

A Dynamic Portrait of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee

Connect Forum

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A Dynamic Portrait of the Cree of Eeyou Istchee

- Adequate policy design relies on accurate labour market research to identify problems and find solutions.
- For this reason, ASD decided to update the socioeconomic profile of Eeyou Istchee with new data from the 2021 National Census and took the opportunity to add information from the previous three Statistics Canada censuses.
- The exercise was completed with the publication in 2025 of an expert study entitled *A Dynamic Portrait of the Cree of Eeyou Istchee Based on the Canadian Censuses of 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021, from a Skills Development Perspective*. The document is now available on ASD's website.



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A Dynamic Portrait: Twenty Years of Changes

- Comparing information from four different Statistics Canada censuses enables us to trace the evolutionary path of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and understand the trajectory of the region over a period of twenty years, from 2001 to 2021.
- This highlights changes that took place and provides comparative perspective with the province of Quebec and other groups as well. It also allows a greater level of confidence concerning most statistics relating to the 2021 census. At the same time, it indicates circumstantial effects of the pandemic, and difficulties with data collection.
- The Dynamic Portrait study identifies the following key findings from this period:



Key Findings: Demography

- In 2021, the population of Eeyou Istchee was 19,496. In the last twenty years, it grew from 14,051 to 19,485, an increase of 38.7%.
- It now represents 37% of the inhabitants of the Nord-du-Quebec region and 14.5% of the First Nations and Inuit of the province.
- Even if half of the Cree population is under 28 years of age, it is maturing rapidly. Projections are that individuals of 55 years and above will be 6,200 in 2041, in contrast to 3,015 in 2021. The implications of such changes are important, as an elderly population will require old age security income and services to be provided by younger people or by foreigners to the land.



Population Change in the Communities

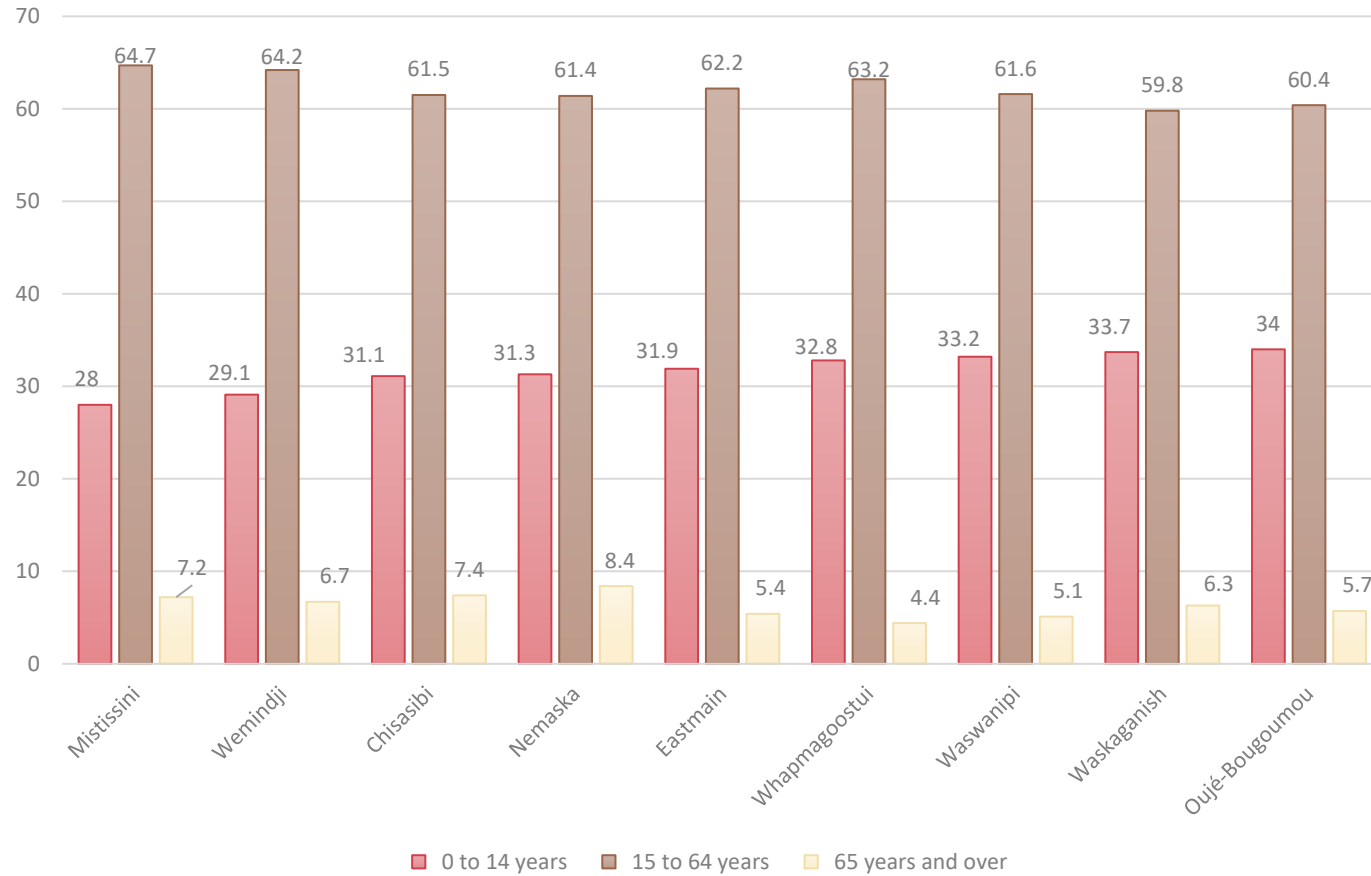
	Population, 2021	Population, 2016	Population percentage change, 2016 to 2021	Total private dwellings	Private dwellings occupied by usual residents
Oujé-Bougoumou ¹	797	747	6,7%	277	218
Nemaska	832	760	9,5%	291	221
Eastmain	924	866	6,7%	280	223
Whamagoostui	1022	1016	0,6%	251	228
EINU ¹	1261	1185	6,4%	1331	906
Wemindji	1562	1444	8,2%	493	397
Waswanipi ¹	1836	1759	4,4%	542	432
Waskaganish	2536	2196	15,5%	626	563
Mistissini	3741	3523	5,9%	1213	1022
Chisasibi	4985	4872	2,3%	1281	1056
TOTAL	19,496	18,368	6.14%	6585	5266

