

Migration and Mobility of Canada's Aboriginal Population

Introduction

According to the 1991 Census of Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, more than 321,000 Aboriginal people were living in a different location in 1991 than in 1986. This highlight examines several key dimensions of Aboriginal migration and residential mobility patterns during that five-year period.

The Aboriginal Population

The most recent information on Aboriginal migration and mobility patterns comes from the 1991 Census of Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS). The Census of Canada, which identifies the Aboriginal population on the basis of ethnic origin or ancestry, in 1991 estimated this population at 1,002,675 individuals. It is here referred to as the **Aboriginal ancestry population**.

The Aboriginal Peoples Survey was conducted as a follow-up to the Census. It sampled the population that reported Aboriginal ethnic origins, but collected information only on the 625,710 individuals who identified with an Aboriginal group. This group is referred to as the **Aboriginal identity population**.

Data presented in this highlight concerning the volume and geographic patterns of Aboriginal migration and the characteristics of migrants derive from the APS and relate to the population reporting Aboriginal identity. Data concerning Aboriginal residential mobility, housing consumption and locational patterns in major urban areas are based on the 1991 Census and relate to the population reporting Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal households are defined as those in which people of Aboriginal origin maintain the household.

Findings

Geographical Patterns of Migration

Although nearly 60 percent of Canada's Aboriginal identity population reported at least one change of residence between 1986 and 1991, most moves occurred within the same community. Migrants (i.e. individuals who reported living in different communities in 1986 and 1991) totaled 117,120 individuals, representing about 22 percent of the total Aboriginal identity population aged

60% Of The

Aboriginal

Identity

Population

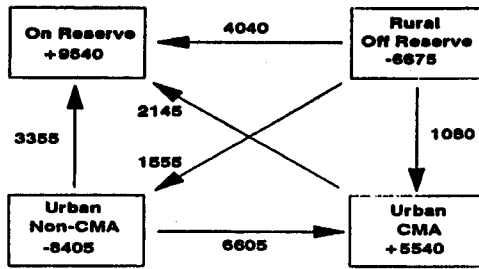
Moved

Between

1986 And 1991

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre *Migration et mobilité de la population autochtone du Canada*.

Figure 1:
Summary of Net Migration Flows Between On and Off-Reserve Locations
During the 1986-1991 Period, Aboriginal Identity Population, Canada



Note: Excludes International migrants and migration from reserves not enumerated in 1991 by the Census and/or Aboriginal Peoples Survey.

Figures in box refer to net migrants for areas.

Source: Custom tabulations from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1991

5 or more. The migration rate of Canada's Aboriginal population during the period was slightly lower than that of the total Canadian population (23.5 percent).

Between 1986 and 1991, migration resulted in net inter-provincial population shifts of about 7,145 Aboriginal individuals. Migration resulted in small increases to the Aboriginal identity populations of both Alberta and British Columbia. All other provinces and regions reported small Aboriginal population losses through migration during the time period.

Large Urban Centres And Indian Reserves Experienced Net Population Gains As A Result Of Migration

As in the case of inter-provincial movements, Aboriginal migration between the far-northern, mid-northern and southern regions of Canada resulted in relatively small changes in the populations of these regions. Both the southern and far northern regions of Canada experienced small increases (less than 1 percent) in Aboriginal population through migration. The mid-north region reported a small population loss through migration (less than 2 percent).

