis on relationships between people and the natural environment. The pre-colonial way of life was less focused on accumulating wealth and more on survival and pleasure, although there were already complex trade systems across the region. Early contacts with Europeans were limited as they were primarily seasonal fishermen. It was only once Europeans came to trade for fur that colonies and more formal relationships were established. With colonies also came new diseases estimated to have decimated more than half of the original population, which probably stood between 10,000 and 15,000 in the early 1500s.

Due to the competing French and British interests in the region, treaties were signed between First Nations and the British to strengthen the British position over the French in Acadia. Peace and Friendship treaties were signed between 1726 and 1779 (1726, 1749, 1752, 1760/61, 1778, 1779), with all three First Nations signatories along with the British Crown. These treaties were not as formal as later Canadian treaties with First Nations in Western Canada that negotiated set land surrenders, but instead, they were Peace and Friendship treaties meant to undermine French power in the area. They did include provisions for the respect of Indigenous land, with the ability for new "lawful" British settlements. The British also agreed not to "molest the communities' fishing, hunting, planting and 'other lawful activities'." A significant issue surrounding these treaties in modern-day interpretation is the lack of defined terms and documentation.

After the end of the Seven Year's war with the French and the creation of an independent United States, a large migratory flux of immigrants including the Loyalists arrived in the Maritime provinces, eroding the treaty relations with the First Nation population. As early as the 1770s, licenses of occupation on Crown Land were given to First Nations, but they had no control or ownership of the land they "occupied." Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reserves were created, and traditional land was taken by the government and given to colonial settlers for profitable use in the case of "underused" land. First Nations land ownership was reduced through

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<sup>2</sup> This brief section draws from four texts describing the history of First Nations in New Brunswick and the Maritimes. They are: **Wicken, William Craig**. 2010. "Fact sheet on Peace and Friendship Treaties in the Maritimes and Gaspé." *Government of Canada.*, **Milne, David**. 1995. The case of New Brunswick-Aboriginal relations. Report prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples., **Foley, Tyler**. 2020. "Building better together: Exploring indigenous economic development in New Brunswick report." *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, and **Hamilton, W D**. 1984. "Indian Lands in New Brunswick: The Case of the Little South West Reserve." *Acadiensis*.

repeated land sales, and the administration of these lands was eventually transferred to the federal government. The loss of a considerable part of the traditional Indigenous land led to the destruction of the traditional ways of life and intergenerational poverty. The implementation of the *Indian Act* in 1876 and the purposeful attack on Indigenous ways of life compounded this legacy of destruction. The paternalism of the *Indian Act* has had long-lasting effects on the ability of First Nations to develop policies for economic and social well-being and be sovereign in their self-determination.

The first changes to the Indian Act in 1951 brought forward new policy changes, such as the extension of economic assistance to First Nations people and the beginning of Federal-Provincial agreements on education, housing and social services for First Nations. The 1960s saw the beginning of formal Indigenous organizations in New Brunswick, such as the Union of New Brunswick Indians, which still promotes social development in New Brunswick. The 1990s brought about the legal and constitutional recognition of Peace and Friendship treaties, which led to the ability for formal land claims and treaty rights. This brought positive economic growth with treaty rights granting access to moderate livelihoods in fishing and hunting (*R. v. Marshall*, [1999] 3 SCR 456) but only domestically for logging and other sectors (*R. v. Sappier*; *R. v. Gray*). In the 2000s, there were new agreements with land claims regarding lost land that was never formally surrendered to the Crown. There are still ongoing claims, such as the Wolastoqey title claim which seeks a declaration of the Aboriginal title to the Wolastoq watershed and compensation from the Crown, which has been met with criticism and fear tactics by the current Provincial Government<sup>3</sup>.

### III. Data description and definitions

The data used in this report was sourced from several 2016 and 2021 Census products. The 2021 Census Indigenous data was released while the report was completed (Fall 2022) and was used to update the main 2016 findings whenever possible. The 2016 reserve-level data was assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits, a Statistics Canada data product which amalgamated reserve-level census subdivision data.<sup>4</sup> The report manually amalgamated the reserve-specific census data into tables from individual reserve-level census products to allow for comparison. Some additional reserve-level data was also found on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles webpage when Statistics Canada produced no Aboriginal Population Profiles. These specific reserves will be marked in tables as containing different data.

Further, the census data is only available for First Nations communities and reserves currently recognized by the Government of Canada and New Brunswick. Therefore, there is no available Peskotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy) data, as their treaty status had not been defined at

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<sup>3</sup> Peach, Ian and Naomi Metallic. (2022). "N.B.'s ongoing battle with Wolastoqey Nation is not reconciliation in action." *Policy Options*.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. "Aboriginal Peoples Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016." (2017).

the time of the 2021 census<sup>5</sup>. If negotiations are resolved before the next census, it would be assumed that a census subdivision would be created to collect reserve-specific data in 2026.

Most of the data on First Nations people in this report came from sampled data. Further, in some instances, random rounding was applied to responses to provide confidentiality, which may lead to discrepancies between the cumulative total and the total value reported. Also, when dealing with small communities and reserves, there may be higher variability in the answers due to a smaller sample population. Finally, area suppression was applied around income levels in smaller reserves to protect confidentiality.

Only the four largest reserves have been updated with 2021 census data as their populations are large enough not to contain missing data due to confidentiality requirements. Smaller reserves often consist of multiple census sub-divisions, many of which are not large enough to publish usable data. This report used the updated reserve-level information for the four largest reserves as they were large enough for the data not to be suppressed. More work can be done to update the report's findings once all reserves have their data released in the form of First Nations Community Portraits similar to the 2016 data products.

The census divides the population into different categories. In the 2016 census, all Indigenous Peoples fall under the term Aboriginal Peoples. However, this report will use the term Indigenous Peoples when referring to individuals that identify as First Nations, Metis, Inuit, more than one group or any other Indigenous group (or previously defined as Aboriginal). Non-Indigenous people refer to anyone that does not identify as Indigenous in the census.

Due to the vastly different economic and social circumstances between First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and interest in the on-reserve and off-reserve comparisons, this report focuses on people who identify as First Nations. The term Indigenous is used in the census as a group encompassing First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. While self-identifying as Indigenous on-reserve does not necessarily equate to identifying as First Nations, it does represent the vast majority of individuals. However, self-identifying as Indigenous off-reserve does not necessarily equal identifying as First Nations. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, comparing Indigenous people as a whole in New Brunswick will not allow for a proper comparison between Indigenous people on and off reserve. Thus, First Nation self-identification is used in this report, as it allows for a proper comparison on and off reserve and more comprehensive policy proposals. Further, as this report also focuses on policies and programs, First Nations people will be the target population due to their unique relationship with the levels of government and their recognized status.

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<sup>5</sup> “Peskotomuhkati First Nation.” *Peskotomuhkati Nation at Skutik*. <https://qonaskamkuk.com/peskotomuhkati-nation/peskotomuhkati-persistence/> (Accessed November 20, 2022)

## IV. New Brunswick First Nations and Non-Indigenous Characteristics

This section deals with New Brunswick data, comparing First Nations people on and off reserves to non-Indigenous people. As mentioned previously, only First Nations data was used, as there are significant policy differences between the First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations in New Brunswick.

### 1. Demographics

Table 1 provides an overview of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in New Brunswick and population rates. In 2016, non-Indigenous people represented 95.9% of the total NB population which an average age of 43.4. In 2021, the total non-Indigenous population decreased to 95.6%, with an average age of 44.5.

Table 1: Population Demographics in New Brunswick in 2016 and 2021

Year	Statistic	Non-indigenous	Total Indigenous	Total First Nations	On Reserve First Nation	Off-reserve First Nation	Métis	Inuk (Inuit)
2016	Population	700,630	29,380	17,575	7,370	10,205	10,205	385
	Percentage of Population	95.9	4.1	2.4	1.0	1.4	1.4	0.0
	Average Age	43.4	35.5	31.9	31.8	31.9	41.4	31.0
2021	Population	725,900	33,295	20,960	7,720	13,240	10,170	685
	Percentage of Population	95.6	4.4	2.7	1.0	1.7	1.3	0.0
	Average Age	44.5	37.3	34.5	33.9	34.8	43.0	32.4
Growth (%)	Population	3.6	13.3	19.3	4.8	29.8	-0.3	77.0

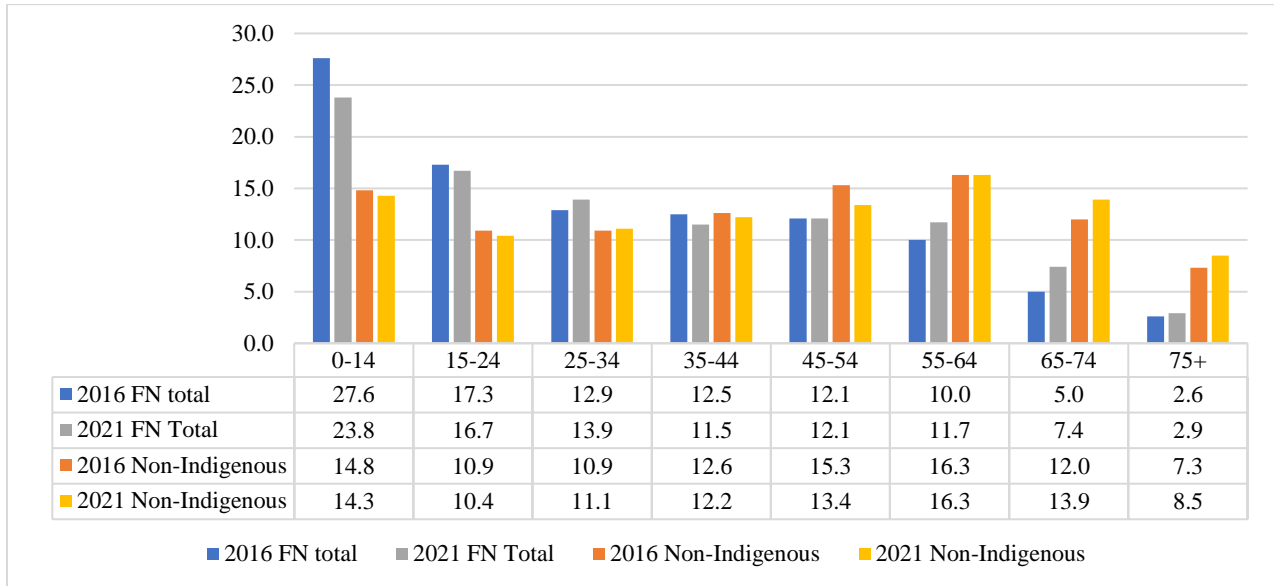
Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0264-01. For 2016: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

In 2021, 33,295 Indigenous people were living in New Brunswick. Out of the 33,295 Indigenous people in New Brunswick, 20,960 (63%) were First Nations, of which 7,720 (23%) were living on reserve and 13,240 (40%) were living off reserve. Of the remaining Indigenous peoples, 10,170 (31%) were Métis and 685 (2%) were Inuit.

The average age for Indigenous people was also lower than the provincial average, with Inuit people having the lowest average in 2021 (32.4), followed by First Nations people on reserve (33.9), then by First Nations people off reserve (34.8) and finally Métis New Brunswickers (43.0). While the non-Indigenous population growth from 2016 to 2021 was only 3.6%, the First Nation population growth was 19.3%. This high growth was mostly seen off reserve, with the First Nation population off reserve going from 10,205 to 13,240 (an almost 30% growth). The low population growth on reserve can probably be attributed to individuals leaving the reserves for economic and social reasons.



**Chart 1: Demographic Distributions for all First Nations and Non-Indigenous Populations in New Brunswick in 2016 and 2021**



Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0264-01. For 2016: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

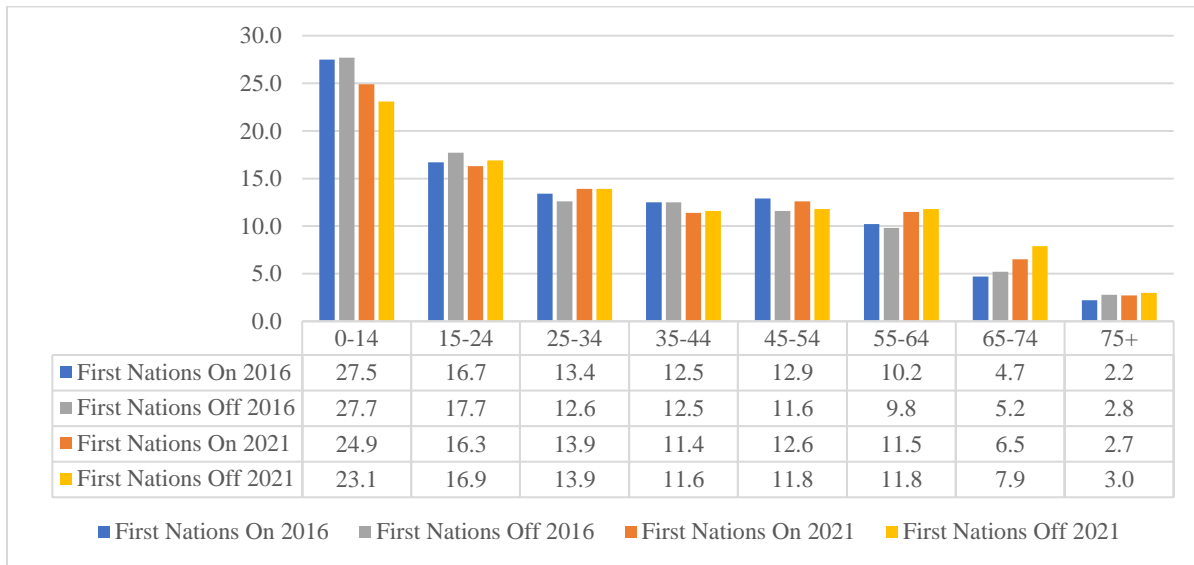
When looking at the age distribution between First Nations and Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers, there is a much more significant difference in population pyramids. First Nations have a much younger population, as presented in Chart 1. While the non-Indigenous under-15 population sat at 14.3% in 2021, the First Nations under-15 cohort represented 23.8% of the total population in 2021. This younger population trend is also seen for cohorts aged 25-34.

New Brunswick's non-Indigenous population is older, with 38.7% of its total population above 55 in 2021, with 8.5% 75 and older. This is contrary to the First Nation population, which is only 22% of its total population above 55 and only 2.9% is 75 and above. Thus, First Nation people are part of the New Brunswick workforce of the future and will need to be called upon to fill gaps as a growing share of the non-Indigenous population leaves the workforce.