Source: Statistics Canada, census profiles, file 98-401-X-2021020

Note: EINU is the acronym for *Eeyou Istchee not urbanized*. EINU is not part of the Cree community of Waswanipi or of any of the other communities of Eeyou Istchee.



Age Structure in the Communities





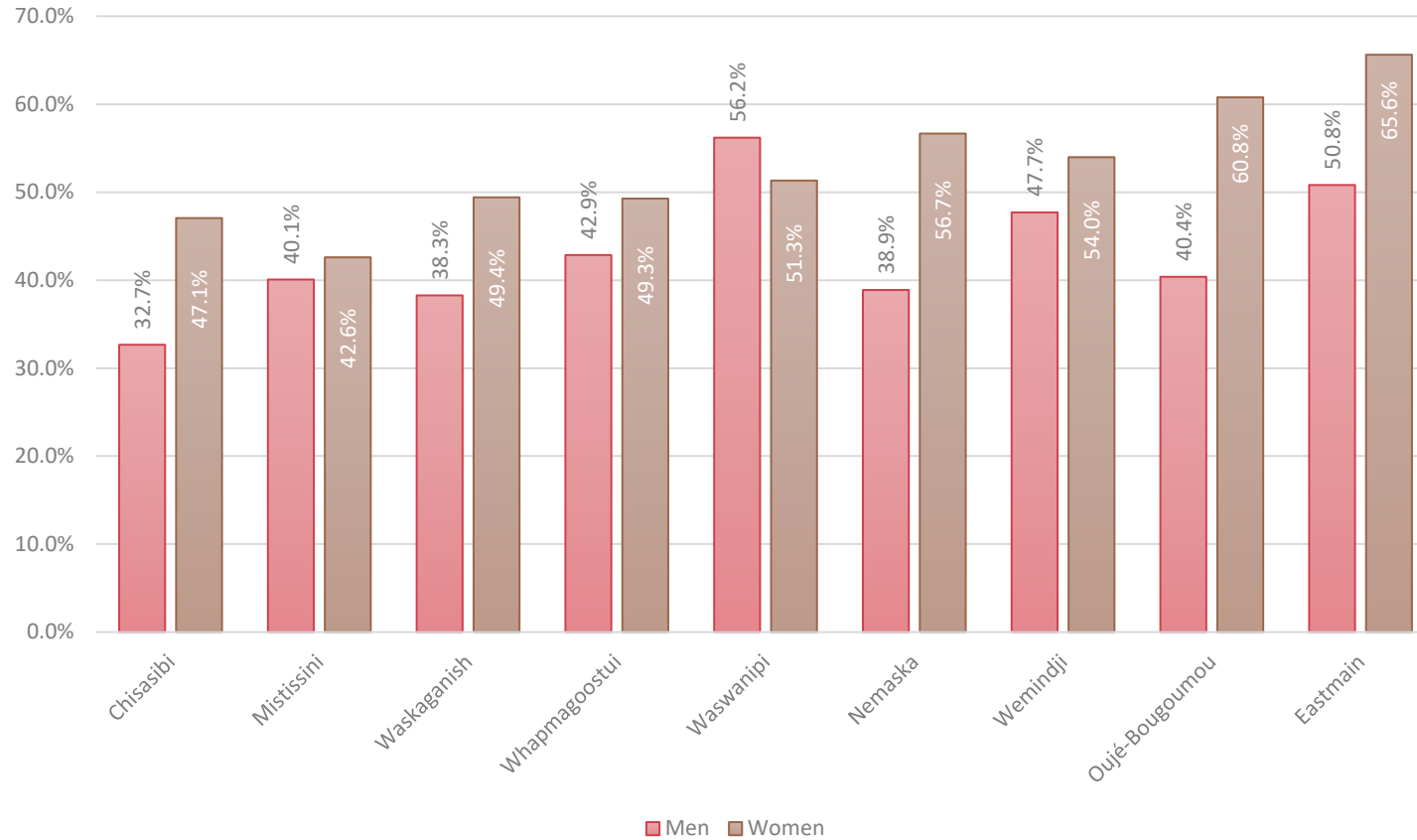
Key Findings: Education

- Labour market studies on the well-being of individuals concur to identify education – measured by years of schooling or degree obtained – as a major determinant of health, employment income, and main features of life satisfaction.
- Substantial gains were achieved in education during the last two decades. Fewer individuals lack a diploma in 2021 (38.1%) than in 2001 (49.4%). For the age group of 25 to 54, 60% of the population has a high school diploma or more.
- The breakdown indicates that 17.1% have a high school diploma, 13.5% an apprenticeship or a trade certificate, and 21.3% a CEGEP or some other non-university degree. University degrees are still limited, with less than 5% having a bachelor or more.



