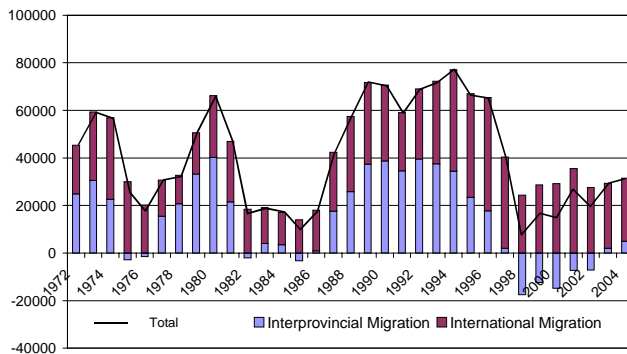


Feature Article: B.C. Migration – Outlook for 2004

Summary

During 2004, the population of British Columbia is expected to increase by 31,550 persons due to migration from other provinces and other countries. This is stronger than the net inflows of the previous five years, and is due to an improving outlook for interprovincial migration. During the course of 2004, the outflows to other provinces are expected to continue to be lower than inflows.

Net migration to B.C. is expected to increase to 31,550 people in 2004.

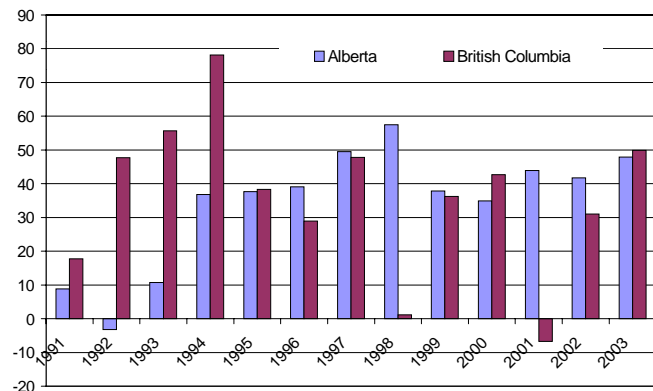


During the late 1980s and early 1990s, migration to British Columbia from the rest of Canada and the rest of the world exhibited large increases, reaching a peak of 77,116 persons in 1994. The large inflows of population to B.C. strengthened total consumer spending and residential investment. This increase in economic activity, in turn, created jobs and income within the province. From 1990 to 1994, B.C. had the highest rate of job creation of any province in Canada, and from 1995 to 1997 B.C.'s employment growth continued to be above the national average. However, this changed in 1998 when employment growth in B.C. dropped to 0.1% and remained below the national average until last year. During 2003, the rate of employment growth was marginally higher than the Canadian average and amongst the highest in the country. Employment grew from an average of 1,973,400 in 2002 to an average of 2,023,300 in 2003, an increase of close to 50,000 in B.C. This was higher than

Alberta but lower than Ontario and Quebec. Overall Canadian employment increased 334,200 or 2.2 percent. The unemployment rate, on the other hand, remained higher in BC compared to these provinces, and the Canadian average, as more people joined the work force.

The number of jobs in B.C. increased by 50,000 in 2003.

Annual Change in Employment (000s)



Given the influence of population growth on labour markets and overall economic performance, it is important to examine what is in store for migration to British Columbia in 2004. Net migration to B.C. has been quite volatile over time. The record high net inflow during 1994 of close to 80,000 persons is in sharp contrast to the lows of 6,200 in 1985 and 6,800 in 1998. This volatility is one of the reasons why it is difficult to accurately predict migration. Most researchers would agree that the first step to forecasting migration is to isolate the factors that influence migration, then attempt to predict those factors. The task of isolating these factors is simplified by separating migration into the international and interprovincial components.

International Migration

International migration to British Columbia is largely determined by federal government policy and the historic distribution of immigrants to the provinces. This forecast as-

sumes that there will be enough people interested in coming to Canada to meet the stated federal government levels. The federal government sets an overall annual immigration planning level for Canada. These planning levels are not intended to be rigid quotas and actual immigration may exceed or fall short of the planning level. In 2003, the planning level was established for 2004 of 225,000 persons, marginally higher than the actual number of immigrants to come to the country in 2003.