The high off-reserve growth has shifted the ratio between First Nation New Brunswickers on and off-reserve. In 2016, 41.9% (7,370/17,575) of all First Nations individuals lived on reserve. The proportion of First Nations people living on reserve dropped to 36.8% (7,720/20,960) in 2021. To investigate this change in on- and off-reserve population structure, it may be helpful to look at demographics by age in New Brunswick. Chart 2 provides a breakdown of demographics in 2016 and 2021 for First Nations on and off reserves. The ratio of First Nations people under the age of 15 shifted from 2016 to 2021. There is now a higher percentage of young First Nations children living on reserve (24.9%) than off reserve (23.1%). Another increase was in the number of First Nations people 55 and over. The 55-64 and 65-74 age categories have increased by more than two percentage points each for First Nations people off reserve (9.8% to 11.8% and 5.2% to 7.9%, respectively). This increase was also seen on-reserve to a similar extent (10.2% to 11.5% and 4.7% to 6.5%).



Chart 2: Age Structure for First Nations Individuals on and Off-Reserve in 2016 and 2021



Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0264-01. For 2016: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

## 2. Economic Indicators

Several economic indicators will be used in this report: average total income, median employment income, total income composition and the incidence of after-tax low-income status. All these measures of income other than the after-tax low-income status are taken for all individuals 15 and over, regardless of whether they are working. Statistics Canada defines median total employment income as: "All income received as wages, salaries and commissions from paid employment and net self-employment income from farm or non-farm unincorporated business and/or professional practice during the reference period."<sup>6</sup>

It is essential to recognize that although the census was conducted in 2016 and 2021, the data is collected from the individual's previous year's income (2015 and 2020). Further, the 2020 data was affected by Covid-19 and might not be an accurate picture of long-term trends. However, this data might still be helpful to demonstrate whether a level of resilience and overall improvement has occurred. It is also important to note that this information is presented in nominal dollars and would need to be adjusted for inflation in order to measure the real change. The New Brunswick CPI index rose from 125.4 in 2015 to 136.6 in 2020 (2002=100).<sup>7</sup> This would be equivalent to an increase of 8.9% over the five years. Thus, it is expected that a growth rate of 9% or more between 2015 and 2020 in New Brunswick exceeds inflation.

The composition of total income is a measure that calculates the shares of the three different sources of income that form the average individual's income. The income composition consists of employment income, government transfers and other sources of income. Employment income

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017) "Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016: Employment income."

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. "Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted."

includes all forms of employment, including self-employment. Government transfers include old age security payments, public pension plans, disability payments, employment insurance, child benefits and other transfers. Other income sources groups non-market and non-transfers sources of income such as private investments.

Four measures of labour market performance are presented, the employment rate in 2016 and 2021, the labour force participation rate in 2016 and 2021, the unemployment rate in 2016 and 2021, and the proportion of employed people who worked full-time in 2015 and 2020. For reference, the 2016 census question "refers to whether a person aged 15 years and over was unemployed or not in the labour force during the week of Sunday, May 1 to Saturday, May 7, 2016"<sup>8</sup>.

## **Income**

Table 2 provides an overview of both nominal income measures in 2015 and 2020 and changes from 2015 to 2020. Overall, the New Brunswick First Nation population's average total income grew by 39.9% over the five years. For non-Indigenous New Brunswickers, the increase was only 17%. The most significant change came from First Nations individuals on reserve, where the average total income increased by 56.3%, from \$23,972 in 2015 to \$37,480 in 2020. This large increase may be due to income support programs related to the pandemic.

The First Nation population's nominal median employment income did not increase at the same pace as the nominal average total income but still outgrew the non-Indigenous median. While the First Nation population's median employment income went from \$17,160 to \$22,800, the non-Indigenous went from \$29,578 to \$33,600, with the 2020 non-Indigenous median income still almost 50% more than the First Nation population's median employment income. There is also a gap between the median employment income for First Nation individuals on and off reserve, with the median employment income on reserve being less than \$20,000 (\$19,800) in 2020 and the off-reserve median employment income being \$24,600 in 2020.

We can also see that the ratio of the First Nation population's average total income to the non-Indigenous total income increased over the five years, with the First Nation population's average total income being 84.6% of non-Indigenous income in 2020, up from 70.7% in 2015. The on-reserve average income was 81.2% of the non-indigenous average income, while the average income ratio between First Nations people off reserve and non-Indigenous New Brunswickers stands at 86.48% in 2020. The most significant percentage point increase was seen on-reserve, with the ratio increasing from 60.7% to 81.2% of non-Indigenous income.

One worrying trend is the small change in the ratio of the median employment income for First Nations people off reserve and non-Indigenous workers. Nominal First Nation population median employment income as a proportion of non-Indigenous median employment income increased at a lower rate (58.0% to 67.9%) than the average total income (70.7% to 84.6%). Off

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018). "New Brunswick [Province] (table). Aboriginal Population Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-510-X2016001."

reserve, the ratio only increased by two percentage points from 2015 to 2020, with the First Nation population off reserve median employment income going from 71.1% of the non-Indigenous nominal median employment income in 2015 to 73.2% in 2020. Compared to the almost 15 percentage point increase for the nominal average total income ratio, this might suggest that although First Nations workers are finding work off reserve, it may be mostly in low-paying entry jobs. To increase First Nations socioeconomic performance, facilitating access to good-paying jobs must be a priority.

There have been strong relative increases in both the average total income and median employment income for First Nations people when compared to the non-Indigenous rates of growth. However, we can still see that First Nations individuals are below the non-Indigenous averages, with more improvements seen on reserve and both First Nations groups are still below the non-Indigenous average.

Table 2: Nominal Average Total Income and Median Employment Income for On-reserve, Off-reserve First Nations People and Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers in 2015 and 2020

Population Type	FN Total		On Reserve		Off Reserve		Non-Indigenous	
	2015	2020	2015	2020	2015	2020	2015	2020
<b>Average Total Income</b>	27,898	39,040	23,972	37,480	30,626	39,920	39,447	46,160
Growth	NA	39.9%	NA	56.3%	NA	30.3%	NA	17.0%
% Of Non-Indigenous Average Total Income	70.7	84.6	60.8	81.2	77.6	86.5	100.0	100.0
<b>Median Employment Income</b>	17,160	22,800	13,337	19,800	21,040	24,600	29,578	33,600
Growth	NA	32.8%	NA	48.5%	NA	16.9%	NA	13.6%
% Of Non-Indigenous Median Employment Income	58.0	67.9	45.0	58.9	71.1	73.2	100.0	100.0

Source: For 2020: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0281-01. For Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

### Income Composition

Income composition statistics were only available for 2015 for on and off-reserve First Nation people. First Nations people on reserve receive nearly twice the proportion of their income in the forms of government transfers than non-Indigenous people (32.6 % versus 16.7%). Government transfers include old age security payments, public pension plans, disability payments, employment insurance, child benefits and other transfers.<sup>9</sup> Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers are older on average and than First nations people so are more likely to rely on government

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. (2021) “Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021: Appendix 2.4 Components of income in 2020.”

transfers such as old age security and pension plans. This may bias somewhat, with an age-adjusted figure showing an even greater dependence of First Nations on government transfers.

Table 3: Composition of Total Income in 2015 (In % of total income)

	<b>First Nations</b>	<b>On reserve</b>	<b>Off reserve</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous</b>
<b>Total Income Composition</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Employment</b>	68.5	63.2	71.4	68.5
<b>Gov Transfers</b>	24.5	32.6	20.1	16.7
<b>Other</b>	7.0	4.2	8.5	14.8

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

There was also a higher reliance on employment income for First Nations people off reserve than non-indigenous New Brunswickers. This is an interesting statistic, as it could again point to a greater reliance on employment income over other forms of income, such as investment and retirement income. However, this is again most likely a demographic effect, as the First Nation population is younger than the non-Indigenous population, which would rely more on forms of income such as investment income and retirement funds. It also indicates that First Nation workers off reserve are finding better-paying jobs than on reserve, a trend seen throughout this report.

### Low-Income Status

Table 4: Prevalence of Low-Income Status After Tax for First Nations People On and Off Reserve and Non-Indigenous People in New Brunswick in 2015 and 2020

<b>Population Type</b>	<b>Low-income after-tax prevalence</b>		
	2015	2020	Decrease (%)
<b>Total First Nations</b>	30.9	20.8	32.7
On Reserve	31.0	23.8	23.2
Off Reserve	30.8	19.1	38.0
<b>Non-Indigenous</b>	16.8	14.0	16.7
<b>Ratio FN/Non-Indigenous (%)</b>	183.9	148.6	19.2

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0283-01. For 2016: Catalogue no. 98-510-X2016001.

Table 4 shows the after-tax low-income status in 2015 and 2020 in New Brunswick. The First Nation population's low-income prevalence fell from 30.9% in 2015 to 20.8% in 2020; a ten-percentage point drop. Non-Indigenous low-income prevalence decreased as well, from 16.8% to 14.0%. From 2015 to 2020, the ratio of low-income after-tax prevalence between First Nations and Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers fell from 183.9 to 148.6.

The low-income status between on-reserve and off-reserve First Nation populations in 2020 was 23.8% and 19.1%, respectively. The share of the First Nation population in low-income status on reserve was almost 25% more than the share of the First Nations population in low-income status off reserve.

### 3. Labour Market Statistics

Table 5: Participation Rates for First Nation Populations On and Off Reserve and Non-Indigenous People in New Brunswick in 2016 and 2021 (15+)

Population Type	FN Total		On Reserve		Off Reserve		Non-Indigenous	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
<b>Participation Rate</b>	58.4	59.1	54.4	51.2	61.2	63.6	61.6	60.1
<b>Employment Rate</b>	45.5	49.1	38.2	41.1	50.8	53.7	54.9	54.1
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	22.0	16.9	30.1	19.7	16.9	15.6	10.9	10.1

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0423-01. For 2016: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

Participation rates in New Brunswick tell an important story about the economic conditions on and off reserves for First Nations people. While the on-reserve participation rate was 54.4% in 2016, the off-reserve participation rate was 61.2%, almost identical to the non-Indigenous participation rate. The percentage point difference in participation has increased since 2016, with a decrease in First Nation population participation rates on reserve to 51.2%, while First Nation population rates off reserve have increased to 63.6%.

Although the participation rate decreased on reserve between 2016 and 2021, the employment rate increased from 38.2% to 41.1%. The employment rate on reserve, like the participation rate, was much lower in both years than that of the off-reserve First Nations population: 50.8% to 53.7% respectively.

It is important to be aware of the age effects when comparing First Nations and non-Indigenous populations. As non-Indigenous New Brunswickers are, on average, older, their participation rate should in principle be lower and on a downward trend. This has led to a higher proportion of First Nations people off reserve participating in the labour market than non-Indigenous New Brunswickers. However, the participation rate on reserve (51.2%) is still 10 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate.

Unemployment is a significant issue for the First Nation population in New Brunswick. In 2016, the unemployment rate was approximately twice as high for First Nations (22.0%) than non-Indigenous people (10.9%). However, there was a 30.1% on-reserve First Nations unemployment rate in 2016, almost double the off-reserve rate (16.9%) and almost triple the non-Indigenous rate (10.9%). In 2020, the unemployment rate was more than 50% greater for First Nations (16.9%) than non-Indigenous people in New Brunswick (10.1%). Like in 2016, the rate is higher on reserve, although there has been a ten-percentage point decrease in unemployment on reserve, with unemployment on reserve in 2021 at 19.7%. The unemployment off-reserve has only decreased by 2 percentage points to 15.6% in 2021.

The relative improvement in unemployment rates seems to have had important effects on other economic factors, such as income which increased 40% over the same five years for First Nation individuals in New Brunswick. Although the relative changes are positive, the on-reserve rates are still not close to the non-Indigenous rates. Finding meaningful work opportunities and developing labour-force readiness programs are paramount for First Nation populations on

reserve to increase the overall employment closer to the off-reserve and non-Indigenous averages.

#### 4. Educational Attainment

Table 6: Highest Education Attainment Rates for First Nation Populations on and Off Reserve and Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers in 2016 and 2021 Aged 15 and Over (In %)

Year	First Nations		On-Reserve		Off-Reserve		Non-Indigenous	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
No certificate (%)	28	27	33	34	26	23	22	19
High School (%)	29	32	28	32	30	32	29	30
Post-Secondary (%)	42	41	38	34	44	45	50	52
Trades (%)	11	7	12	6	10	7	9	8
College (%)	20	21	18	18	22	23	22	23
University (%)	11	13	9	10	13	14	19	21

Source: For 2021: Table 98-10-0423-01. For 2016: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

The two main statistics analyzed are the high school incompleteness rate, which is the share of the population with no certificate and the post-secondary attainment rate.

First Nations people over 15 in New Brunswick had a higher high school non-completion rate than non-Indigenous individuals in 2016 (28% vs 22%). This incompleteness rate was even greater on-reserve, with 33% of all adults without a high school diploma. The off-reserve average stood at 26%, four percentage points higher than the 2016 non-Indigenous average.

The incompleteness rate for all First Nations has decreased only slightly in 2021, from 28% in 2016 to 27% in 2021. However, the decrease in First Nation high school incompleteness is smaller than the non-Indigenous decrease of three percentage points. However, the First Nation population statistic may be biased, as there was a greater share of First Nations people between the ages of 15 and 18 added to the data pool than non-Indigenous people, and they should hopefully go on to complete their high school certificate in the next five years. Comparing trends on and off reserve may also be biased, as this report has demonstrated that there has been a noted exit of skilled workers away from the reserves, which could explain why the proportion of high school incompleteness increased from 2016 to 2021 on reserve (from 33% to 34%) while it decreased off reserve (26% to 23%).

The post-secondary attainment rate in 2016 for the First Nation population was 42%, eight percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous population (50% of the non-Indigenous population had more than a high school diploma in 2016). Comparing the on and off-reserve populations, 38% of First Nations people 15 and over on reserve attained higher education in 2016, whereas 44% of First Nations people off-reserve had a higher education.

There has been a worrying change on reserves from 2016 to 2021, with post-secondary education shares decreasing for First Nations individuals from 42% to 41%. While the off-reserve share increased by a percentage point (44% to 45%), the off-reserve share decreased by four

percentage points (38% to 34%). As mentioned previously, one hypothesis could be that more educated individuals are leaving the reserves for better-paying jobs.