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High School Diplomas in the Communities





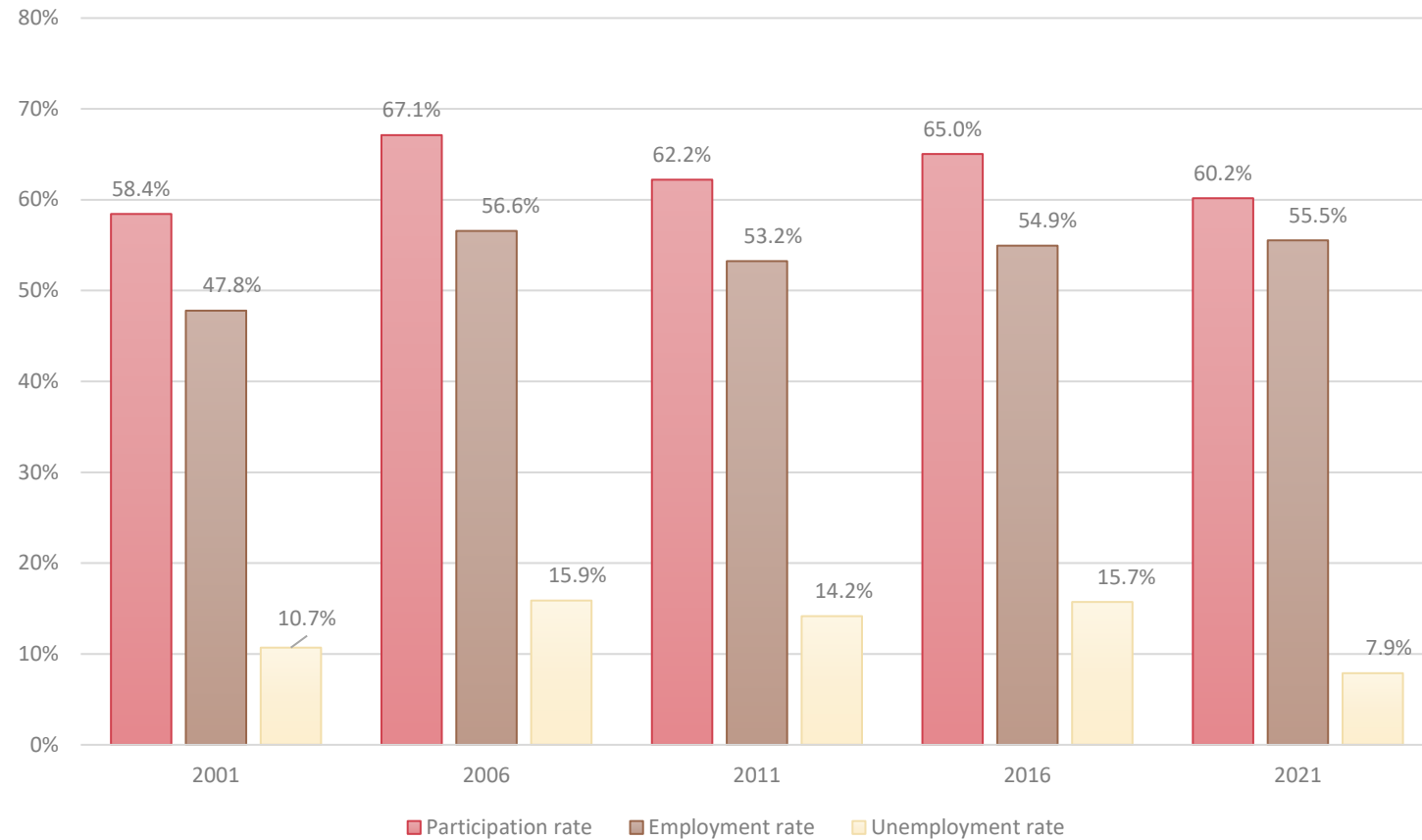
Key Findings: Labour Market

- Labour market indicators are influenced by demography and schooling, along with economic and technological development. But they are also affected by cyclical and other random occurrences, such as COVID in 2020 and 2021.
- The Canada emergency response benefit (CERB) during the pandemic could have played a role in the very low unemployment rate results in the 2021 census. This could be misleading.
- If we make a rough assumption about an implicit participation rate of 65% in 2021 (the level reached in 2016), we estimate an unemployment rate closer to 12%, which is still better than in the previous fifteen years.



