

Country Report: Canada February 2022

Since its establishment, the Canadian government has mistreated and wiped-out Indigenous populations and cultures living within their borders. Although Indigenous peoples inhabited Canada for thousands of years, colonization efforts from European white settlers – particularly the English and French – have threatened these Native populations since the 16th century. Today, Indigenous [activists](#) and communities across Canada have called on the government for apologies, reparations, acknowledgments, and legislative changes to protect Indigenous Canadians.

The Canadian Constitution [recognizes](#) three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. However, pre-colonial Canada was home to hundreds, if not thousands, of Indigenous tribes, each with their own cultures, languages, histories, and spiritual practices. Approximately 200,000 First Nations and Inuit people [inhabited](#) Canada when European settlers arrived in the 1500s. Their arrival led to a steep decline in Aboriginal populations through disease, warfare, forced removal, and cultural assimilation policies.

Indigenous Canadians also suffered extreme religious and cultural genocide through residential schools in western Canada. Beginning in the late 19th century, the Canadian government constructed a [system](#) of boarding schools to ‘kill the Indian in the child’ and assimilate Indigenous people into white European society. [Thousands](#) of Aboriginal children were stolen from their homes and forced to forsake their culture and language. Some of these residential schools remained operational until as late as the 1970s and 1980s.

The legacies and impacts of systemic discrimination against Indigenous Canadians continue to this day. The remains and unmarked graves of nearly 900 Indigenous children were discovered near former residential schools in [British Columbia](#) and [Saskatchewan](#) in the summer of 2021, a grim reminder of one of the darkest chapters of Canadian history. Because many residential schools did not cease operation until the late 20th century, the discovery of mass graves is unfortunately [common](#) and reopens painful memories of genocide for Indigenous populations.

Today, Aboriginals make up [5%](#) of the Canadian population, and most of these communities live on reserves through treaties with the Canadian government. However, resources are limited, and the standard of living in these communities is [far below](#) the Canadian average. The average [employment](#) rate of Indigenous communities is much lower than that of non-Indigenous Canadians, with 62.1% of the non-Indigenous population employed compared to the employment rate of 57.5% for Indigenous Canadians. Indigenous Canadians are also [more likely](#) to live in inadequate housing, have shorter life expectancies, suffer from diseases and illnesses, abuse drugs or alcohol, and commit suicide than non-Indigenous Canadians. Like Indigenous communities in the United States, First Nations groups in Canada also struggle to access [basic needs](#) such as clean drinking water.

Because of Canada’s long history of colonization against Indigenous populations and lack of reparations towards these communities, Genocide Watch declares Canada to be at **Stage 10: Denial. Genocide Watch recommends:**

- Canada’s government order the immediate excavation of any remains from the sites of former Indigenous schools.
- Indigenous Canadians be given reparations for their suffering, either economic, physical/territorial, political, social, or cultural.
- The living conditions on Canadian reservations be improved by the federal government.
- Canadian companies be encouraged to hire from Indigenous communities to foster employment and economic growth on reservations.