Another takeaway is the drop of First Nations people in the trades, with 11% of all First Nations adults with a trade certification in 2016 to 7% in 2021. In comparison, only 8% of the non-Indigenous population had a trade certification in 2021. This, however, led to a trade-off in university-level education, with 13% of the First Nations population having a university degree or certificate in 2021 (up from 11% in 2016). In comparison, 21% of the non-Indigenous population has obtained a university degree. College rates were similar between First Nations and non-Indigenous people in 2021 (21% and 23%). Finally, First Nations people off reserve had higher college and university attainment rates than the on-reserve population in 2021 (14% and 23% versus 10% and 18%), potentially due to living in cities and communities with potentially easier access to higher education and an overall higher high school diploma attainment.

### 5. Occupations:

The last indicator is the different occupational structure shares in New Brunswick. In 2015 (Table 7). Relative to the non-Indigenous population, First Nations people had a higher percentage of the working population in the following sectors: education, law and social, community and government services (15.4%), sales and service occupations (26.5%), and natural resources, agriculture, and related production occupations (10.1%).

When comparing First Nations people on and off reserve in 2015, the occupations with significant disparities between the two groups were health occupations (2.6 % on reserve and 5.9% off reserve), community and government services (16.8% on reserve and 14.4% off reserve), sales and services occupations (20.6% on reserve and 30.4% off reserve), and natural resources, agriculture, and related production occupations (16.6% on reserve and 5.9% off reserve).

Table 7: Job Occupation Shares for First Nations Individuals on and Off Reserve and Non-Indigenous New Brunswickers in 2015

	<b>Non-Indigenous</b>	<b>Total First Nations</b>	<b>On-Reserve</b>	<b>Off-Reserve</b>
<b>Total – Occupation (%)</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Occupation - not applicable (%)	1.8	4.6	6.9	3.2
All occupations (%)	98.1	95.4	93.0	96.9
Management occupations (%)	9.0	7.3	7.0	7.5
Business, finance, and administration occupations (%)	13.9	9.6	9.3	9.8
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations (%)	5.5	3.2	3.3	3.0
Health occupations (%)	8.1	4.6	2.6	5.9
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services (%)	11.9	15.4	16.8	14.4



Occupations in art, culture, recreation, and sport (%)	1.7	1.5	1.2	1.6
Sales and service occupations (%)	23.8	26.5	20.6	30.4
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations (%)	15.7	12.8	11.1	13.9
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations (%)	3.6	10.1	16.6	5.9
Occupations in manufacturing and utilities (%)	4.9	4.2	3.9	4.4

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile no. 98-510-X2016001.

The top three occupations for the non-Indigenous population in 2015 were sales and service (23.8%), trades, transport, and equipment operators (15.7%), and business, finance and administration (13.9%). The top three occupations for First Nations individuals on reserve were sales and service (20.6%), community and government services (16.8%), and natural resources, agriculture, and related production (16.6%). The top three occupations for First Nations off-reserve were also sales and service (30.4%), community and government services (14.4%), and natural resources, agriculture, and related production (13.9%). This similar sectoral breakdown between on-reserve and off-reserve First Nations populations might indicate systematic barriers for First Nations people, especially in potentially higher-paying jobs such as business administration or management. Access to these different occupations might not be as easy for the First Nation population to enter, regardless of whether they are on or off reserve.



## V. Reserves in New Brunswick

This section of the report presents reserve-level data on the different recognized reserves in New Brunswick. This data comes from the 2016 census and was collected from various sources, including the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles. The Indigenous and Northern Affairs profiles were used for the smaller communities not profiled in the 2016 Aboriginal Community Portraits. The Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada profiles are, therefore, less reliable due to the size of the communities (populations less than 150); rates are more affected by random rounding applied to small data sets in order to protect confidentiality. This variance in data affects the Pabineau, Buctouche and Fort Folly reserves, and asterisks note them throughout this section.

Although some 2021 data was available, only the top four largest reserves will be updated with 2021 data, as they consist of only individual, non-suppressed census subdivisions. Future work will be required to update this study with full 2021 data on reserves once the census subdivisions are amalgamated by reserve by Statistics Canada. The 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits were not released until 2019, so we do not expect the 2021 census portraits to be released until 2024. 1996 data was also taken from the Donald Savoie monogram entitled *Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick*. However, due to the lack of disaggregation between on and off-reserve population data, a formula was applied to the total population data based on the available information regarding the population split on and off-reserve in 1996.<sup>10</sup>

This section of the report also divides the socioeconomic performances by First Nation. The Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqey First Nations on reserve averages were calculated using a weighed average with the available reserve-level information using the total population as the weight. As the smaller reserves are missing data due to confidentiality requirements, it is important to note that these are simply estimates and are missing key information and will only be used comparatively. Future work could provide a detailed analysis of the performance of both First Nations on the same statistics used in this report.

### 1. Geographic Distribution

In present-day New Brunswick, there are currently 15 First Nations Reserves and 16 First Nations Communities. This discrepancy is because the Peskotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy) First Nation lost its lands and formal status due to a series of deliberate sales and subsequent cover-up of the act by the Crown during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> There have been positive discussions between the two parties, and the Peskotomuhkati are expected to gain formal recognition in the coming

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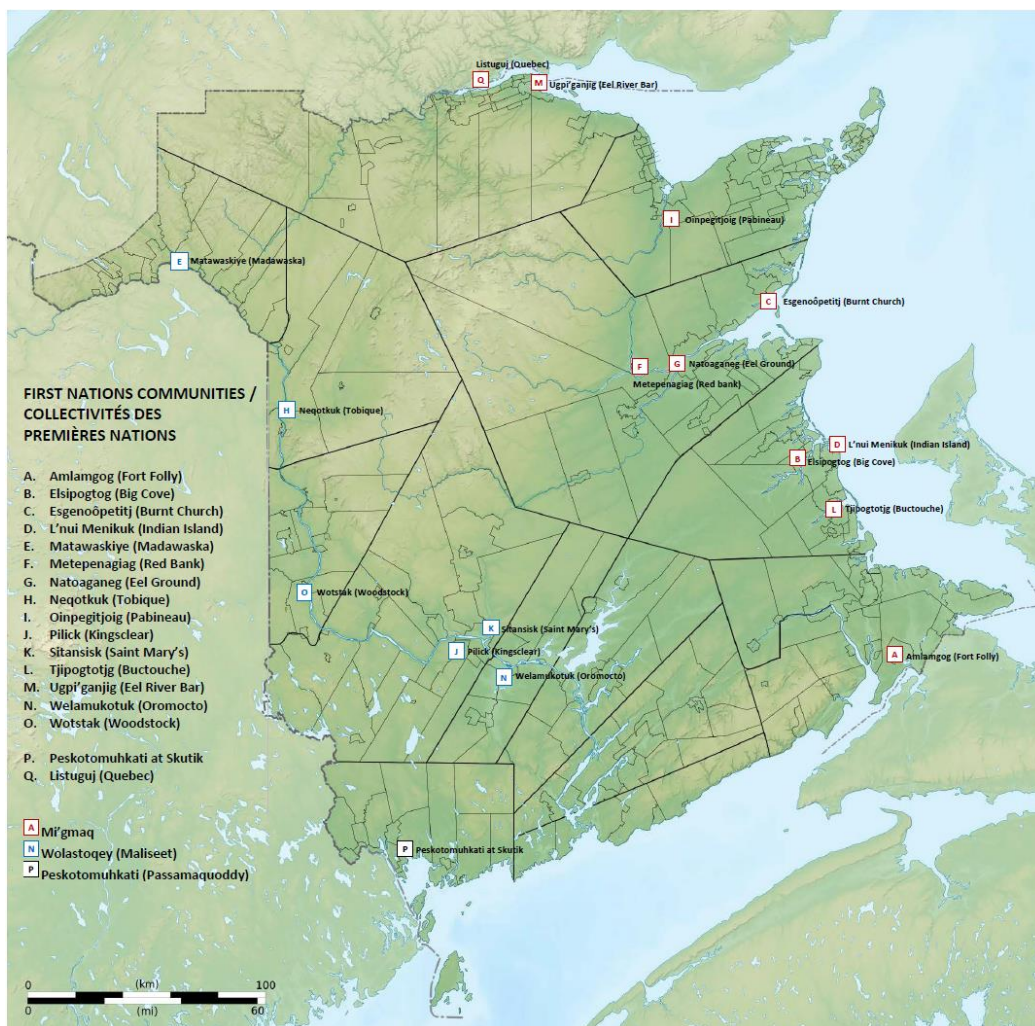
<sup>10</sup> The data comes from Donald J. Savoie, *Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick*. It included both on-reserve and off-reserve population rates based on the First Nations registry data with a ratio of 69% on reserve and 31% off reserve. This rate was applied to individual reserves in this report to approximate the 1996 population data.

<sup>11</sup> "Peskotomuhkati First Nation." *Peskotomuhkati Nation at Skutik*. <https://qonaskamkuk.com/peskotomuhkati-nation/peskotomuhkati-persistence/> (Accessed November 20, 2022)

years.<sup>12</sup> However, as no current legal First Nation status is attributed to this community, there was no available disaggregated data.<sup>13</sup>

The First Nation communities in this study are divided between the two other First Nations. Nine Mi'kmaq First Nations are situated on the eastern coast of New Brunswick, and six Wolastoqey (Formerly referred to as Maliseet) First Nations are located along the Saint John (Wolastoqey) River. Half of the First Nation communities are concentrated near CMAs and CAs, such as the three reserves near Fredericton (St. Mary's, Kingsclear and Oromocto), two near Miramichi (Natoaganeg and Metepanagiag), one near Edmundston (Madawaska), and one near Campbellton (Eel River Bar).

Map 1 New Brunswick First Nations Communities<sup>14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Smith, Connell. (2020). "The Passamaquoddy people could be close to gaining recognition in Canada" *CBC News*.

<sup>13</sup> "Peskotomuhkati First Nation." *Peskotomuhkati Nation at Skutik*.

<sup>14</sup> Government of New Brunswick Department of Aboriginal Affairs. (2022a). "First Nations Communities." [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/aboriginal\\_affairs/fnc.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/aboriginal_affairs/fnc.html) (Accessed December 12, 2022)

## 2. Demographics

Table 8 presents essential demographic information on the different reserves in New Brunswick. Overall, the on-reserve population increased from 7,000 in 2006 to 7,465 in 2016, a 7 percent increase in population. Moreover, there was a significant difference in population change between the different reserves, with the largest population increase at 42% for Indian Island (From 95 in 2006 to 145 in 2016) and the largest population decrease at 22% for Metepanagiag (From 360 in 2006 to 280 in 2016). Notably, most First Nation reserve populations increased between 2006 and 2016, with only three reserves falling.

Table 8: New Brunswick First Nations Reserve Populations by Nation in 1996, 2006 and 2016

	1996	2006	2016	Change 1996 - 2006	Change 2006 - 2016	Change 1996 - 2016	Median Age in 2016
<b>Total NB on reserve</b>	<b>7,087</b>	<b>7,000</b>	<b>7,465</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Total Mi'kmaq</b>	<b>3,874</b>	<b>4,465</b>	<b>4,575</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>NA</b>
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	1,523	1,855	1,890	22	2	24	27
Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	832	1,075	1,125	29	5	35	29
Natoaganeg (Formerly Eel Ground)	515	510	505	-1	-1	-2	30
Eel River	350	315	360	-10	14	3	31
Metepanagiag (Formerly Red Bank)	310	360	280	16	-22	-10	36
Indian Island	97	95	135	-2	42	39	28
* Pabineau *	130	125	135	-4	8	4	35.2
* Buctouche *	59	85	95	44	12	61	28.1
* Fort Folly *	58	45	50	-22	11	-14	49.2
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	<b>3,214</b>	<b>2,595</b>	<b>2,980</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>-7</b>	<b>NA</b>
St. Mary's	733	670	910	-9	36	24	25
Tobique	1,119	825	910	-26	10	-19	30
Kingsclear	474	440	470	-7	7	-1	30
Woodstock	466	280	260	-40	-7	-44	36
Oromocto	282	250	250	-11	0	-11	29
Madawaska	140	130	180	-7	38	29	44

Source: 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles for Bouctouche, Fort Folly and Pabineau. 1996 data from Donald J. Savoie, *Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick*. Table 1, p. 54. \* used to signify less reliable data. \*

There was a large variation in population between the different reserves across New Brunswick. In 2016, the reserves with the largest populations were Elsipogtog (1,890), Esgenoopetitj (1,125), St. Mary's (910) and Tobique (910), while the five smallest reserves had less than 200 people each (Fort Folly, Bouctouche, Indian Island, Pabineau and Madawaska). The other six mid-size reserves all had populations between 200 and 500 people.

Table 9 Percentage of First Nation Population by Reserve in 1996, 2006 and 2016

	<b>Pop 1996</b>	<b>Pop 2006</b>	<b>Pop 2016</b>
<b>Total NB on reserve</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total Mi'kmaq</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>61.3</b>
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	21.5	26.5	25.3
Esgenoopetitj	11.7	15.4	15.0
Natoaganeg (Formerly Eel Ground)	7.3	7.3	6.8
Eel River	4.9	4.5	4.8
Metepanagiag (Formerly Red Bank)	4.4	5.1	3.8
Indian Island	1.4	1.4	1.8
* Pabineau *	1.8	1.8	1.8
* Bouctouche *	0.8	1.2	1.3
* Fort Folly *	0.8	0.6	0.7
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>38.7</b>
St. Mary's	10.3	9.6	12.2
Tobique	15.8	11.8	12.2
Kingsclear	6.7	6.3	6.3
Woodstock	6.6	4.0	3.5
Oromocto	4.0	3.6	3.4
Madawaska	2.0	1.9	2.4

Source: 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles for Bouctouche, Fort Folly and Pabineau. 1996 data from Donald J. Savoie, *Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick*, Table 1, p. 52. \*\* used to signify less reliable data.

Elsipogtog (formerly Big Cove) had over 50% more residents than the second-biggest reserve (Esgenoopetitj) and twice the population of the third and fourth-largest reserves in New Brunswick (St. Mary's and Tobique). The four largest reserves accounted for nearly 65% of the total on-reserve Indigenous population. The top two largest reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj) are Mi'kmaq, and the third and fourth largest reserves (St. Mary's and Tobique) are Wolastoqey. Overall, two-thirds of the on-reserve population live in Mi'kmaq reserves. However, the growth rate is significantly higher in Wolastoqey communities on reserve, with a population growth rate of 15% between 2016 and 2021, compared to a 2% growth rate for Mi'kmaq reserves during that same time frame.

The median age on reserve in 2016 was 29, with considerable differences across reserves, ranging from 25 at St. Mary's to 49.2 at Fort Folly. The four largest reserves all have median ages between 25 and 30, while most smaller reserves have older median populations. Larger population centers may have more work opportunities for younger individuals, which could explain the age difference between small and large reserves.