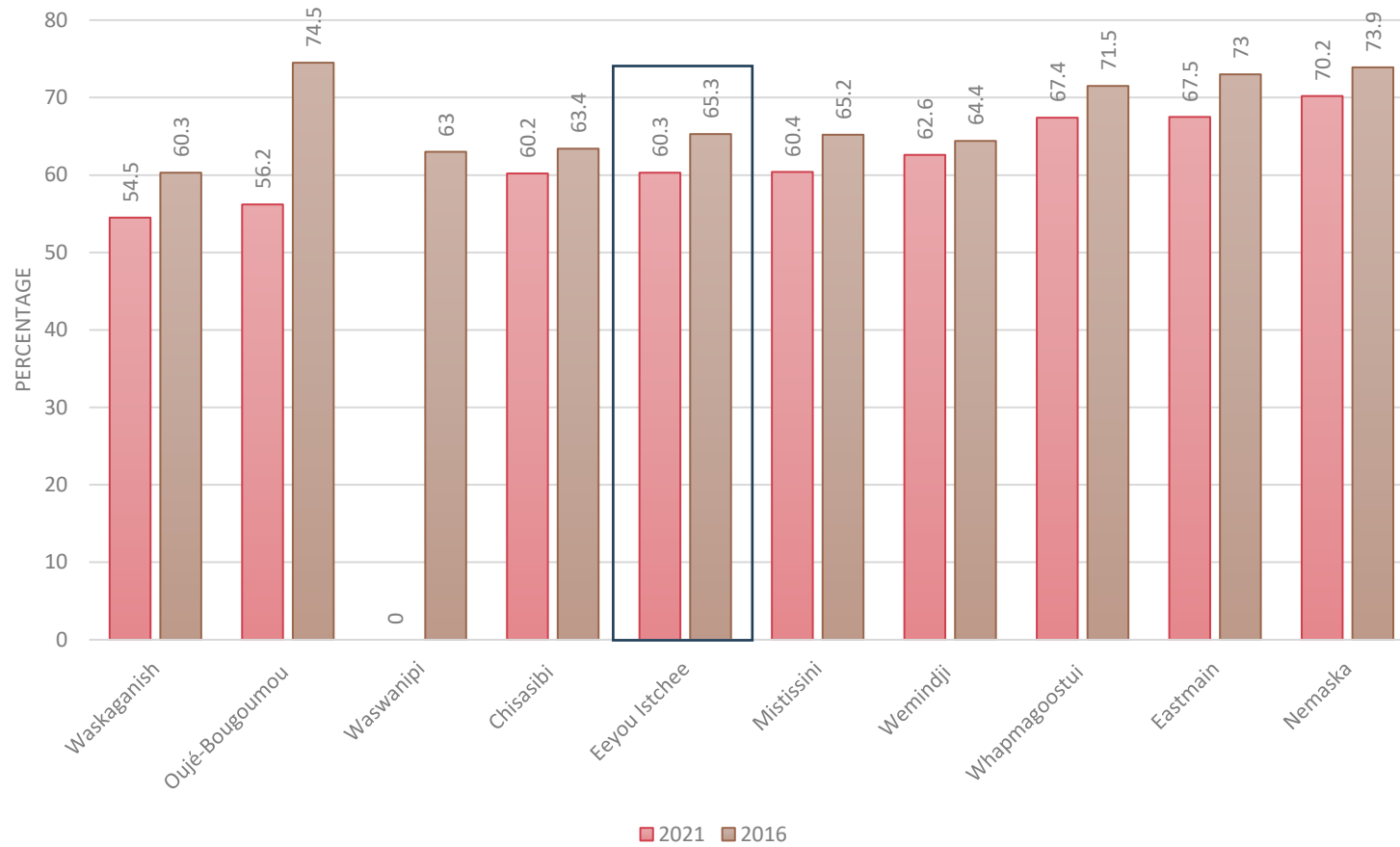
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Labour Market Indicators in the Communities