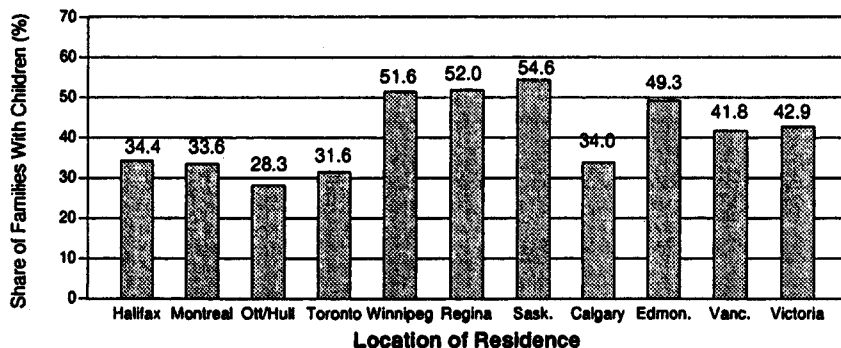
In relation to other geographical dimensions of Aboriginal migration, movement on and off reserve and within the rural-urban hierarchy represents a more common and important factor in Aboriginal migration. Large urban centres (Census Metropolitan Areas) experienced a net increase of 5,540 Aboriginal individuals through migration, suggesting that the longstanding process of urbanization of the Aboriginal population continued during the 1986-1991 period. Indian reserves gained 9,540 individuals as a result of migration during the period. Roughly 20 percent of this population increase was associated with migration to reserves of individuals who gained or regained Indian status under the 1985 amendments to the Indian Act (Bill C-31). Losses of Aboriginal population through migration were reported for smaller urban areas and rural areas (Figure 1).

Characteristics of Migrants

Data concerning age, gender and family status reveal that women, young and lone-parent families were most likely to migrate. These demographic groups within the Aboriginal population remained the most likely to move and formed the bulk of the migrant population during the period. Of particular note in this regard, are the high concentrations of lone parent families among Aboriginal migrants to major urban centres. Lone parent families formed the majority of families with children among the

Aboriginal migrant populations residing in several of Canada's major urban centres (Figure 2).

Figure 2:
Lone Parent Families as a Proportion of All In-Migrant Aboriginal Families With Children, Selected Census Metropolitan Areas, Canada 1991



Source: Custom tabulations from the 1991 Census of Canada

In relation to their non-migrant counterparts, Aboriginal migrants possessed higher personal resources (in the form of educational attainment) and were more likely to be either attending school or participating actively in the labour market. Nevertheless, Aboriginal migrants experienced higher rates of unemployment than Aboriginal non-migrants in all locations except rural areas. Data for major urban areas with large Aboriginal populations clearly reveal that Aboriginal migrants to major Prairie

urban centres experience the greatest economic difficulties in terms of the labour market and incomes. More than one-half of all Aboriginal migrant households in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton reported incomes below the Statistics Canada low income cut-off in 1990. High rates of dependence on income assistance programs were also characteristic of Aboriginal migrants to these centres.

Reasons for Migration

In relation to other factors, family issues or housing-related matters were cited much more commonly as reasons for migration to Indian reserves. Although these same factors were also cited frequently by Aboriginal migrants off reserve, migrants to off-reserve locations were much more likely to report moving in response to employment (especially in the case of males) or community-related issues (in the case of females).

Residential Mobility in Major Urban Areas

Residential mobility (i.e. moves within the same community) was examined within the context of eleven major urban areas which contain large Aboriginal populations. Rates of residential mobility among Aboriginal ancestry households residing in these centres ranged from a low of 47 percent in Toronto to a high of 72 percent in Winnipeg during the 1986-1991 period (Figure 3). In all major urban areas considered, the residential mobility rate of Aboriginal households exceeded that of non-Aboriginal households by a large margin (about 1.8 times higher on average).

Large differences in rates of residential mobility were identified among various types of Aboriginal households. As expected, non-family households reported higher rates of mobility than families. Aboriginal lone parent families residing in Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg, however reported residential mobility rates exceeding 80 percent, a rate of mobility higher than that of non-families.

Data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey concerning the reasons for moving confirm the importance of housing-related issues to residential mobility. Moves to improve housing conditions accounted for 51 percent of all residential moves. An additional 8 percent of residential moves was attributed to the availability of a housing unit. Family-related issues accounted for 14 percent of all moves. Involuntary or forced moves (e.g. fire, eviction) were reported by roughly 9 percent of all movers. All other factors, such as neighbourhood issues and accessibility issues, were cited much less frequently.

