

# 13 Half of children in foster care are Indigenous

Out-of-home care (i.e., fostering) provides children in difficult situations with temporary support when they are not able to remain in their family home. This includes children who have experienced neglect, abuse, or trouble with the law.

Depending on the circumstances, time spent in foster care may range from a brief period to a more extended arrangement. Foster families receive compensation for caring for the child, but they are not considered to be the child's legal guardians. Child welfare is a provincial responsibility. There is no centralized system tracking the number of children in foster care across jurisdictions, where definitions, reporting methods, and inclusion criteria often vary.

The 2021 Census counted 26,680 foster children under age 15 in Canada.<sup>1</sup> This represents about one in 250 children under 15. Still, the census does not provide a complete picture of children in out-of-home care. It does not collect information on children in other placement situations, such as group care, treatment care, or adoption services.

In 2021, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of children under 15 but for more than half (53.8%) of all foster children.<sup>2</sup> Among

all children in Canada under 15, Indigenous children were about 14 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in foster care (3.2% and 0.2%, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

Foster children are most common in provinces and territories with relatively large proportions Indigenous populations. For example, Manitoba had the highest rate of children under 15 in foster care at a rate of 19.7 per 1,000 children and PEI had the lowest (1.7 per 1,000 children).<sup>4</sup> While there is less data available on racialized children, Black children are also overrepresented among children admitted into care, which is 2.2 times higher than their proportion among all children.<sup>5</sup>

### Why this matters

The high rate of Indigenous children in foster care in many ways mirrors the practices and outcomes of the "Sixties Scoop."<sup>6</sup> This refers to a period when the Canadian government was removing many Indigenous children from their families and communities without notice or consent under the guise of "child welfare." These children were then placed with mostly White, middle-class families, typically devoid of cultural understanding around differing child rearing practices—



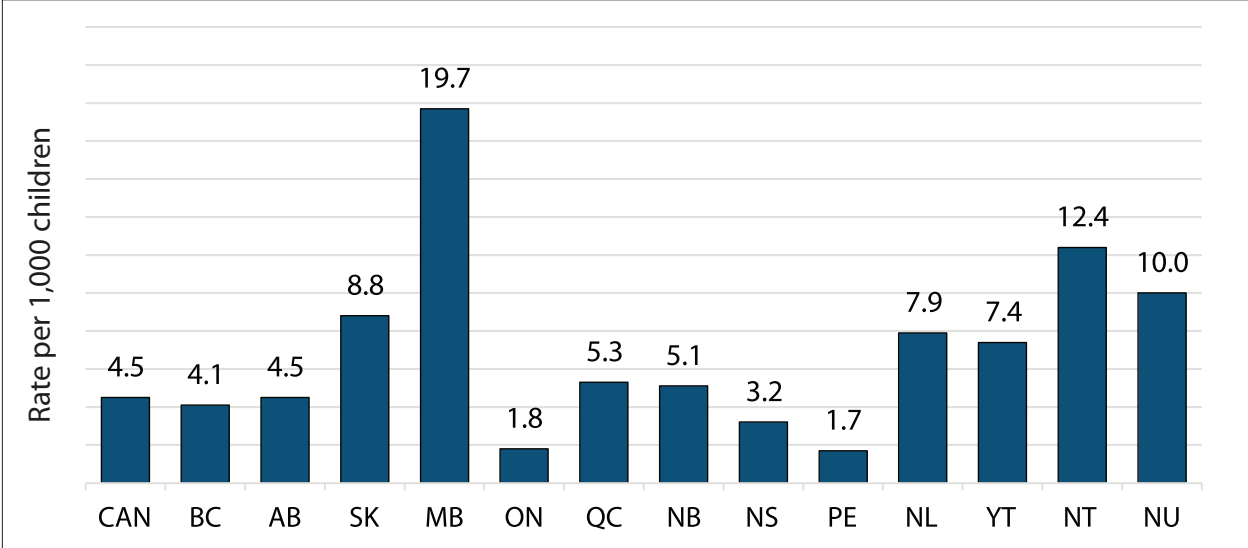
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an extension of racist policies that sought to assimilate Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of removing Indigenous children from their families continues at high rates today, which has led many to call modern child welfare practices the “Millennium Scoop.” Similar to the residential school system, this practice uproots children from their families and communities, and away from loving child-rearing practices, parental role models, their cultures, and their identities.

Some steps have been taken to reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care. Developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples, the 2019 *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*<sup>2</sup> affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services. It also allows Indigenous groups, who wish to do so, to design and deliver child and family services solutions that best suit their needs.

Rate of children under 15 in foster care, Canada, provinces and territories, 2021



Source: Black, T., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., & Houston, E. (2022). Children in foster care in Canada in 2016 & 2021.<sup>4</sup>



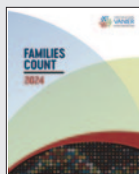
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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, July 13). Table 98-10-0135-01 Household and family characteristics of persons including detailed information on stepfamilies, presence of grandparents in household, age group and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations. <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810013501-eng>
- <sup>2</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2023, February 15). Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>
- <sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, September 21). Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Black, T., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., & Houston, E. (2022). Children in foster care in Canada in 2016 & 2021. <https://cwrp.ca/publications/children-foster-care-canada-2016-2021>
- <sup>5</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2018, January 8). Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare. <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/interrupted-childhoods>
- <sup>6</sup> CBC Radio. (2018, January 25). The Millennium Scoop: Indigenous youth say care system repeats horrors of the past. *The Current*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/a-special-edition-of-the-current-for-january-25-2018-1.4503172/the-millennium-scoop-indigenous-youth-say-care-system-repeats-horrors-of-the-past-1.4503179>

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*Families Count 2024* is a publication of the Vanier Institute of the Family that provides accurate and timely information on families and family life in Canada. Written in plain language, it features chapters on diverse topics and trends that have shaped families in Canada. Its four sections (Family Structure, Family Work, Family Identity, and Family Wellbeing) are guided by the [Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework](#).

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