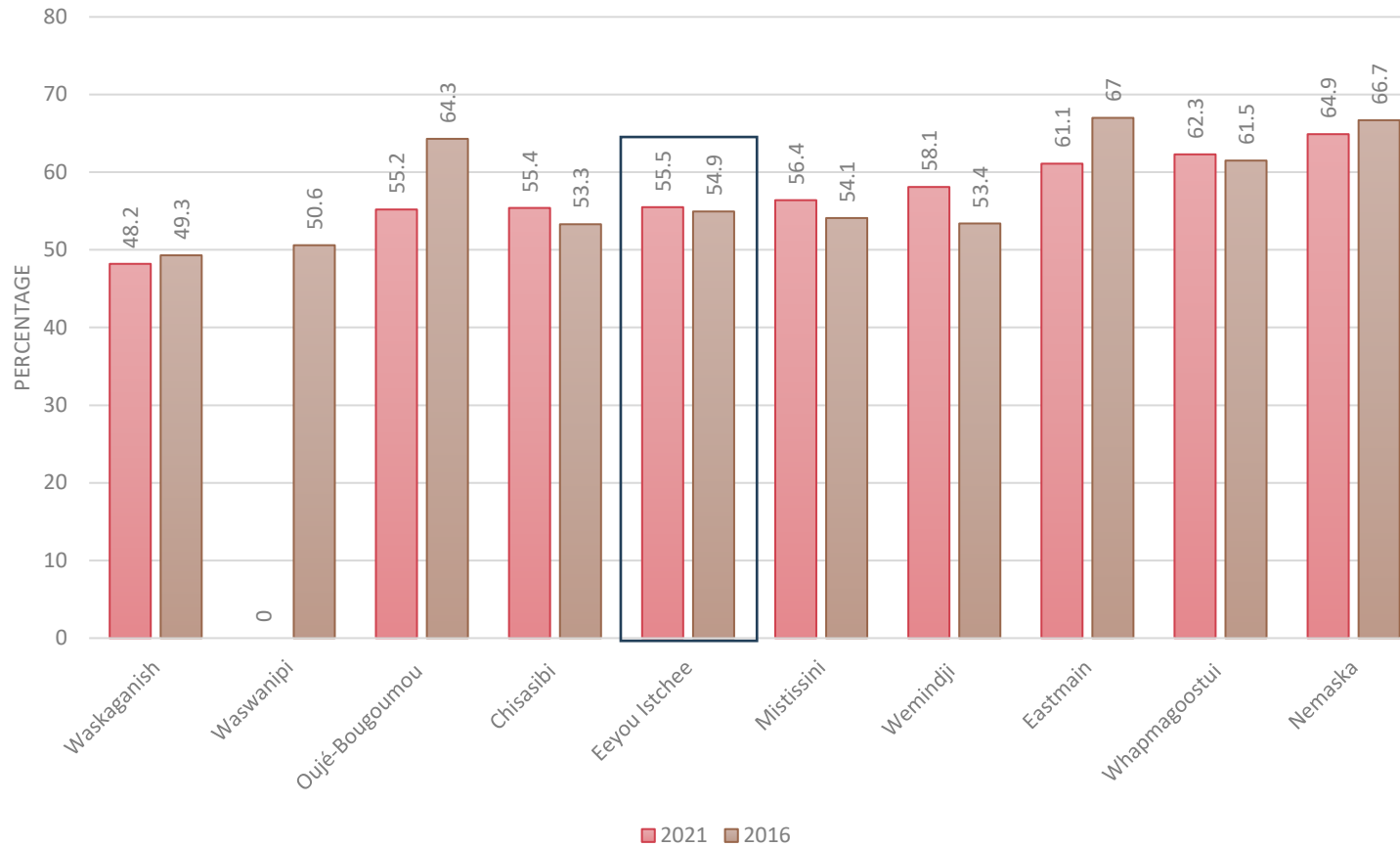


Participation Rate in the Communities





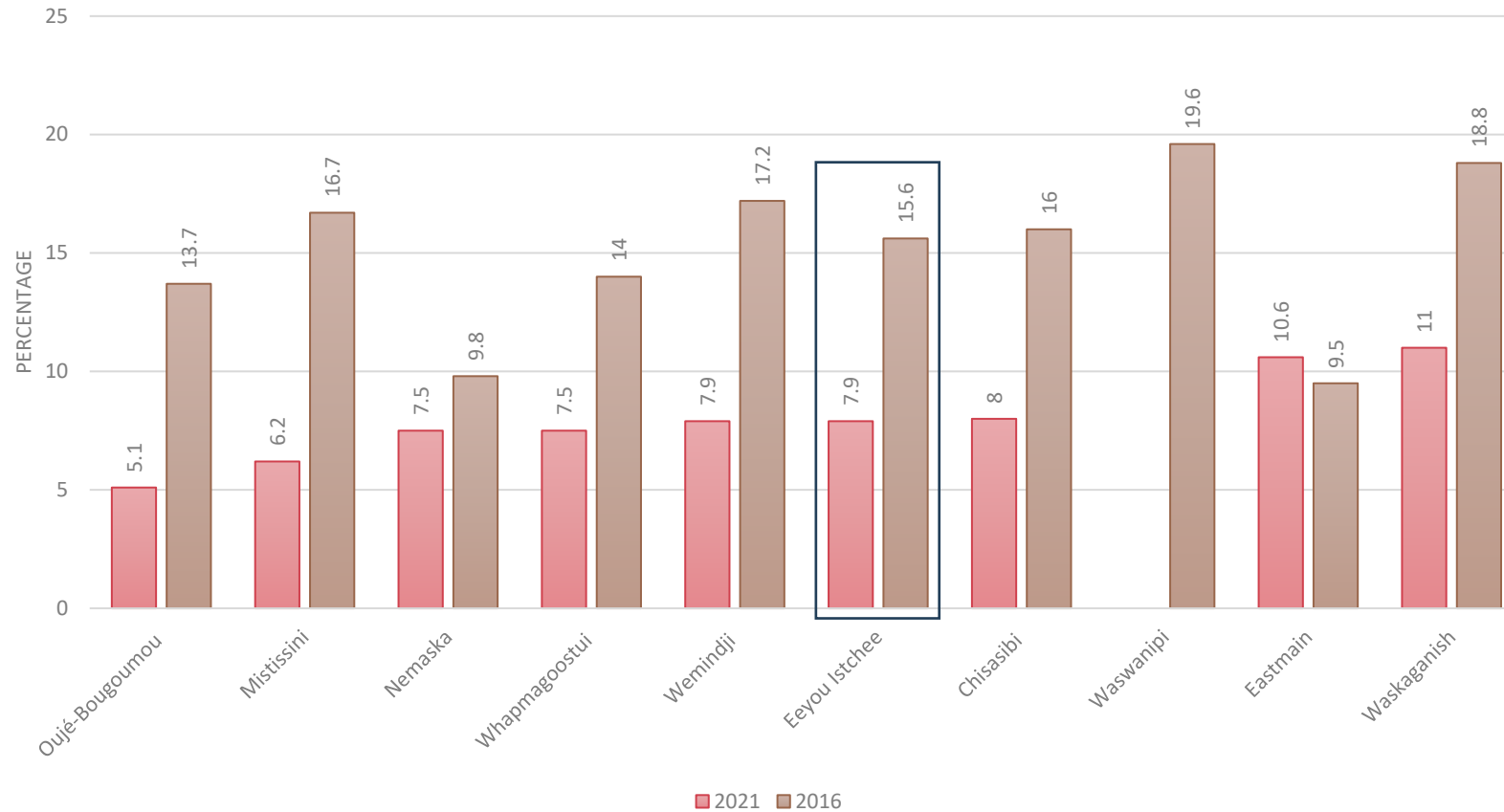
Employment Rate in the Communities



Note: Statistics Canada 2021 data for Waswanipi is currently incomplete.