Housing Deficiencies Among Movers and Stayers

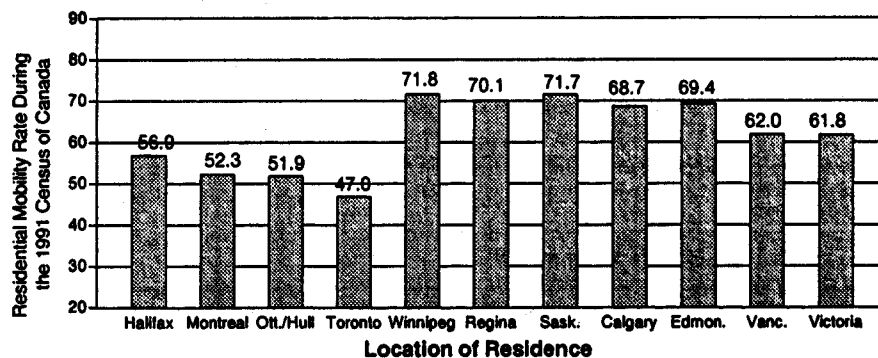
Aboriginal housing consumption was examined in relation to three commonly-accepted consumption standards: including affordability, adequacy and suitability. Although moving represents an opportunity for the household to bring housing consumption better in line with needs and resources, most Aboriginal moves resulted in housing circumstances which continued to fail accepted consumption standards. In all of the eleven urban centres examined, Aboriginal households that moved during the 1986-1991 period were considerably (at least 1.3 times) more likely than those that did not move, to experience at least one housing consumption deficiency.

Locational Patterns in Major Urban Areas

Analyses comparing the locational patterns of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population revealed low to moderate levels of residential segregation in major urban areas. Tenure differences between the two populations are likely to account for much of the observed levels of segregation.

Housing-Related Matters Were Common Reasons for Migration

Figure 3: Residential Mobility Rates During the 1986-1991 Period Among Households of Aboriginal Ancestry, Selected Census Metropolitan Areas, Canada, 1991.



Source: Custom tabulations from the 1991 Census of Canada

In most of the major urban areas examined, the Aboriginal population was geographically dispersed. Sizable Aboriginal enclaves were identified in only one urban centre, Winnipeg, where the Aboriginal population accounted for more than 20 percent of the total population residing in each of 14 Census tracts and formed the majority of the population residing in one Census tract. In only two other centres, Regina and Saskatoon, did the Aboriginal population of individual Census tracts exceed 20 percent of the total tract population.

Comparison of the locational patterns of Aboriginal migrants and non-migrants revealed that migrants tended to be located in the same areas as non-migrants. In-migration during the 1986-1991 period served to reinforce and expand existing concentrations of the Aboriginal population in most of the major urban centres.

Additional analyses comparing the locational patterns of Aboriginal movers and stayers did not reveal large differences between the two populations in any of the major urban areas examined. During the 1986-1991 period, the process of residential mobility did not contribute to significant changes in the geographical distribution of the Aboriginal populations in these urban areas.

Conclusion

Although 22 percent of the Aboriginal identity population moved to a new community between 1986 and 1991, migration in general had little impact on the geographic distribution of the population. From a geographic perspective, the most significant dimensions of Aboriginal migration during this period involved the continued migration to major urban areas and the return migration to Indian reserves. This latter dimension may have resulted, in part, from the effects of Bill C-31.

Migrants to larger urban centres tended to reside in areas with sizable existing Aboriginal populations thereby reinforcing and expanding existing population concentrations. In most of the centres examined, however, the Aboriginal population remains geographically dispersed and large Aboriginal enclaves are not common.

High rates of residential mobility and poor housing conditions characterize the Aboriginal populations residing in Canada's major urban areas. These situations are especially pronounced in the major Prairie urban centres of Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, and Edmonton.

For the majority of Aboriginal households residing in major urban areas, the process of residential mobility does not result in the consumption of housing that meets accepted standards. Given this situation, high rates of residential mobility may reflect an additional dimension of the housing challenge confronting Aboriginal households in large cities.

This research highlight summarizes some of the findings in Migration and Mobility of Canada's Aboriginal Population. To obtain a copy of the report, call the Canadian Housing Information Centre (613) 748-2367. For further information, contact Mr. Denys Chamberland, Manager, Centre for Future Studies, CMHC, (613) 748-2812.

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