As noted earlier, the 1996 data is not as reliable as the more recent data, but its data tells an interesting story. The two most notable changes in population between 1996 and 2016 were found in two Wolastoqey reserves northwest of Fredericton: Tobique and Woodstock. Tobique fell from being the second largest reserve in 1996 to the joint third largest in 2016, St. Mary's and Esgenooetitj increased their percentage of the total population over the 20 years. Elsipogtog has continuously been the largest reserve in the province and has increased its size from 21% to 25% of the total on-reserve First Nation population from 1996 to 2016.

### 3. Economic Indicators

This section will deal with income, income composition and labour force participation for the individual reserves in New Brunswick.<sup>15</sup>

#### Income

Table 10 presents data on reserve-specific average total income and median employment income. The on-reserve First Nation population median employment income in New Brunswick in 2015 was \$13,350. The median employment income allows a better understanding of the employment market and the opportunities on reserve for employment. The reserve with the highest median employment income in 2015 was Eel River, at \$19,776. The reserve with the lowest median employment income in 2015 was Oromocto, with a median income of \$9,281.

The reserve with the highest median employment income in 2015 had twice the lowest, which presents a significant variance in median incomes across reserves in New Brunswick.

However, Esgenooetitj (the second largest reserve) had a lower overall median employment income of \$11,246 in 2015, which is about \$2,000 lower than the on-reserve median employment income and may contradict the hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, that a large population may lead to better wages. St. Mary's had a median employment income of \$16,336 which was also above the median in 2015.

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<sup>15</sup> Some economic measures might not be available due to confidentiality requirements in small communities. This may lead to bias in the analysis as there is no ability to compare with the least populated reserves as they are below the suppression threshold.



Table 10: Median Employment Income and Average Total Income on Reserve in 2015<sup>16</sup>

Reserve	Median Employment Income	Ratio of Median Employment Income (% of NB median)	Average Total Income	Ratio of Avg Income (% of NB total)
<b>Total NB on reserve</b>	13,350	100.0	24,010	100.0
<b>Total Mi'kmaw</b>	13,980	104.7	24,137	100.5
Eel River	19,776	148.1	30,788	128.2
Elsipogtog	15,712	117.7	22,232	92.6
Metepanagiag	12,512	93.7	26,401	110.0
Esgenoopetitj	11,246	84.2	24,576	102.4
Natoaganeg (Eel ground)	10,272	76.9	24,294	101.1
Bouctouche	NA	NA	NA	NA
Fort Folly	NA	NA	NA	NA
Indian Island	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pabineau	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	13,354	100.0	21,332	88.8
Woodstock	17,429	130.6	26,562	110.6
St. Mary's	16,336	122.3	21,780	90.7
Kingsclear	14,080	105.5	22,119	92.1
Tobique	9,952	74.6	18,687	77.8
Oromocto	9,281	69.5	22,420	93.4
Madawaska	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Median Employment Income statistics from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits, Income composition and Average income assembled from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles.

Eel River also had the highest average total income at \$30,788 in 2015. Other higher-earning reserves included Metepanagiag and Woodstock, with average incomes of \$26,401 and \$25,562, respectively. Reserves with median employment income below the provincial median were also generally below the provincial average for total income. Tobique was again in the worst condition, with only an average total income of \$21,780, 78% of the provincial average. However, Tobique and Eel River are two outliers, with all the other reserve-specific average incomes being within \$3,000 of the total on-reserve provincial average.

Geographically, the communities with the highest median income were all near cities such as Fredericton (St. Mary's and Kingsclear), Woodstock (Woodstock) and Campbellton (Eel River).

<sup>16</sup> The Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqey averages were calculated using a weighed average with the available reserve-level information regarding population and income. These are estimations and are missing key information and are used only comparatively

One interesting pair is Metepanagiag and Eel Ground. Both reserves were located near each other and under the total on-reserve median employment income (\$12,512 and \$10,272, respectively). Another interesting geographic effect was that all three First Nations surrounding Fredericton (St. Mary's, Oromocto and Kingsclear) had below-average total incomes in 2015. However, St. Mary's and Kingsclear had above average median employment incomes.

When comparing both First Nations, there was very little difference between the Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaw median employment incomes in 2015. However, the average total income was higher on Mi'kmaw reserves (\$24,137) than on Wolastoqey reserves (\$21,332) in 2015. The higher average total income on Mi'kmaw reserves could be a product of a higher dependency on government transfers than employment for Mi'kmaw reserves in 2015 (Table 11).

### **Income Composition**

Although the previous section did focus on different types of income and the particularities regarding the median employment income and the total average income, it does not tell the whole story regarding income composition on NB reserves.

Table 11 provides a breakdown of income composition by the reserve. The total on-reserve composition of total income in 2015 consisted of 63.1% employment income, 32.7% government transfers, and 4.3% other income forms. Income composition might allow a better understanding of deep-rooted economic problems, including lagging average incomes. Most reserves with employment income shares above the on-reserve average also had higher median employment incomes (Eel River, St. Mary's, Kingsclear, Woodstock). The only outlier is Elsipogtog which had a higher median employment income, but people on the reserve have, on average, only 56% of their total income from employment.

Elsipogtog and Esgenooetitj had the highest percentage of government transfers in total income at 40%. This is peculiar as those are the two largest reserves in New Brunswick, and both are part of the Mi'kmaw First Nation. This higher dependency on government transfers is something that should be studied further in order to encourage economic growth. Mi'kmaw First Nations have a much higher government transfer dependency than Wolastoqey reserves, with 37% of all income coming from government transfers in Mi'kmaw reserves in 2015 versus 29% for Wolastoqey reserves.

Table 11: Sources of Total Income on Reserve in 2015

Reserve	Employment	Government Transfer	Other Sources
<b>Total NB on reserve</b>	63	33	4
<b>Total Mi'kmaw</b>	58	37	4
Eel River	69	29	3
Metepanagiag	63	31	6
Natoaganeg (eel ground)	63	32	5
Esgenooetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	57	40	4
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	56	40	4
Bouctouche	NA	NA	NA
Fort Folly	NA	NA	NA
Indian Island	NA	NA	NA
Madawaska	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	68	29	4
Woodstock	75	21	6
Kingsclear	69	28	3
Oromocto	68	30	3
St. Mary's	67	28	5
Tobique	65	31	4
Pabineau	NA	NA	NA

Source: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles. 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits for NB on-reserve total

#### 4. Labour Market

This report presents four different but related labour force statistics: the participation rate, the employment rate, the unemployment rate, and the % of individuals on reserve working full-time for the full year in 2015. The first three were sampled during two weeks in 2016, while the last statistic was asked regarding the entirety of 2015.

The rate of employed First Nations people aged 15 and over working full-time on reserves all year in 2015 was 37%, which is low relative to the total population. Communities with higher full-time work had higher average total incomes in 2015, such as Kingsclear, Natoaganeg, Metepanagiag and Woodstock. Only St. Mary's had a lower-than-average total income with higher full-time employment.

The on-reserve participation rate was 54%, with only 1 in 2 people working or looking for work in 2016. This participation rate was highest in Pabineau (71.4%), Woodstock (68%), Eel River (67%), Indian Island (67%), Bouctouche (66.7%) and Tobique (65%). It was at its lowest at Natoaganeg (43%), Madawaska (48%) and Kingsclear (49%).



Table 12: Labour Market Statistics on Reserve in 2016

Reserve	Participation rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate	% of people employed working full time in 2015
<b>NB on reserve</b>	54	38	30	37
<b>Total Mi'kmaw</b>	52	35	32	33
*Pabineau*	71*	48*	40*	NA
*Bouctouche*	67*	47*	30*	NA
Eel River	67	50	19	39
Indian Island	67	50	33	38
Metepanagiag	55	41	25	40
Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	51	32	27	24
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	50	30	40	33
*Fort Folly*	50*	38*	0*	NA
Natoaganeg (Eel Ground)	43	32	25	42
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	57	44	24	42
Woodstock	68	56	14	52
Tobique	65	42	35	36
Oromocto	58	34	41	36
St. Mary's	53	46	16	45
Kingsclear	49	42	16	43
Madawaska	48	45	14	53

Source: Statistics from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles for Bouctouche, Fort Folly and Pabineau. \*\* used to signify less reliable data

As seen previously in the report, the unemployment rate on reserve sat at 30% in 2016. The unemployment rate does vary substantially from reserve to reserve, with the largest reserve (Elsipogtog) having the second highest unemployment rate at 40% of the labour force. This could explain the higher reliance on government transfer as a percentage of total income for the reserve.

Other reserves with high unemployment rates in 2016 include Oromocto (41%), Pabineau (40%), Tobique (35%), and Indian Island (33%). The high unemployment rates in Oromocto and Tobique correlate with lower-than-average total incomes and median employment incomes. However, unlike Elsipogtog, which used government transfers to top up high unemployment, Oromocto and Tobique did not have a higher dependency on government transfers in 2016, which may explain the difference in average income.

The lowest unemployment rates were found in Woodstock (14%), Madawaska (14%), Kingsclear (16%) and Eel River (19%). Although these rates were the lowest among all reserves, they are still higher than the non-indigenous unemployment rate in New Brunswick in 2015 (10.9%). However, we see higher median incomes for all these First Nation reserves. With higher median employment incomes than the reserve median, this may act as an incentive to work.

When comparing both First Nations, there are significant differences in the labour market rates between the Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqey reserves in 2016. The Mi'kmaw participation rate was 52%, while the Wolastoqey rate stood at 57%, a five-percentage point difference. The employment rate was higher on Wolastoqey reserves (44%) than on Mi'kmaw reserves (35%). Further, the unemployment rate was 33% higher in Mi'kmaw reserves than in Wolastoqey reserves in 2016 (32% unemployment and 24% unemployment). As mentioned in the report, there seems to be a higher lack of work opportunities on Mi'kmaw reserves, which has translated to a higher reliance on government transfers.

## 5. Educational Attainment

The distribution of the highest educational attainment in 2016 for individuals between the ages of 25 and 64 living on reserves (Chart 13) was as follows: 8% of the on-reserve First Nation population had a university degree, 23% had a college diploma, 15% had a trades certification, 26% had a high school diploma as the highest level of education, and 28% had not completed high school. With such a high rate of non-completion, it is evident that there is a need for policies to encourage educational attainment.

The highest rate of high school incompleteness in 2016 was found in Esgenoopetitj at 43% of the total population, which is more than 1.5 times the on-reserve average. Other reserves with high non-completion rates include Fort Folly (38%), Oromocto (36%), Bouctouche (33%) and St. Mary's (32%).

On the other hand, reserves with high post-secondary attainment include Eel River (71%), Indian Island (66%), Bouctouche (60%), Madawaska (56%) and Woodstock (56%). The most common level of educational attainment was a college diploma in all of these cases. The only reserve with reliable data with similar college and trade degree levels was Elsipogtog (with 22% completing college and 21% completing a trade certification).

The highest levels of university completion were found at Indian Island reserve, with 33% of all individuals having a university degree in 2016. However, with a population of 135, this could be a sampling issue. Other high levels of university education are found at Bouctouche (13%), Tobique (13%) and Eel River (12%). It is interesting to point out that communities closer to universities that have lower opportunity costs of attending university do not have exceptionally high rates. St. Mary's, Oromocto, Kingsclear, Fort Folly and Madawaska all had less than 10% of the total population with university degrees in 2016, although they are closer to university campuses.

Table 13: Education Attainment on Reserve in 2016 (Age 25-64), Percent

Reserve	Less than High School	High School	Post-secondary			
			Uni	College	Trade	Total Post-secondary
<b>NB on reserve total</b>	28	26	8	23	15	46
<b>Total Mi'kmaw</b>	29	24	8	19	19	46
Indian Island	13	20	33	13	20	66
Metepanagiag	14	46	5	22	8	35
Eel River	15	17	12	39	20	71
Natoaganeg (eel ground)	21	35	9	23	11	43
*Pabineau*	29	29	6	6	29	41
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	29	20	7	22	21	50
*Buctouche*	33	13	13	0	47	60
*Fort Folly*	38	25	0	0	25	25
Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	43	22	5	11	18	34
<b>Total Wolastoqey</b>	27	28	10	28	9	46
Woodstock	16	34	9	38	9	56
Kingsclear	23	27	6	37	10	53
Madawaska	24	24	8	40	8	56
Tobique	25	23	13	25	14	52
St. Mary's	32	30	9	24	5	38
Oromocto	36	36	7	14	7	28

Source: Statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles were used for Bouctouche, Fort Folly and Pabineau. \*\* used to signify less reliable data

When comparing both First Nations, the post-secondary attainment is identical between both groups (46%), but a larger percentage of Wolastoqey First Nations people had university degrees than Mi'kmaw First Nations people on reserve in 2016 (10% and 8% respectively). Another difference was the high school incompleteness rates, with Wolastoqey First Nations having a slightly lower high school incompleteness rate than the Mi'kmaw reserves in 2016 (27% and 29%, respectively). These differences in educational attainment could also help explain the large income structure and labour market differences between First Nations in 2016.

## 6. Top Industries

Looking at the top industries by reserve in 2016, we see that most reserves fall into one of three important categories: Sales and Service, Natural Resources, Education, Law, and Social, and Community and Government Services. Only Madawaska had a different top industry: Business, Finance and Admin.

Table 14: Top Industries and Average Income on Reserve in 2016

	<b>Avg Income</b>	<b>Top industry</b>
<b>Total NB on reserve</b>	<b>24,010</b>	<b>Sales and service</b>
Eel River	30,788	Natural Resource
Woodstock	26,562	Sales and Service
Metepanagiag	26,401	Sales and Service
Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	24,576	Natural Resources
Natoaganeg (Eel Ground)	24,294	Education, Law and Social, Community and Government Services
Oromocto	22,420	National Resources
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	22,232	Natural Resources
Kingsclear	22,119	Education, Law and Social, Community and Government Services
St. Mary's	21,780	Sales and Service
Tobique	18,687	Sales and Service
Indian Island	NA	Natural Resources
Madawaska	NA	Business, Finance and Admin
Bouctouche	NA	NA
Fort Folly	NA	NA
Pabineau	NA	NA

Source: Statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

The two largest reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj) had natural resources as their top industry, while the join-third (St. Mary's and Tobique) had Sales and Service as their top industry in 2016. There does not seem to be any relation between the top industry and the average income, as there are reserves with all three industries that were above and below the income average in 2015. Most of the largest Mi'kmaq reserves have natural resources as their main occupation. This data gives a better picture of the industries that might be leveraged more effectively when looking at public policy. As more opportunities come from land claims and access to natural resources, we should expect an increase across the reserves for jobs in the natural resources sector and income as a whole.