Unemployment Rate in the Communities



Note: Statistics Canada 2021 data for Waswanipi is currently incomplete.



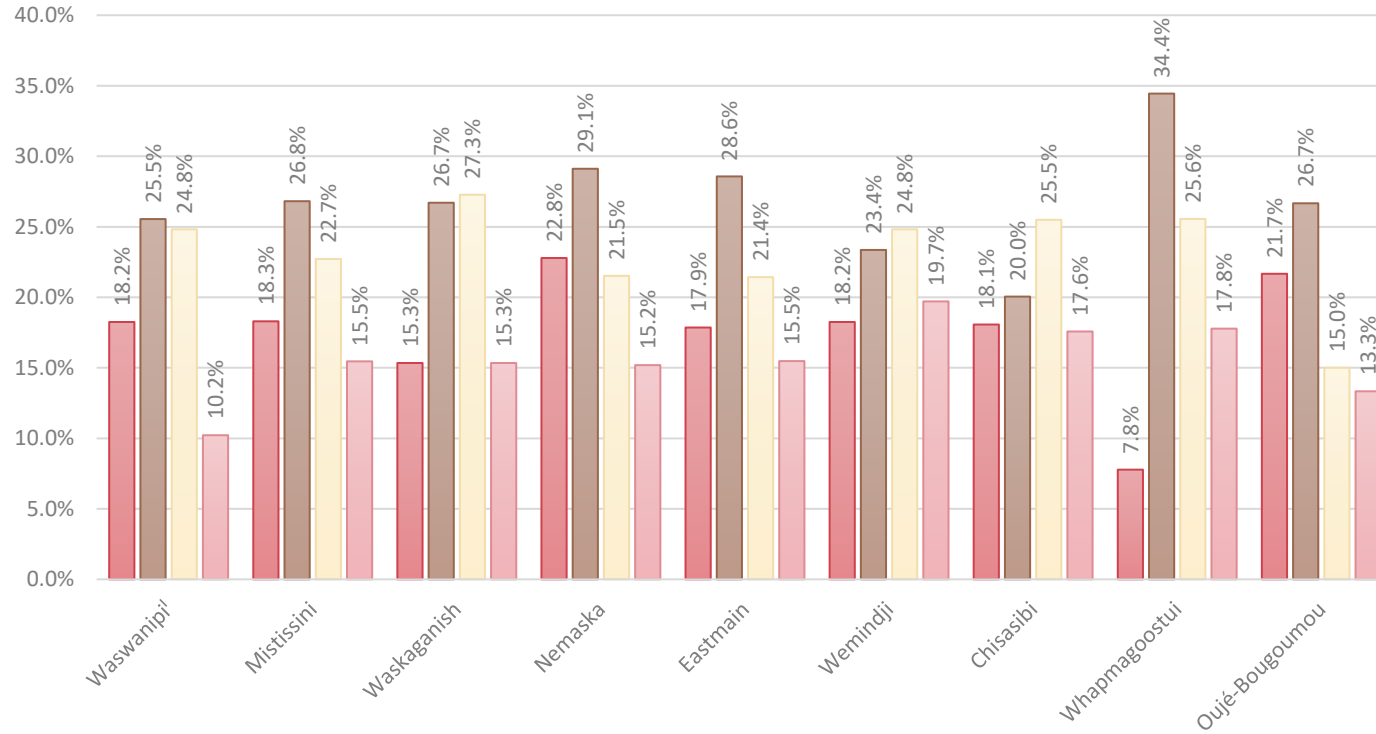
Key Findings: Employment by Occupation and Industry

- The distribution of occupations shows a concentration in a limited number of them. Education, law, social and community services regroup almost a quarter of the labour force, twice as much as in Quebec.
- The concentration of workers in industries reflects what happens with occupations. Public administration is a major employer (22.3% in Eeyou Istchee and 6.7% in Quebec). Manufacturing is quasi-absent, with 0.5% of jobs, contrasted to 10.3% in the province.
- Education hires almost twice as many people (13.9% in Eeyou Istchee and 7.8% in the province). The same is true for health and social services, where a high proportion of Cree workers are not health professionals, even if the social services part of the sector is larger than it is in Quebec.



