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## Economic Life

Government investment and activity in the North since the 1950s and, since about 1970, oil, gas and mineral exploration and development by multinational and Crown corporations, have caused great changes in the economic life of the Inuit. There has been a substantial increase in the number and diversity of wage employment opportunities in the Arctic, and Inuit have been taking up these opportunities in much larger numbers. No longer are these jobs merely the lowest skilled and the lowest paid. Inuit are increasingly well represented in managerial, administrative, and technical occupations, both in the regional centres and in the smaller communities. The majority of Inuit households now rely on employment income for most of their cash. This increased household income, along with government investment in housing, utilities, and municipal infrastructure, has greatly improved the standard of living among the Inuit.

As already noted, their traditional activities of hunting and fishing have not, however, been abandoned. Throughout the Arctic, the Inuit have created a mixed economy in which wage employment and harvesting are thoroughly integrated. Hunting and fishing are still essential activities in all the small communities, but the expensive equipment necessary to pursue these activities is now more likely to be provided by wage income than by the sale of furs and skins.

### Hunting, trapping and fishing

Today, the Inuit use about the same area of land, water, and sea ice (over 4 million km<sup>2</sup>) as they did a century ago. The replacement of dog teams by snowmobiles, and the advent of gasoline-powered boats, means that the Inuit can now harvest very large tracts as effectively from the 50 or so settlements in which they now reside, as from the hundreds of small camps they inhabited before. Today an Inuit hunter thinks nothing of travelling 200 km to hunt caribou on a Saturday off work.

Although the Inuit now use the most modern hunting equipment, the organization of hunting and fishing has changed very little. These are still largely domestic rather than market activities. Hunters go out alone or in small groups to obtain meat and fish for their families, kinsmen, or communities. Butchering meat, preparing food, cleaning and stretching skins are household activities. Products intended for export, such as fox furs, seal skins, handicrafts, or fish, are marketed through local stores, or through local producer co-operatives, or in the case of furs and skins may be sent directly to major auction houses in southern Canada.