## VI. Analysis of Largest Reserves

This section will bring together all the information and look at the four biggest reserves in New Brunswick (Elsipogtog, Esgenooetitj, St. Mary's and Tobique). These four reserves represent more than two-thirds of the entire reserve population. They also represent both Nations, with Elsipogtog and Esgenooetitj being Mi'kmaq and St. Mary's and Tobique being Wolastoqey. Additionally, as some census-subdivision data for 2021 was available, 2021 census data will be used with these reserves. This is because they all consist of census subdivisions above the suppression level and are easily calculated. This was not the case with all reserves, so the four largest reserves were selected.

### 1. Population

Table 15: Population Data on the Four Largest Reserves in 2016 and 2021

	<b>NB on-reserve total</b>	<b>Four largest reserves</b>	<b>Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)</b>	<b>Esgenooetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)</b>	<b>Tobique</b>	<b>St. Mary's</b>
<b>Pop 2006</b>	7,000	4,425	1,855	1,075	825	670
<b>Pop 2016</b>	7,465	4,835	1,890	1,125	910	910
<b>Pop 2021</b>	7,720	5,455	2,062	1,243	1,080	1,070
<b>2006-2016 Pop change (%)</b>	7	9	2	5	10	36
<b>2016-2021 Pop change (%)</b>	3	13	9	11	19	18
<b>2016 Median Age</b>	29	NA	27	29	30	25
<b>2021 Median Age</b>	NA	NA	31	31	35	32

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. No. 98-316-X2021001 and Table 98-10-0264-01. For 2016: statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

There has been an increase in the on-reserve population from 2016 to 2021 for the four largest First Nations communities. The increase over five years from 2016 to 2021 was larger than the previous ten-year increase of 9% from 2006 to 2016 for the four largest reserves. However, this trend is different from the overall on-reserve First Nation growth, with the total on-reserve total only increasing by 3% from 2016 to 2021. When data becomes available, it may be important to look at the expected decrease in smaller First Nations communities. This could also signify an increasing population divide between larger and smaller reserves due to a discrepancy in services and opportunities.

Elsipogtog is still the largest reserve in 2021, with a First Nation population of over 2000. Tobique overtook St. Mary's in 2021 to become the third largest reserve with 1080, although St. Mary's is not much smaller, with a population of 1070. Elsipogtog's population growth from 2016 to 2021 was larger than the 2006-2016 population growth, with Elsipogtog growing by

9.1% from 2016 to 2021, up from 2% from 2006-2016. Esgenoopetitj recorded a population growth of 10.5% from 2016 to 2021, up from 5% from 2006-2016.

However, Tobique and St. Mary’s are still growing faster than the two largest reserves, with 18.7% and 17.5% growth over the 2016-2021 period, respectively. This is an increase in the growth rate for Tobique and a decrease for St. Mary’s. Interestingly, all four reserves recorded above-average growth (13%), above the New Brunswick reserves’ average population growth of only 3%.

## 2. Demographics

Table 16: Population Structure for the Four Largest Reserves in 2016 and 2021, Percent

	Year	NB on-reserve total	Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	St. Mary’s	Tobique
<b>Under 15</b>	2016	27	28	27	35	26
	2021	25	25	21	25	25
<b>15-24</b>	2016	17	17	17	14	18
	2021	16	16	13	17	16
<b>25-64</b>	2016	49	48	52	46	48
	2021	56	50	52	54	49
<b>65+</b>	2016	7	7	5	5	8
	2021	3	9	9	7	11

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001 and Table 98-10-0264-01. For 2016: statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

When comparing population demographics, 35% of First Nations people at St. Mary’s were under 15 in 2016, around eight percentage points greater than the NB on-reserve average and the other three larger reserves. This trend was reduced in 2021 for St. Mary’s, Elsipogtog and Tobique, with all three reserves now having the same rate of 25%.

St. Mary’s, Elsipogtog and Tobique have seen increases in their First Nation populations between the ages of 25 and 64 since 2016. St. Mary’s recorded the biggest growth, going from 46% of the total population in 2016 to 54% in 2021. Elsipogtog saw a more moderate increase, with its share of the total population increasing from 48% in 2016 to 50% in 2021. Tobique recorded a one percentage point increase in the share of people between the ages of 25 to 64, going from 48% in 2016 to 49% in 2021. Finally, Esgenoopetitj saw the rate stay at 52% from 2016 to 2021.

Tobique had an older population in 2016 (with a median age of 30) higher than the total on-reserve median age of 29. This trend has continued, with its median age now being 35.1 and 11% of its population over 65 in 2021. However, Tobique now has a larger under-25 population rate, with 25% of its population under 15 and 18% between the ages of 15 and 24. The aging

population was also felt by both Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj, as the share jumped to 9% of the total population in 2021.

### 3. Economic Indicators

#### Income

Table 17: Nominal Income Statistics for the Four Largest Reserves in 2015 and 2020

	<b>NB on-reserve total</b>	<b>Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)</b>	<b>Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)</b>	<b>St. Mary's</b>	<b>Tobique</b>
<b>Avg Income 2015</b>	24,010	22,232	24,576	21,780	18,687
<b>Avg Income 2020</b>	37,380	41,040	35,400	32,600	35,100
% Change in Average Income 2015-2020	56%	85%	44%	50%	88%
<b>Median employment income 2015</b>	13,350	15,712	11,246	16,336	9,952
<b>Median employment income in 2020</b>	21,040	24,600	11,600	21,600	20,000
% Change in Median employment income 2015-2020	58%	57%	3%	32%	101%

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001 and Table 98-10-0281-01. For 2016: statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

In 2015, only one of the large reserves had an above-average income statistic (Esgenoopetitj with \$24,576, greater than the \$24,010 on-reserve average). The other three reserves had lower average incomes than the total on-reserve average income. There have been significant increases in the average total income from 2015 to 2020. Elsipogtog and Tobique recorded 85% increases in their average income, going from \$22,232 to \$41,040 for Elsipogtog and from \$18,687 to \$35,100 for Tobique. This growth was above the on-reserve average of 56%. The increases for the other two reserves were also significant but below the on-reserve average of 56%, with Esgenoopetitj recording 44% growth (from \$24,756 to \$35,400) and St. Mary's recording 50% growth (from \$21,780 to \$32,600). The large increase in income could be distorted by pandemic relief payments such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), and the 2020 data might not capture long-term trends.

Interestingly, the average total income rankings have changed. Whereas Esgenoopetitj had the highest average total income in 2015 among the four largest reserves at \$24,576, it was surpassed in 2020 by Elsipogtog, which recorded an average total income of \$41,040. St. Mary's was ranked third in 2015 and last in 2020 (with an average total income of \$32,600), surpassed by Tobique's high average total income growth of 85%. However, the data tells a different story



when looking at median employment income. The median employment income only increased by 3% for Esgenoopetitj, going from \$11,246 in 2015 to \$11,600 in 2020. This stagnant growth has placed Esgenoopetitj last in median employment growth, even if its average total income is still second compared to the other large reserves. Further, the on-reserve median employment income recorded 58% growth over the five years.

In contrast to Esgenoopetitj’s growth, Tobique’s median employment income doubled with a 101% growth, going from \$9,952 in 2015 to \$20,000 in 2020. It has gone from last to third in terms of median employment income and is only \$1,600 behind the second-highest median employment income, St. Mary’s, with \$21,600 in 2020. St. Mary’s dropped in ranking, going from having the highest median employment income in 2015 of \$16,336 to having the second highest median employment income in 2020 with \$21,600. Finally, Elsipogtog’s median employment income was the highest in 2020, at \$24,600.

### Income Composition

Table 18: Total Income Composition Rates for the Four Largest Reserves in 2015 and 2020, Percent

	Year	NB on-reserve total	Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	St. Mary’s	Tobique
<b>Composition of total income</b>	NA	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Employment</b>	2015	63	56	57	67	65
	2020	NA	60	56	69	66
<b>Gov transfer</b>	2015	33	40	40	28	31
	2020	NA	39	40	27	30
<b>Other</b>	2015	4	4	4	5	4
	2020	NA	2	4	4	4

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001. For 2016: Statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits. Income composition was added using Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada’s First Nations profiles.

Income composition proportions have mostly stayed the same between 2015 and 2020 for the four largest reserves in New Brunswick. Employment income as a portion of total income composition has increased for three of the four reserves (from 56% to 60% in Elsipogtog, from 67% to 69% in St. Mary’s and from 65 to 66% in Tobique). However, the rankings stayed the same from 2015 to 2020, with St. Mary’s having the highest employment income percentage at 69% in 2020, followed by Tobique at 66%, then Elsipogtog at 60% and Esgenoopetitj at 56%.

When looking at total income composition using Table 18, St. Mary’s and Tobique had below-average government transfers as a percentage of total income in 2015. These shares have decreased even more in 2020, with government transfers only representing 27% of the total



income at St. Mary’s and 30% in Tobique. Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj had, on average, 40% of their total income covered by government transfers in 2015, which was seven percentage points greater than the on-reserve average. This mostly stayed the same in 2020, decreasing by one percentage point to 39% for Elsipogtog and increasing by half a percentage point for Esgenoopetitj.

#### 4. Labour Market Indicators

Table 19: Census Labour Market Performance for the Four Largest Reserves in 2016 and 2021 (15 and over), Percent

	NB on-reserve total		Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)		Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)		St. Mary’s		Tobique	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
<b>Participation rate</b>	54	52	50	38	51	55	53	51	65	56
<b>Employment</b>	38	43	30	30	32	36	46	44	42	44
<b>Unemployment</b>	30	19	40	22	27	34	16	11	35	21
<b>Employed individuals who worked full-time the whole year before</b>	37	NA	33	33	24	26	45	41	36	31

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001 and Table 98-10-0423-01. For 2016: statistics assembled from the 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

Looking at labour market indicators from 2016 to 2021, we can see that the participation rate has decreased in three of the four reserves, with the participation rate increasing only in Esgenoopetitj (51% to 55%). The two largest changes happened at Elsipogtog (50% to 38%) and Tobique (65% to 56%) from 2016 to 2021.

St. Mary’s also had a much lower than average unemployment rate in 2016, with half of the average unemployment rate, possibly related to the proximity to Fredericton and ample job opportunities. This is also seen in the percentage of the labour force working full time, with almost 45% of all workers working full time at St. Mary’s. This rate is much lower in the two largest reserves in 2016, where only 33% of all employed workers have full-time jobs in Elsipogtog and only 24% at Esgenoopetitj. In 2021, this trend continued, with St. Mary’s having an unemployment rate of only 11%, only one percentage point lower than the non-Indigenous unemployment rate of 10.1%. The unemployment rate decreased from 30% in 2016 to 19% in 2021 across all reserves, a ten-percentage point decrease in the measure. This was accompanied by a five-percentage point increase in employment rate from 38% to 43% in all reserves.

There is a large discrepancy between the two top Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqey reserves regarding employment rates in 2021. While St. Mary’s and Tobique have employment rates of 44% in 2021, above the on-reserve average, Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj have employment

rates of 30% and 36%, below the average. These below-average statistics demonstrate a potential lack of full-time opportunities on reserve and a greater reliance on government income, especially for Elsipogtog, which has a 40% unemployment rate in 2021. This could explain the large difference in income composition, with Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj relying much more on government transfers as sources of income.

Finally, the number of workers working full time in the year before the census has either stayed the same or increased for the largest Mi'kmaq reserves in 2021, while it decreased for the largest Wolastoqey reserves in 2021. Interestingly, Esgenoopetitj only has 26% of its employed population working full-time, much lower than St. Mary's 41% in 2021.

## 5. Educational Attainment

Table 20: Educational Attainment Data for the Four Largest Reserves in 2016 and 2021 (Ages 25-64)

	NB on-reserve total		Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)		Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)		St. Mary's		Tobique	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2021	2016	2021	2016
<b>Less than High School</b>	28	NA	29	38	43	37	32	22	25	22
<b>High School</b>	26	NA	20	31	22	33	30	35	23	28
<b>Post - Secondary</b>	46	NA	50	32	34	31	38	43	52	49
University	8	NA	7	6	5	6	9	12	13	23
College	23	NA	22	20	11	17	24	25	25	17
Trade	15	NA	21	6	18	8	5	5	14	9

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001. For 2016: 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

Three out of the four largest reserves had higher high school incompleteness rates in 2016 (Elsipogtog with 29%, Esgenoopetitj with 43% and St. Mary's with 32%). Tobique was the only reserve with a smaller-than-average high school incompleteness proportion in 2016. The 43% incompleteness level for Esgenoopetitj in 2016 was a worrying statistic, as this was more than 1.5 times the on-reserve average in 2016 and around two times the non-indigenous provincial average (21.7%). The reserve of most concern is Elsipogtog, which saw its share of individuals with no high school diploma increase by almost ten percentage points from 29% in 2016 to 38% in 2021. Overall, we can notice a pattern in the four largest reserves; the two largest Mi'kmaq reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj) have higher incompleteness levels than the Wolastoqey (St. Mary's and Tobique) reserves.

For Tobique, in 2016, those who completed high school were more likely to complete higher levels of education; 52% of the population had more than a high school diploma. This

trend continued in 2021, with 49% of the total population with a postsecondary degree, and almost one in four individuals between the age of 25 and 65 having a university degree.

## 6. Occupations

Table 21: Top Occupations for the Largest Reserves in 2016 and 2021

	Year	Total on reserve	Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	St. Mary's	Tobique
<b>Top Occupation</b>	2016	Sales and Service (23%)	Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (28%)	Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (33%)	Sales and service (38%)	Sales and service (25%)
	2021	NA	Education, law and social, community and government services (24%)	Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (23%)	Sales and service (31%)	Sales and service (31%)
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Occupation</b>	2016	Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (20%)	Education, law and social, community and government services (20%)	Sales and service (23%)	Trades, transport, and equipment operators and related (16%)	Education, law and social, community and government services (18%)
	2021	NA	Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (19%)	Sales and service (23%)	Education, law and social, community and government services (21%)	Education, law and social, community and government services (23%)

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada no. 98-316-X2021001. For 2016: 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits.

In 2016, There was a wide distribution of occupations across New Brunswick reserves. The top three sectors in 2016 were Sales and Services (23%), Natural resources, agriculture, and related production (20%), and Education, law and social, community and government services (17%). The largest sectoral concentration was in St. Mary's, where 38% of all workers were in the sales and service sectors in 2016. This could be due to the urban proximity of the reserve. This was also the case for the other large Wolastoqey reserve of Tobique, with 25% of all

employed individuals working in sales and service in 2016. Mi'kmaq reserves had natural resources, agriculture, and related products as their top sector in 2016.