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Employment by Occupation

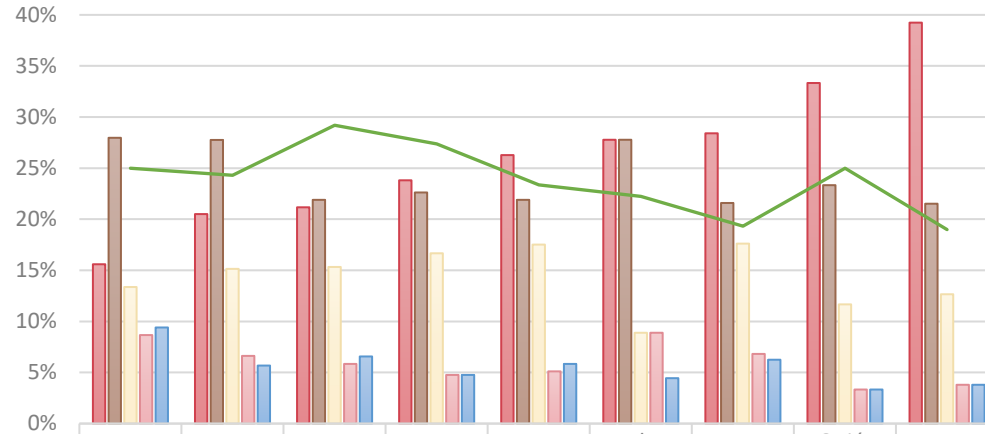


- 1 Business, finance and administration occupations
- 4 Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services
- 6 Sales and service occupations
- 7 Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations



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Employment by Industry



	Chisasibi	Mistissini	Wemindji	Eastmain	Waswanipi	Whapmagooi	Waskaganish	Oujé-Bougouou	Nemaska
Public administration	15.6%	20.5%	21.2%	23.8%	26.3%	27.8%	28.4%	33.3%	39.2%
Health care and social assistance	28.0%	27.8%	21.9%	22.6%	21.9%	27.8%	21.6%	23.3%	21.5%
Educational services	13.4%	15.1%	15.3%	16.7%	17.5%	8.9%	17.6%	11.7%	12.7%
Retail trade	8.7%	6.6%	5.8%	4.8%	5.1%	8.9%	6.8%	3.3%	3.8%
Construction	9.4%	5.7%	6.6%	4.8%	5.8%	4.4%	6.3%	3.3%	3.8%
All other	25.0%	24.3%	29.2%	27.4%	23.4%	22.2%	19.3%	25.0%	19.0%

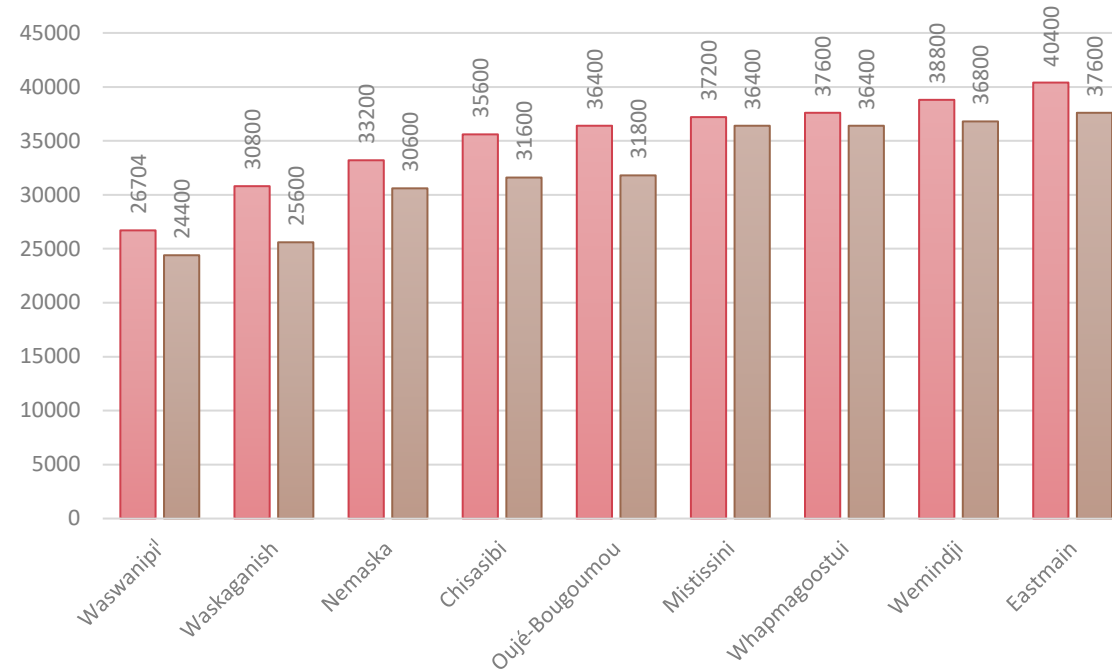


Key Findings: Income

- On the surface, earnings statistics do not differ a great deal between Eeyou Istchee and Quebec. But many difficulties make comparisons hazardous when we want to relate that information to economic well-being.
- Family size and the cost of living are both more important in the Cree Nation territory.
- Also, Eeyou Istchee residents depend more on employment income and on transfer payments, while the other residents of the province derive income from salary, profits and other sources of capital income. Again, this reflects the more modest part played by private enterprise in the economy of the Cree Nation territory.



