
Feature Article: Migration of Rural Youth

Summary

There have been concerns for some time about the movement of young people away from rural communities. Youth have been leaving rural areas to find employment in urban centres or to enrol in post-secondary educational institutions, and subsequently finding jobs in the urban areas. Statistics Canada has recently released a study¹, which examines the migration patterns in rural and urban areas of the country. In addition, the study provides information about migration between rural and urban British Columbia, both at the provincial and sub-provincial level.

There are many factors that contribute to the movement of young people from rural communities and small towns to larger urban centres, such as Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Nanaimo or Prince George. The availability of a variety of employment opportunities is important to young people entering the labour market, as is the range of social and other activities that can be found in urban settings. Other youth are drawn to urban settings with post-secondary institutions to continue their education and once having left their home communities may be more likely to later find employment in an urban centre. On the other hand, there are also youth that are attracted to small towns and rural communities for jobs, especially in the resource sectors, and for other reasons such as recreation opportunities and more affordable housing. Analysis of migration to non-metro rural counties in the United States² indicates that natural amenities, which pertain

¹ Dupuy, Richard, Francine Mayer and René Morissette [2000], "Rural Youth: Stayers, Leavers and Return Migrants", Statistics Canada, Research Paper Series No. 152, Analytical Studies Branch.

² Thrush, Glenn [1999], "Something in the Way We Move", American Demographics, November 1999.

Definitions

*The data used in the study come from the 1996 Census and T1 tax records. The 1996 **Census** gives information on a person's location in both 1991 and 1996. **Tax** data also provide information on five-year migration patterns, as well as migration over a longer period.*

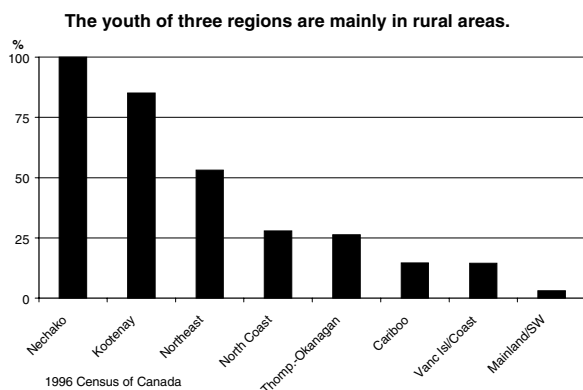
*An **urban area** is a geographical unit belonging to either a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) or a Census Agglomeration (CA), that has an urbanized core of more than 10,000 persons. **Rural areas** and **small towns** are defined residually as geographical units that are neither CMAs nor CAs. Migration flows for B.C. are analyzed using geographical units defined as rural/urban areas within each of the eight development regions (DR).*

*A **leaver** is defined as a person who was in a given geographical unit in 1991 but not in 1996; otherwise, a person is a **stayer**. A **permanent stayer** is a person who stayed in the same geographical unit for all 11 years of the 1987-1997 period. A **return migrant** is a person who changed geographical units at some point during the period but was in the same unit in both 1987 and 1997. A **permanent leaver** is a person who changed geographical units at some point during the period but was in different units in 1987 and 1997.*

to the physical environment and enhance a location as a place of residence, are important to all age groups, not just those approaching retirement. The U.S. counties that ranked highest on natural amenities, whatever their economic base, were the ones that offered an ideal climate and interesting terrain such as mountains, ocean, rivers and lakes. Virtually all of these counties were in the western states.

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This article will look at the movements between rural and urban areas of the province, although the reasons for moving are not explicit in the data. In 1996, rural youth (aged 15 to 29 years) represented more than half of the population of young people in three of the eight regions of the province: Nechako (100%), Kootenay (85%) and Northeast (53%). On the other hand, only 3% of the Mainland/Southwest region's youth lived in rural areas. The rural young people who were working full-time in 1996 were more likely than their urban counterparts to be employed in the primary sector (agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining) or in manufacturing. The urban youth were more likely to be working in business or distributive services, such as transportation.



Between 1991 and 1996, there was strong migration of young people both within B.C. and from outside the province. As a result, rural communities experienced a net loss (-3.1%) of teenagers aged 15 to 19 due to migration, while the teenage population in urban centres increased by 10.7%. Over the same period the rural population of older youth grew more strongly than the urban population (29.0% rural vs 10.2% urban for the 21-24 age group and 21.3% rural vs 6.5% for the 25-29 age group). There was more volatility in the rural youth population than in the urban youth as larger proportions left rural areas than urban areas but also larger proportions came

to rural areas. Those coming to rural areas were most likely to come from urban areas within the province, while those coming to urban areas were most likely to come from urban areas in other provinces. For the province as a whole, the 1991 to 1996 period was characterised by strong inflows of people from other provinces, with a large proportion of them being young adults.

The following table shows the different rural and urban net flows by age group and region. For the teenage group, there were large net outflows for rural parts of Kootenay, Thompson-Okanagan and Nechako regions and a large net inflow for rural Northeast. Mainland/Southwest attracted the largest share of youth to urban centres. For the 20-24 year olds, the rural areas of all regions had net inflows with over 40% for both Cariboo and Northeast. Thompson-Okanagan had the largest urban net inflow. For the oldest youth, the

Net Migration Flows (%) by Age and Region, 1991 to 1996

Development Region		Age in 1991		
		15-19	20-24	25-29
Vancouver Island / Coast	Rural	1.1	32.7	30.7
	Urban	9.1	5.2	9.1
Mainland / Southwest	Rural	17.2	37.5	22.1
	Urban	13.5	10.7	3.9
Thompson - Okanagan	Rural	-13.2	32.4	25.7
	Urban	7.9	18.4	22.3
Kootenay	Rural	-14.4	18.1	18.7
	Urban	-8.6	0.6	22.0
Cariboo	Rural	7.1	41.7	21.2
	Urban	1.2	11.3	9.1
North Coast	Rural	3.8	16.8	14.0
	Urban	-6.3	8.5	4.3
Nechako	Rural	-8.9	20.4	7.4
Northeast	Rural	31.1	40.3	15.5
	Urban	3.7	1.9	0.9
British Columbia	Rural	-3.1	29.0	21.3
	Urban	10.7	10.2	6.5

Source: 1996 Census of Canada

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rural inflows were generally smaller than for the middle age group, with Vancouver Island/Coast having the largest net inflow. Thompson-Okanagan and Kootenay had the largest urban net inflows. These data indicate that although the populations of rural communities and small towns grew between 1991 and 1996, there was a great deal of turnover among their youth.

Although young people may move from rural area to urban centres, it is also of interest to know whether they later return to their rural roots, to either the same area that they left or to another rural part of the province. The data for the 1987 to 1997 period provides information on this issue. For the 15 to 19 age group, 14.4% had left and returned to the same rural area between 1987 and 1997, while 19.0% of this group had left their rural area but by 1997 were living somewhere else in rural B.C. These proportions fall as the age of the young people increases. For the 20 to 24 age group, 11.3% had returned to their rural area of origin and 16.7% to rural B.C. For the 25 to 29 age group, 8.0% had returned to their rural area of origin and 13.3% to rural B.C. The proportions of youth who return to rural B.C. are somewhat higher than for the country as a whole but are not high enough to have a major impact on the growth of rural communities. Instead growth in these areas will be dependent on migration from other areas, most likely urban areas of B.C.

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