In 2021, the share of occupations had changed slightly. Sales and service are still the most numerous occupations for the Wolastoqey reserves, although they now have education, law and social, community and government services as the second most important. For the two largest Mi'kmaq reserves, Natural resources jobs are less dominant than they were five years before, with Elsipogtog having more individuals working in the education and social service sector in 2021. The change in job occupation shares might affect income, and we are still seeing lower-paying job sectors like sales and service being dominant on First Nations reserves.

## VII. First Nations in Canada and New Brunswick

This section compares New Brunswick’s First Nation population’s performance to that of First Nation populations in Canada and the other provinces. By providing a benchmark to compare with the other provinces and the Canadian average, the benchmark will provide a point of comparison on whether the province of New Brunswick’s levels is similar to the mean. Particular attention is given to economic outcomes such as income and low-income status.

### 1. Demographics

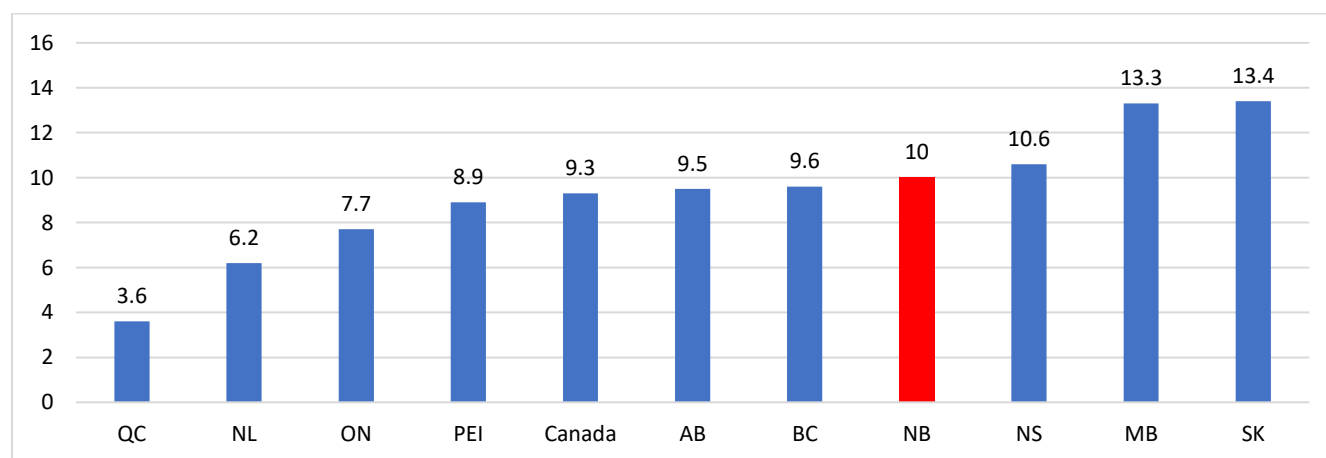
Table 22: Average Age of the First Nation Populations and the Non-Indigenous Populations in the Provinces and Canada in 2021

	<b>Canada</b>	<b>QC</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>ON</b>	<b>PEI</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>NB</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>SK</b>
First Nations	32.5	38.5	39.5	33.9	33.9	29.6	33.6	34.5	33.7	28.0	27.9
Non-Indigenous	41.8	42.1	45.7	41.6	42.8	39.1	43.2	44.5	44.3	41.3	41.3
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-9.3</b>	<b>-3.6</b>	<b>-6.2</b>	<b>-7.7</b>	<b>-8.9</b>	<b>-9.5</b>	<b>-9.6</b>	<b>-10.0</b>	<b>-10.6</b>	<b>-13.3</b>	<b>-13.4</b>

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0264-01.

The average First Nation individual’s age in Canada in 2021 was 34.5 in New Brunswick, two years older than the Canadian average of 32.5. New Brunswick has the third oldest non-Indigenous average age, only behind Newfoundland (39.5) and Quebec (38.5). However, New Brunswick also has one of the highest non-Indigenous average ages at 44.5, with only Newfoundland having a higher average age of 45.7. This leads to a more significant difference in average ages between the First Nation population and the non-Indigenous population in New Brunswick. New Brunswick has a 10-year difference between the average age of its non-Indigenous and First Nation populations, which is greater than the Canadian average of 9.3 years. New Brunswick has the fourth largest difference between its two populations but is only really comparable to Nova Scotia, as both Manitoba and Saskatchewan have much younger First Nation populations.

Chart 3: Difference Between the Average Age of the Non-Indigenous Population and the First Nation Population in the Provinces and Canada in 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0264-01.

Table 23: First Nation Population Age Structure in New Brunswick and in Canada in 2016 and 2021

Age %	2016		2021	
	NB	Canada	NB	Canada
0-14	27.6	29.2	23.8	27.1
15-24	17.3	17.5	16.7	16.3
25-34	12.9	14.0	13.9	14.8
35-44	12.5	11.9	11.5	11.8
45-54	12.1	12.1	12.1	11.0
55-64	10.0	8.9	11.7	10.4
65-74	5.0	4.5	7.4	6.0
75+	2.6	1.9	2.9	2.7

Source: For 2021 data: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0281-01. For Canada in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001. For NB in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001.

A few key differences exist when comparing the demographic change between the New Brunswick First Nation populations and the First Nation populations at the national level over time. First, at the national level, the population proportion between the ages of 0-14 stood at 27.1% in 2021, while in New Brunswick, it was 23.8%. There is also a higher share of First Nations adults between the ages of 25-44 (14.8% between 25-34, 11.8% between 35-44) in Canada than in New Brunswick, with New Brunswick having a lower share in both groups (13.9% between 25-34, 11.5% between 35-44). Finally, New Brunswick has a larger 55+ population share, with 11.7% being between 55-64, 7.4% being between 65-74 and 2.9% being 75+ in 2021.

## 2. Economic Indicators

### Income in Canada and New Brunswick

Table 24: Nominal Average Total Income and Median Employment Incomes for First Nations in New Brunswick and Canada in 2015 and 2020

Year	Average Total Income			Median Employment Income		
	2015	2020	2015-2020 (%)	2015	2020	2015-2020 (%)
NB	27,898	39,040	39.9	17,160	22,800	32.9
Canada	31,519	41,880	32.8	23,345	28,400	21.7
NB/Canada	88.5	93.2	5.3	73.5	80.3	9.3%

Source: For 2021 data: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0281-01. For Canada in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001. For NB in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001.

The average income for the First Nation populations in New Brunswick increased by 39.9% between 2015 and 2020, going from \$27,898 to \$39,040. The average total income growth for First Nations across Canada was 32.8% over the five years, going from \$31,519 in 2015 to \$41,880 in 2020, which is lower than the New Brunswick average total income growth rate. The ratio between New Brunswick First Nation's average total income and the First

Nation's average total income at the national level went from 88.5% in 2015 to 93.2% in 2020, a five percent increase in the ratio over the five years.

When looking at the median employment income, there has been a more considerable difference in growth between the New Brunswick and Canadian median. While the New Brunswick First Nation population's median employment income grew 32.9% from \$17,160 in 2015 to \$22,800 in 2020, the Canadian median employment income grew 21.7% from \$23,345 in 2015 to \$28,400 in 2020. The ratio of New Brunswick's median employment income to Canadian median employment income is the lowest across the provinces, in 2020, at 80.2% of the Canadian First Nation median employment income in 2020. However, there was a 9.3% increase in the New Brunswick First Nation population's median employment income ratio to the Canadian median employment income over the five years, almost twice the growth rate of the average total income.

### Income Between Provinces

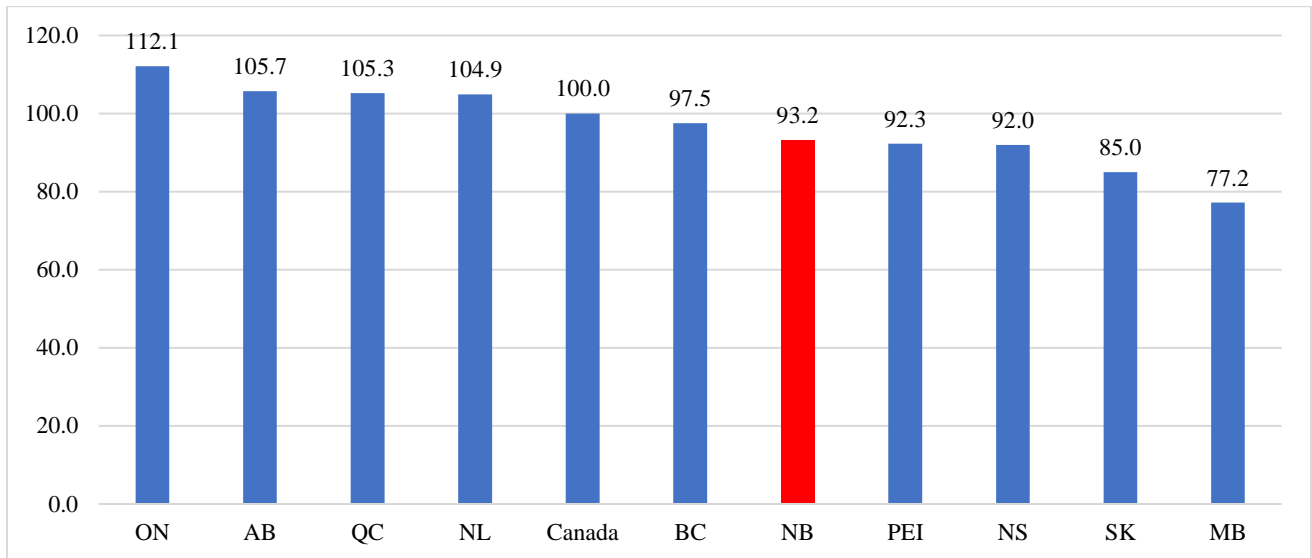
Table 25: First Nation Population Average Total Income and Median Employment Income by Province and Ratio of Provincial Statistics Over Canadian Statistics in 2020

	Canada	ON	NL	AB	QC	BC	NB	PEI	NS	SK	MB
<b>Average First Nation Total Income (\$)</b>	41,880	46,960	43,920	44,280	44,080	40,840	39,040	38,640	38,520	35,600	32,320
<b>Ratio of Canadian average (%)</b>	100.0	112.1	104.9	105.7	105.3	97.5	93.2	92.3	92.0	85.0	77.2
<b>Median employment income (\$)</b>	28,400	30,800	27,800	30,600	30,400	28,800	22,800	24,400	25,800	24,000	23,200
<b>Ratio of National Median (%)</b>	100.0	108.5	97.9	107.7	107.0	101.4	80.3	85.9	90.8	84.5	81.7

Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0281-01.

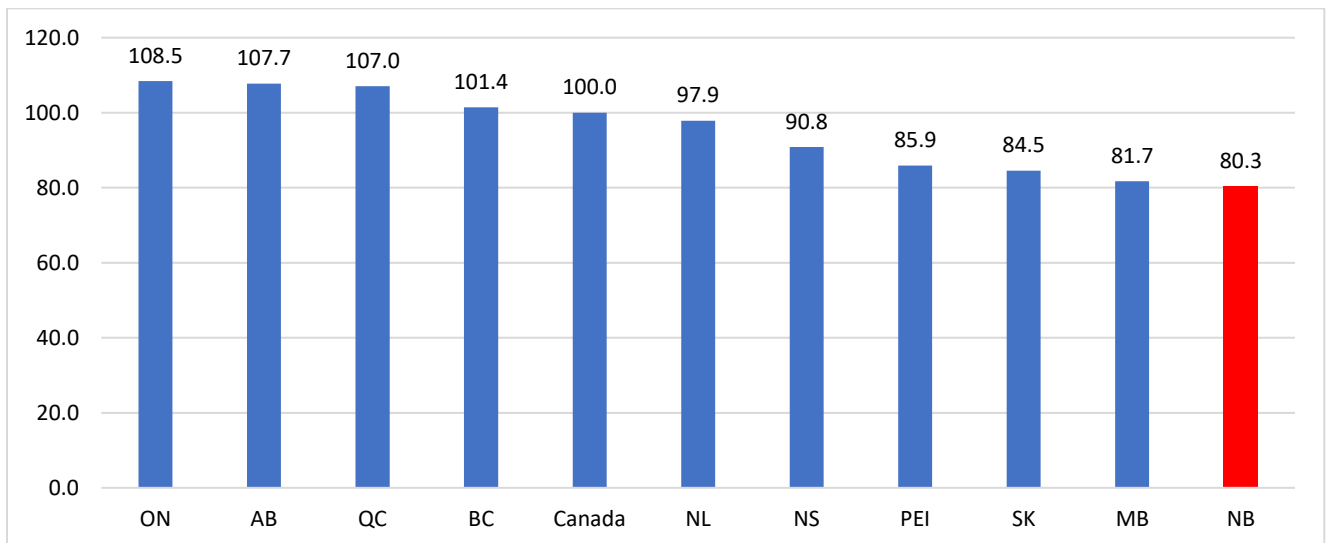
The New Brunswick average total income in 2020 is 93.2% of the national average income and ranks New Brunswick 6<sup>th</sup> among all provinces. New Brunswick has the second-highest Atlantic First Nation population average total income after Newfoundland. It is also similar to the other two maritime provinces, with Nova Scotia at 92% and PEI at 92.3%. The highest average income for First Nation populations by province is in Ontario, with an average income of \$46,960. The lowest is in Manitoba, with an average income of \$32,320 in 2020, which places it at 77.2% of the national First Nation population average.

Chart 4: First Nation Population Average Total Income by Province and Ratio of Provincial Average Over Canadian Average in 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0281-01.

Chart 5: First Nation Population Median Employment Income by Province and Ratio of Provincial Median Over Canadian Median in 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0281-01.

New Brunswick's median employment income in 2020 is the lowest across all the provinces, at \$22 800. The highest median employment income was in Alberta, with \$30,600 in 2020. New Brunswick's First Nation population's median employment income is only 80.3% of the Canadian median employment income. This is a concerning statistic, as New Brunswick has a better ranking concerning average total income. However, the First Nation population's nominal median employment income growth was 32.8% from 2015 to 2020 in New Brunswick, indicating relative improvements.



Consequently, more needs to be done to increase employment income and opportunities for First Nation people in New Brunswick. It also shows that the employment income distribution may be skewed in New Brunswick, with fewer high earners or workers than in other provinces with lower average total incomes. Additional research should be undertaken to understand this phenomenon.