Median after-tax income and median employment income, 2019¹



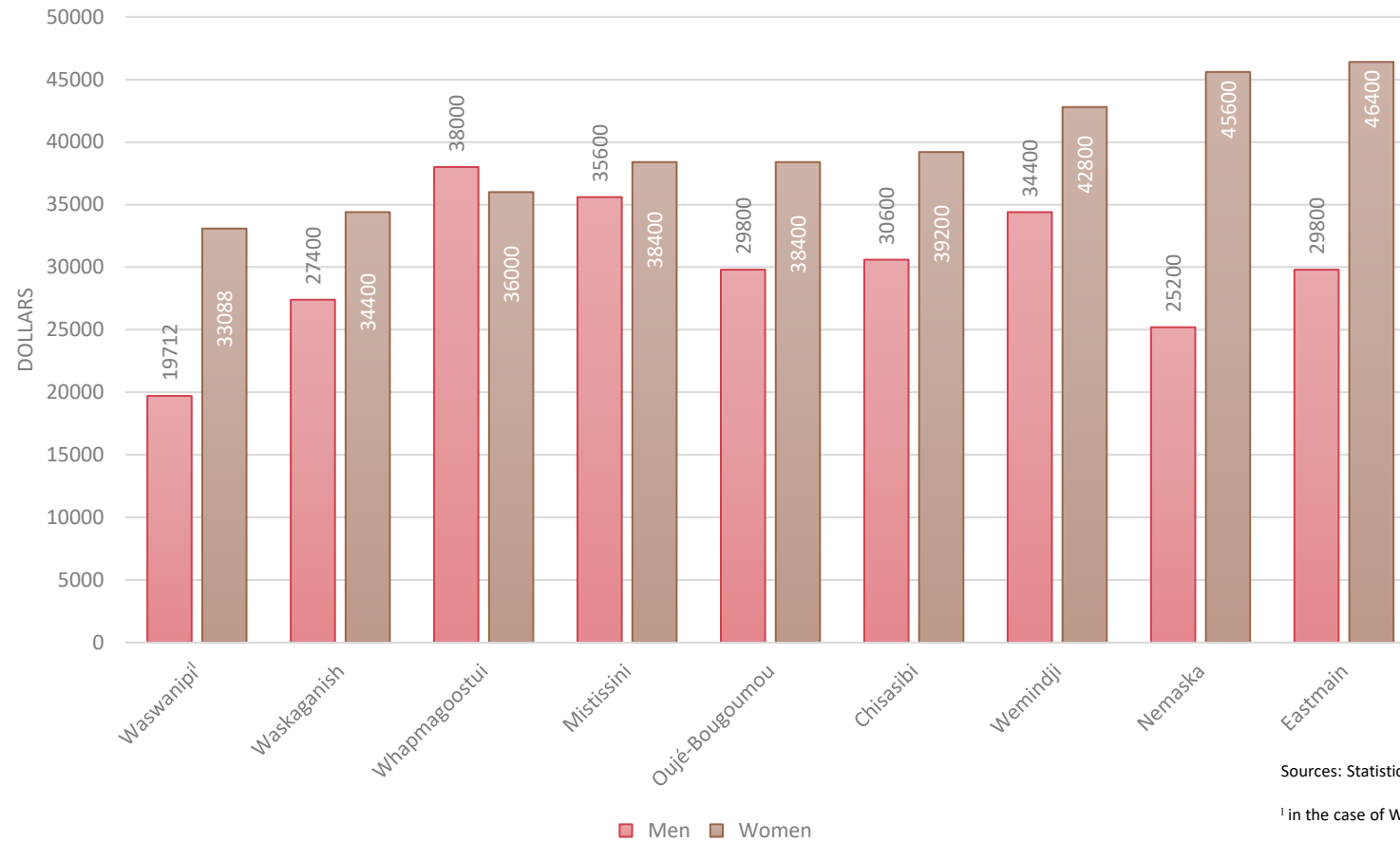
- Median after-tax income in 2019 among recipients (\$)
- Median employment income in 2019 among recipients (\$)

Sources: Statistics Canada, files 98-401-X2021020.IVT and 98-401-X2016065.ivt

¹ in the case of Waswanipi, the data is from 2016



Median after-tax income by gender, 2019¹



Sources: Statistics Canada, files 98-401-X2021020.IVT and 98-401-X2016065.IVT

¹ in the case of Waswanipi, the data is from 2016



A Dynamic Portrait: Conclusion

- The Eeyou Istchee demography is dynamic with a robust rate of growth, that is expected to slow in the future, while remaining significant. This will impact the communities that will face the challenge to adapt to the new reality of an older population, while still providing for an important cohort of young members.
- Schooling is clearly a main task to pursue. Even if noticeable advances occurred, the general picture is of a population much less educated than the rest of the citizens of Quebec or Canada. Women have made impressive gains in the recent past, but men have not done so to the same extent. If this challenge exists in other societies, the gap is especially large in First Nations on reserve, the Cree included.



A Dynamic Portrait: Conclusion

- The lower level of school achievement translates into more limited jobs prospects, both in terms of the type of occupations and sectors of activity. Education, law and social services regroup almost a quarter of the labour force. Workers in health occupations are only 4.5% and 2.1% in applied sciences. Two and a half times as many people are in natural resources (4.9%, versus 2%) compared to the rest of the province.
- Location and the small size of the population remain constraints. The reliance on public employment is high and options for private or cooperative pursuits are limited. The remoteness of major markets impact goods, services, jobs and business opportunities, commanding a specific strategy in matter of economic development.



A Dynamic Portrait: Conclusion

- Mutually beneficial partnerships with external resources, whether financial, technical, or human, are essential to develop and diversify the economy and make it more resilient.
- Eeyou Istchee is a vast territory with a great deal of potential and opportunities in various sectors of activity. It has the possibility to benefit from future developments, by supplying goods and services internally, but also by exporting what it can produce with its comparative advantages.



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Thank you for listening!

- I will now open the floor for questions.
- (QR Code)