### Income Composition

When comparing the income composition between the New Brunswick First Nation population and the Canadian First Nation population, there is a significant difference regarding the relative importance of employment income and government transfers. Based on the 2015 data, the New Brunswick First Nation population relied more on government transfers (24.5 %) than the Canadian First Nation average (21%). Furthermore, the above-average reliance on government transfers translates in New Brunswick to a lower percentage of employment income in the total income composition for First Nations people. Thus, there is a lower level of economic self-determination in New Brunswick (68.5%) than in Canada (72%). This may be an area where New Brunswick can improve.

Table 26: First Nations Population Income Composition in New Brunswick and Canada in 2015

	<b>NB</b>	<b>Canada</b>
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0
<b>Employment</b>	68.5	72.0
<b>Government Transfers</b>	24.5	21.0
<b>Other</b>	7.0	7.0

Source: For Canada in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001. For NB in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001.

### Low-Income Status

After-tax low-income status decreased from 30.9% to 20.8% in New Brunswick and from 29.7% to 22.7% in Canada for First Nation populations. There has been a significant decrease for New Brunswick, as it is lower than the national number in 2020, which was not the case in 2015.

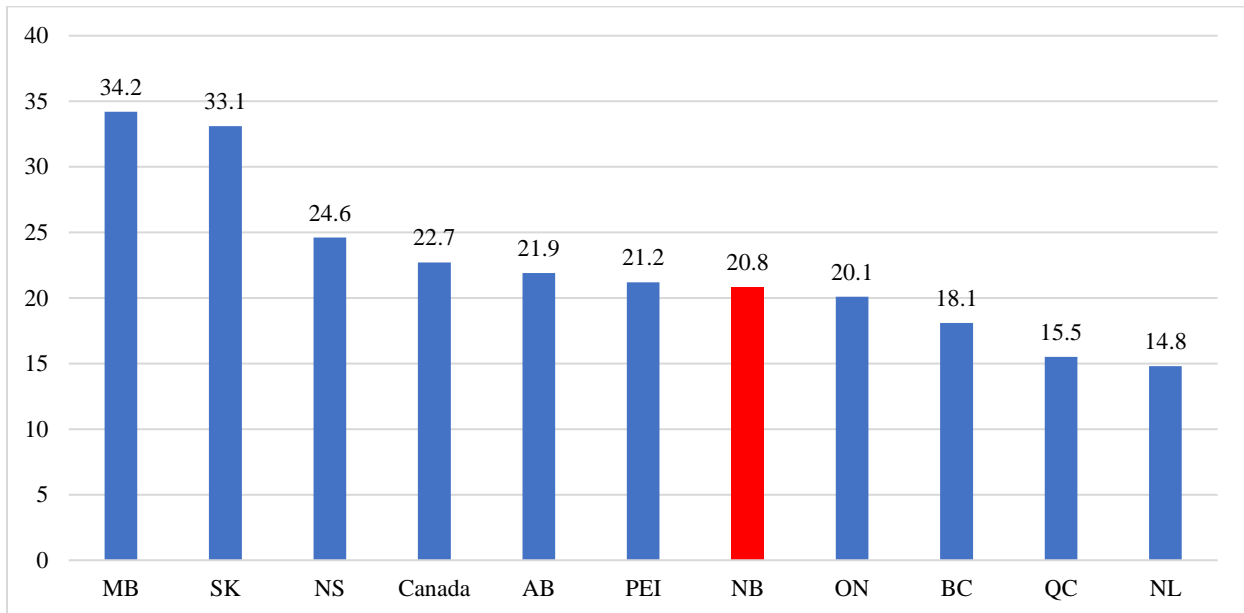
Compared with the other provinces, New Brunswick ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 10 for its prevalence of low-income status for First Nations people in 2020. It had the second lowest prevalence in the Maritimes and is six percentage points higher than Newfoundland's lowest prevalence at 14.8%. It is also 13.4 percentage points lower than the highest prevalence, that of Manitoba at 34.2%.

Table 27: After-Tax Low-Income Status Prevalence for First Nations in New Brunswick and in Canada in 2015 and 2020

	<b>2015 LIM-AT</b>	<b>2020 LIM-AT</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>New Brunswick</b>	30.9	20.8	-32.7
<b>Canada</b>	29.7	22.7	-23.5
<b>NB/Canada</b>	104.0	91.6	-11.9

Source: For 2021 data: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0281-01. For Canada in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001. For NB in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001.

Chart 6: Prevalence of Low-Income Status (LIM-AT) for First Nations Across Provinces in 2020 (%)



Source: Statistics Canada Table: 98-10-0283-01.

### 3. Labour Market Statistics

The New Brunswick First Nation population participation rate in 2016 was higher than the Canadian First Nation population participation rate (58.4% and 57.1%, respectively). However, the 2016 employment rate is lower in New Brunswick; it was 45.5% in 2016, while the Canadian employment rate was 46.8% for First Nations people. Participation rates and employment rates are higher for First Nations individuals in New Brunswick than in Canada in 2021, which is a good sign. While the First Nations Canada-wide average employment rate has decreased over the five years, the New Brunswick rate has increased by 3.5 percentage points from 45.5% to 49.1%

The New Brunswick unemployment rate has converged with the Canadian First Nation population unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for First Nations individuals in New Brunswick was 22% in 2016 and 16.9% in 2021. The unemployment rate for First Nations individuals in Canada was 18.0% in 2016 and 16.7% in 2021. Thus, although there is a lower unemployment rate in Canada, the decrease from 2016 to 2021 has been much larger in New Brunswick, by five percentage points compared to only 1.5 percentage points in Canada.

Table 28: Labour Market Statistics for First Nation Populations in New Brunswick and Canada in 2016 and 2021

Year	Participation Rate		Employment Rate		Unemployment Rate	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
<b>NB</b>	58.4	59.1	45.5	49.1	22.0	16.9
<b>Canada</b>	57.1	55.6	46.8	46.3	18.0	16.7
<b>NB/Canada</b>	102.3	106.3	97.2	106.0	122.2	101.2

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0423-01. For Canada in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001. For NB in 2016: Statistics Canada no. 98-510-X2016001.

#### 4. Educational Attainment Over Time

Table 29: Highest Educational Attainment Levels for First Nations Individuals Above the age of 15 in New Brunswick and Canada in 2016 and 2021

Highest Educational Attainment	Canada		New Brunswick		NB/Canada	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
Less than High School	38.2	33.3	28.8	27.0	75.4	81.1
High School	25.4	29.8	29.3	32.2	115.4	108.1
Post Secondary	36.4	36.9	41.9	40.9	115.1	110.8
Trade	9.8	8.7	10.9	7.0	111.2	80.5
College	17.0	16.9	20.1	21.2	118.2	125.4
University	7.4	9.0	9.1	10.3	139.2	114.4

Source: For 2021: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0414-01. For 2016: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016264.

When looking at the educational attainment levels for First Nations people in Canada and New Brunswick, First Nations people in New Brunswick seem to perform considerably better than the Canadian average. The high school incompleteness level for First Nations individuals in Canada was 38.2% in 2016 and 33.3% in 2021, a five-percentage point drop. The level of high school incompleteness in New Brunswick was 28.8% in 2016 and 27.0% in 2021, only seeing a two-percentage-point drop in incompleteness levels. Thus, the percentage point difference between Canada and New Brunswick has diminished from 2016 to 2021, going from almost ten percentage points to six percentage points.

Post-secondary education attainment is the other important statistic for this report. In Canada, the First Nation population's post-secondary education levels went from 36.4% in 2016 to 36.9% in 2021, only half a percentage point increase. The New Brunswick First Nation population performed better overall but saw the levels drop from 2016 to 2021. In New Brunswick in 2016, 41.9% of all First Nations individuals above the age of 15 had a post-secondary diploma, five percentage points higher than the Canadian average. In New Brunswick in 2021, 40.9% of First Nations individuals had a post-secondary degree, a one percentage point decrease in New Brunswick and a drop in the New Brunswick to Canada ratio.

In Canada and New Brunswick in 2021, there were drops in trade diplomas, while university attainment rose, and college levels stayed approximately the same. Much has already been said previously about the change in educational attainment from 2016 to 2021 in this report, especially the drop in post-secondary levels. It is alarming to see that while New Brunswick is currently performing above average, the New Brunswick growth rates relative to the Canadian trends seem to be diminishing.

## VIII. Policy Proposals

As seen throughout the report, there has been significant socioeconomic growth and improvement for First Nations people in New Brunswick since 2016. However, these are relative gains, as the First Nation population’s socioeconomic performance is still below non-Indigenous performance in New Brunswick. More has to be done to increase the socioeconomic conditions of First Nations people in New Brunswick. The following policy proposals will link recommendations brought forward by other organizations with this report’s key findings.<sup>17</sup> Priority areas identified in this report include educational attainment, employment, and social welfare dependency.

A number of organizations in New Brunswick are working to foster Indigenous economic development. One of the leading organizations is the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI), an Indigenous-led organization founded in 1995 that provides programs and research on entrepreneurship, community development, workforce development and partnerships.<sup>18</sup> Other organizations include Ulnooweg Development Group Inc., an Atlantic Canada organization tasked to “promote the social and economic welfare” of Indigenous individuals in three main areas: employment, capacity development and community participation.<sup>19</sup>

Other key players in New Brunswick include reserve-level organizations. Some examples include the FNEII (First Nations Education Initiative Incorporated), which provides support to address educational barriers for youth in 11 of the 15 First Nations communities in New Brunswick, and the Mi’gmaq’el Tplu’tagnn or the Mi’kmaq Economic Benefits Office, which both provide economic support, programs and development partnerships to Mi’kmaq communities. Tribal Councils also play an important part in economic development, for example, the Wolastoqey Tribal Council Inc. or the MAWIW Tribal Council. Each Tribal Council may administer different services targeting economic and social well-being, such as health, education, or governance. It is important to note that there is a diversity of Indigenous perspectives and governance, meaning there is no overarching organization. Different models will require different solutions, and unique strategies will have to be funded to meet the needs of different communities.

When looking at the national level, many organizations play a role in economic development and reconciliation throughout Canada and New Brunswick. National organizations like the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, and the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association. Further, governmental departments and agencies like the Department of Indigenous Services, the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency play a role in administering programs and services to First Nation

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<sup>17</sup> The policy proposals in this report take from three policy reports: **Foley, Tyler**. 2020. “Building Better Together: Exploring Indigenous Economic Development in New Brunswick Report.” *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*., **Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs**. April 2022. “Barriers to Economic Development in Indigenous Communities” *House of Commons*., and **National Aboriginal Economic Development Board**. April 2013. “Addressing the Barriers to Economic Development on Reserve.”

<sup>18</sup> Joint Economic Development Initiative. (2022) <https://jedinb.ca/> (Accessed November 18, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Ulnooweg. “About” <https://www.ulnooweg.ca/about-ulnooweg/> (Accessed November 18, 2022).

communities. The Federal government also administers the *Indian Act* and the reserve system. Barriers created by reserves include the lack of access to capital and equity due to impediments contained in the *Indian Act*. First Nation communities can opt out of certain parts of the *Indian Act*, such as through the First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA), which seems to have successfully led to improved economic conditions for First Nations that have participated by increasing the “speed of business.” However, not all reserves have decided to opt out of the act for various reasons, such as the “increased burden of having to deal with the aftermath of legacy issues of the Indian Act system, increased cost and efforts to develop laws and policies, and the negation of fiduciary responsibility of the Crown.”<sup>20</sup>

It is important to underline that First Nation communities must lead economic and social decision-making in their communities. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, assented by Parliament, declares that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development freely, as well as having the right to determine, develop and administer programs through their institutions when possible.<sup>21</sup> All of the suggested policies require Indigenous decision-making and active participation to succeed. Thus, this report calls on the New Brunswick provincial government to work in good faith with the ongoing Wolastoqey title recognition to find a solution that will lead to socioeconomic development. A proposed revenue-sharing agreement for Crown lands and the legal declaration of the Aboriginal title to the Wolastoqey territory should not be used by the government to spread fear but rather should be the beginning of positive talks at a Nation-to-Nation level.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, this report has mainly focused on the First Nations population in New Brunswick, but all Indigenous people should have a seat at the table in New Brunswick. Additionally, it is important to note that these different policy areas are inherently connected, and change will not happen overnight. However, only consistent and meaningful efforts to collaborate and engage Indigenous partners will lead to permanent and effective results.

### Priority 1: Respecting Treaty Rights and Reconciliation

In order to allow for economic self-determination and growth, the different levels of government need to work with Indigenous people in their claims for treaty recognition. The historical lack of respect towards treaties has led to dire socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, reconciliation must include economic reconciliation, as recognized by the call-to-action number 92 of the Truth and Reconciliation report.<sup>23</sup>

The government of New Brunswick should commit to building relationships instead of fear with the Wolastoqey Nations, who are currently seeking a title claim for the unfair

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<sup>20</sup> Jobin, Shalene and Emily Riddle. (2019). “The Rise of the First Nations Land Management Regime in Canada: A Critical Analysis.” *Yellowhead Institute*. pp. 6, 15.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations. (2007) “United Nations Declarations of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” Articles 3 and 23

<sup>22</sup> Peach, Ian and Naiomi Metallic. (2022). “N.B.’s ongoing battle with Wolastoqey Nation is not reconciliation in action.” *Policy Options*.

<sup>23</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.” p. 10

dispossession of its territory without consent or compensation.<sup>24</sup> The provincial government should try to find an amicable solution to the title claim, one that rights historical wrongs and improves the Nation's ability to participate equally in its economic development. A revenue-sharing agreement could help First Nations communities develop stronger and more resilient economies and build trust and long-lasting relationships at a Nation-to-Nation level.<sup>25</sup> Another example is the recognition of the right to a moderate livelihood has led to economic growth in Mi'kmaq coastal fishing communities in the Atlantic provinces, with the value of communal commercial landings increasing from \$3 million in 1999 to \$120 million in 2020.<sup>26</sup> Future court decisions on issues such as title claims should hopefully lead to more reconciliatory action and cooperation.

Indigenous people must always have a seat at the decision-making table and should be given resources to lead their economic development as necessary. First Nations communities cannot walk the road of self-sufficiency alone; they need the support of all levels of government as they have been systematically impeded for generations by the very same actors. The future of First Nations people is crucial to New Brunswick and Canada, and the First Nation population has an important part to play in the economy of today and tomorrow. Without solving this critical issue, we will be unable to adequately tackle other policy issues, such as climate change, remote development, and labour force shortages.

## Priority 2: Developing Partnerships

Public-private partnerships are important in the economic and social development of First Nations communities in New Brunswick. Partnerships can allow for better self-determination while combining expertise or investments. Many feel a “considerable distance between themselves, government, and the private sector.”<sup>27</sup> In order to have successful economic self-determination, the different levels of government need to continue to listen to Indigenous representatives on their priorities and needs, as well as to provide more opportunities for private partnerships, such as forums or funds. This could take the form of a partnership forum, such as the 2018 National Indigenous-Local Government Partnership Forum, organized by various stakeholders, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, to discuss key issues and build networks.<sup>28</sup> Creating more opportunities to build face-to-face relationships and trust will create more partnerships and an understanding of unique issues.

As self-sufficiency and self-sustainability rank top of First Nation communities' economic development priorities, the ability to find partners will allow for greater economic

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<sup>24</sup> Bear Robe, Andrew. (2022) “The Wolastoqey title claim in N.B., a centuries-old issue and the honourable solution.” *Policy Options*.

<sup>25</sup> Coates, Ken S. (2015) “Sharing the Wealth: How resource revenue agreements can honour treaties, improve communities, and facilitate Canadian development.” *MacDonald-Laurier Institute*. p.6

<sup>26</sup> Government of Canada. (2020) “Briefing for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for her November 18, 2020 Appearance.” [https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/briefing-breffage/2021/livelihood-subsistance-eng.htm#\\_Toc56509339](https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/briefing-breffage/2021/livelihood-subsistance-eng.htm#_Toc56509339). (Accessed January 9, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Foley, Tyler. “Building Better Together: Exploring Indigenous Economic Development in New Brunswick Report.” p. 133

<sup>28</sup> Alderhill Planning Inc. (2018) “Summary Report of the 2018 National Indigenous-Local Government Partnership Forum.” <https://www.edo.ca/downloads/2018-partnership-forum-report.pdf>. (Accessed January 9, 2023).



development and growth. Continuous and clear funding of organizations in New Brunswick, such as JEDI, is required to develop long-lasting expertise and recognition within the business community. Funding should be more flexible and predictable, focusing less on grants and more on long-term planning in order to allow for self-sufficiency in the long run properly. Further, funding should be exercised at the community level, enabling the communities to make funding decisions with appropriate mutual transparency and accountability measures.

Establishing specific initiatives for private and public partners to find and connect with Indigenous communities might allow for greater development and economic growth, especially in key self-identified industries. Another priority should be funding Economic Development Officers in every First Nation community, as many do not have enough funds. Economic Development Officers would give the ability to each reserve to advocate for its own unique economic development opportunities and enable entrepreneurs in the community to strengthen the community with their projects. Economic Development Officers could also act as facilitators for organizing relations and partnerships with governments and industry.

### Priority 3: Key Industry Development

By setting clearly defined industries as priorities, First Nation communities might attract more attention from industry stakeholders and the government. These key self-defined industries include natural resources (fishing, logging, etc.), renewable energy, tourism, and cannabis.<sup>29</sup> These industries allow for much self-determination due to the recognition of treaty rights and the ability to use already-owned land.

A provincial task force has been suggested to engage communities and government with Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation. The objective could be to increase the inclusion and development of First Nations communities in the self-defined key industries for “mutually beneficial relationship and economic reconciliation.” This would hopefully signify a renewed provincial interest in economic reconciliation and dialogue with Indigenous communities. This task force could build trust by developing strategies relating to specialized curriculums and post-secondary opportunities, developing plans to deal with barriers to entry, measuring progress and creating accountability, and aligning priorities across First Nation communities.

Further, the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Parliamentary Committee recommended in its report on Indigenous economic development for the Government of Canada to “increase ways to support Indigenous peoples who want to seize opportunities arising from the natural resources extraction industry actively.”<sup>30</sup> Action can be taken at all levels of government to collaborate with First Nations that wish to seize opportunities in key industries. One example of supporting specific industry development is the Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative which provides funding and support to First Nation communities in the Atlantic, as well as providing

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<sup>29</sup> Foley, Tyler. “Building Better Together: Exploring Indigenous Economic Development in New Brunswick Report.” p. 137

<sup>30</sup> Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. April 2022. “Barriers to Economic Development in Indigenous Communities” *House of Commons*

capacity building and training.<sup>31</sup> A similar task force could be created for tourism creation or other commercial ventures.

#### Priority 4: Education

Lack of education is a significant barrier to economic development and future economic growth in Indigenous communities. This report has demonstrated that the educational attainment of the First Nation population lags behind the New Brunswick average, especially on reserves. One key area is high school incompleteness. In a JEDI report on education, participants reported racist practices and discrimination throughout high school, leading to disinterest.<sup>32</sup> Other issues include the lack of on-reserve high schools (currently nonexistent), leading to lengthy transportation, culture shocks and a lack of culturally relevant educational opportunities. The provincial government should partner with larger reserves to examine the effect of the lack of on-reserve high schools on education completion rates. The New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has signed a memorandum of understanding with all First Nations communities in the province to help address the barriers to academic success.<sup>33</sup> This memorandum also promises specific funds to First Nations communities. The government of New Brunswick must respect this commitment and work to find solutions that keep individuals in school and feeling supported.

In order to increase high school completion rates and achieve more post-secondary attainment, long-term investments must be made to develop local programs to engage and support Indigenous youth and improve educational outcomes. Provincial curriculums should be culturally responsive, and youth councillors should be available for Indigenous youth with different aspirations. Culturally sensitive labour force readiness programs should be available to Indigenous youth who want to participate in the local economy should also be implemented. Further, the provincial government should commit to addressing potential barriers to teachers' education and certification for Indigenous people, which would create culturally safer educational environments. One example is the Wabanaki Bachelors of Education program run by the University of New Brunswick, which can currently only accept 30 students a year.<sup>34</sup> More funding for programs to educate Indigenous teachers would allow for a more culturally responsive workforce.

#### Priority 5: Labour Force Participation

It is important to ensure that First Nations people are entering a labour market that is culturally aware and addresses barriers to employment. Labour force readiness should be a key funding priority, allowing organizations to develop apprentice programs and strategies to engage

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<sup>31</sup> Government of Canada. (2023) "Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative." <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/aboriginal-autochtones/aicfi-ipcia/index-eng.html>. (Accessed January 9, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Joint Economic Development Initiative. (2018). "Moving Forward Together Through Reconciliation: The New Brunswick Indigenous Labour Market Intelligence Report" p.7

<sup>33</sup> Government of New Brunswick. (2022b) "Office of First Nation Education." <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/k12/content/office-of-first-nation-education.html>. (Accessed December 27, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> University of New Brunswick. (2023) "Wabanaki Bachelor of Education." <https://www.unb.ca/mwc/programs/wabanaki-bed.html>. (Accessed January 9, 2023).



the Indigenous population and allow for an easy transition into the labour market. As the baby boomer cohort leaves the workforce, a demand for labour will fall on First Nation and immigrant populations to fill. Thus, it is imperative that education continues to be a priority and that people have access to programs that will impart new skills wherever they are in their careers. JEDI has seen success with various programs, such as the creation of an Indigenous Internship Program, an Indigenous Reconciliation Awareness Module in partnership with private employers, and an Indigenous Adult Learning and Literacy program. Programs like these that remove barriers to access by facilitating labour force participation will ensure that individuals gain the skills and networks required to thrive.

There is also an important role for public-private partnerships in labour force participation; funding should be allocated for placement programs with key economic drivers in the province. On reserve, labour participation will increase with better employment opportunities. Many Indigenous people cite the lack of meaningful full-time opportunities as a barrier to self-sufficiency due to a lack of full-time jobs and only seasonal or part-time jobs on reserve. Although there is a large priority on developing industries such as natural resources and tourism, this will not solve seasonality. Only with strategies that include education and training opportunities that allow for more long-term employment will we see a decrease in the self-professed overuse of social assistance in New Brunswick, especially in Mi'kmaq First Nations.<sup>35</sup>

#### Priority 6: Support Smaller Reserves

Many smaller and medium-sized reserves have lower average incomes than larger population reserves. More should be done to encourage partnerships and access to markets for smaller reserves, as the large reserves may have better access to services, organizations, and lobbying. Smaller reserves might have more difficulties finding the required capital to start large projects and require more long-term support. Ensuring that not just the largest reserves access funding and services will ensure a more proportional and fair distribution of increased funding. Additionally, capital must be adequately priced, as interest rates are often much higher than for non-Indigenous borrowers. This could include pairing federal equity from Aboriginal Financial Institutions to ensure low-cost debt to break away from the vicious cycle of lack of access to capital.

Further, the Government of Canada must continue to work with First Nation communities and partners to address some of the systemic economic issues resulting from the *Indian Act*. The First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA) has allowed First Nation bands to opt out of certain parts of the Indian Act, which seems to have successfully led to improved economic conditions for First Nations that have participated. By allowing First Nation communities to receive and regulate property and revenue taxation on reserve, as well as more effective borrowing of long-term capital, the act allows revenues to return directly to First Nation communities. By increasing revenues and the ability to complete partnerships, the act allows First Nation communities to administer programs and projects in the communities more

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<sup>35</sup> Joint Economic Development Initiative. (2018). "Moving Forward Together Through Reconciliation: The New Brunswick Indigenous Labour Market Intelligence Report" p.7

effectively. Four of the six Wolastoqey First Nations (Madawaska, Tobique, Woodstock and St. Mary's) have entered or are working towards opting into the FNLMA. The FNLMA should also be paired with simplifying Federal procedures and processes, such as land designations or federal financing.

## IX. Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that there have been relative gains for First Nations people in New Brunswick, but the First Nation population is still not close to parity with non-Indigenous New Brunswickers. Economic outcomes such as income and after-tax low-income status prevalence have had stronger relative performances than social outcomes such as educational attainment rates.

However, there is still much to be done. New Brunswick's First Nation population's median employment income ranked last in Canada. The employment rate is much lower for First Nations individuals, as well as facing higher rates of high school incompleteness and government social welfare dependency. Education attainment seems to have gotten worse on reserves, with the proportion of individuals between the ages of 25 and 64 with post-secondary degrees decreasing from 2016 to 2021. This is less seen off-reserve but is very troubling as it points to a lack of a skilled labour force to tackle socioeconomic development on reserves. While the First Nation population in New Brunswick seems to be better off than they were five years before, these are relative gains and are still below the provincial average.

Further, there is a large divide when comparing First Nation populations on and off reserve. Progress has not happened equally on and off-reserve, with First Nations people on reserve worse off for all socioeconomic measures in New Brunswick than First Nations off reserve. First Nations people off reserve have even outperformed some non-Indigenous rates, such as having a higher participation rate.

Regarding particular reserves, the two largest Wolastoqey reserves (St. Mary's and Tobique) had much better labour market and educational outcomes than the two largest Mi'kmaq reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgehoopetitj), which translated into employment being a much greater source of income. The two largest Mi'kmaq reserves (Elsipogtog and Esgehoopetitj) had lower high school completion and employment rates, although they did have higher average total incomes. More could be done to study the difference between the First Nations and how policies should be adapted to the different realities and opportunities present on the reserves.

While First Nations people off reserve are moving closer to the non-Indigenous averages, much more must be done to support First Nations people on reserve, as they face a different labour context than First Nations individuals off reserve. More should be done to promote economic reconciliation and sovereignty in a way which supports reserves and allows First Nations people to thrive. Economic reconciliation must include the respect of treaty rights and the investments necessary on reserve to allow for greater economic self-determination. However, this does not mean that all efforts should be targeted towards reserves, as First Nations people off reserve still face more barriers than non-Indigenous New Brunswickers.

In order to foster socioeconomic development, this report has outlined six potential policymaking areas. They call for treaty rights recognition, increasing partnerships and funding, on-reserve industry development, educational outcomes, labour market participation and supporting smaller reserves. These policy directives are broad by definition and should serve as starting points for greater development and directives.

Future studies could be directed at updating the reserve-level analysis with the 2021 census subdivision data, comparing the New Brunswick performance to the other provinces in more detail, adding more qualitative analysis and input from First Nations communities, and more reserve-level determinants of socioeconomic welfare such as economic activity, productivity, or well-being. More analysis could be done for other Indigenous groups, such as Métis and Inuit individuals in New Brunswick.

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## Appendix A: Reserve-Level Data

Table 30: Total Reserve-Specific Economic and Social Indicators from the 2016 Census

	Pop 2016	Pop 2006	Pop change (%)	Median Age	More than High School	High School	Less than High School	Participation rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate	% workers who worked full time in 2015	Avg Income (2015)	Median income (2015)	Employment as income (%)	Gov transfer as income (%)	Other money as income (%)
NB on reserve	7,465	7,000	7	29	46	26	28	54	38	30	37	24,010	13,350	63	33	4
*Boucoucher*	95	85	12	28	60	13	33	67	47	30	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Eel River	360	315	14	31	71	17	15	67	50	19	39	30,788	19,776	69	29	3
Elsipogtog (Formerly Big Cove)	1,890	1,855	2	27	50	20	29	50	30	40	33	22,232	15,712	56	40	4
Esgenoopetitj (Formerly Burnt Church)	1,125	1,075	5	29	34	22	43	51	32	27	24	24,576	11,246	57	40	4
Fort Folly	50	45	11	49	25	25	38	50	38	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
*Indian Island*	135	95	42	28	66	20	13	67	50	33	38	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Kingsclear	470	440	7	30	53	27	23	49	42	16	43	22,119	14,080	69	28	3
Madawaska	180	130	38	44	56	24	24	48	45	14	53	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Metepanagiag	280	360	-22	36	35	46	14	55	41	25	40	26,401	12,512	63	31	6
Natoaganeg (eel ground)	505	510	-1	30	43	35	21	43	32	25	42	24,294	10,272	63	32	5
Oromocto	250	250	0	29	28	36	36	58	34	41	36	22,420	9,281	68	30	3
*Pabineau*	135	125	8	35	41	29	29	71.4	48	40	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
St. Mary's	910	670	36	25	38	30	32	53	46	16	45	21,780	16,336	67	28	5
Tobique	910	825	10	30	52	23	25	65	42	35	36	18,687	9,952	65	31	4
Woodstock	260	280	-7	36	56	34	16	68	56	14	52	26,562	17,429	75	21	6

Source: 2016 Census Aboriginal Community Portraits; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations profiles for Boucoucher, Fort Folly and Pabineau and all composition of total income; 1996 population data from Donald J. Savoie, Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick. Table 1, p. 54. \*\* less reliable data. All income data is based on 2015 income. The last three columns present the composition of the total