The planned immigration levels since 1990 are shown in the following table along with actual immigration to Canada and the B.C. share. The steady increase in immigration to Canada experienced since the mid-1980s levelled off to between 212,000-226,000 persons annually over the 1994-1997 period. Immigration to Canada in 1998 weakened, likely as a result of economic downturn in Asia, but has since returned to mid 1990 levels.

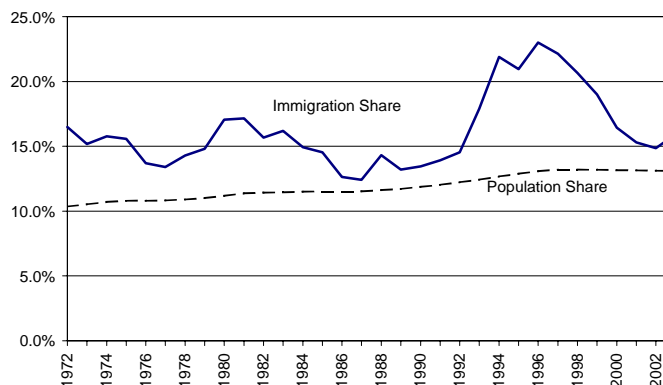
Canadian Immigration

Year	Planning Level (000's)	Actual (000's)	B.C. Share (%)
1990	200	214	13.4
1991	220	231	13.9
1992	250	253	14.5
1993	250	256	17.9
1994	250	224	21.9
1995	190-215	212	20.9
1996	195-220	226	23.0
1997	195-220	216	22.0
1998	200-225	174	20.6
1999	200-225	190	19.0
2000	200-225	227	16.5
2001	200-225	250	15.3
2002	210-235	229	14.8
2003	220-245	221	15.9
2004	225		

Starting in 1993, British Columbia experienced a significant increase in its share of immigrants coming to Canada, likely resulting from the change in governance of Hong Kong. B.C.'s immigration share peaked in 1996 at 23 per cent declining to

14.8 per cent in 2002, but rising again to 16% in 2003.

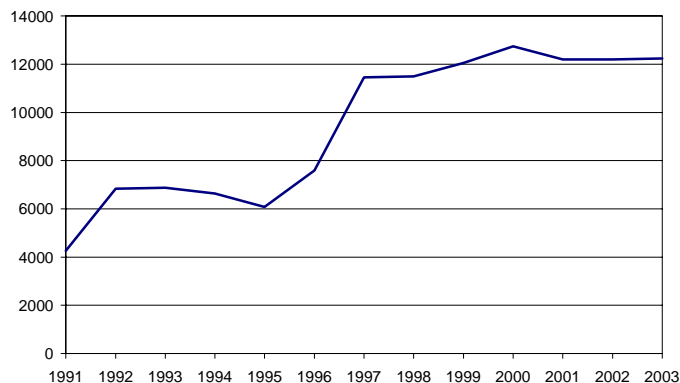
B.C.'s share of immigrants to Canada rose for the first time since 1996.



However, while the share of immigrants coming to BC rose in 2003, the actual numbers declined slightly as fewer immigrants came to Canada. It appears that B.C.'s higher share of immigration was partly a result of lower immigration to Ontario last year. Ontario's share of immigrants has declined from 59.3% to 54.1% over the last three years. Quebec, which is the only province to have responsibility for the selection of some classes of immigrants, increased its share of immigration by 4 percent since 1997.

It is likely that B.C.'s share of Canadian immigration in 2004 will again be around the 15 percent mark. After accounting for changes in the other components of international migration such as emigration, net international migration to British Columbia in 2004 is expected to be 23,744 persons, down marginally from the 27,400 estimated in 2003. The number of people emigrating from BC is difficult to measure; however, despite the increase in the number of people returning to Asia after the turn over of Hong Kong, and the burgeoning economies in Asia, it is assumed that emigration will decline marginally in 2004.

The total number of emigrants from BC has grown over the last decade.¹



Interprovincial Migration

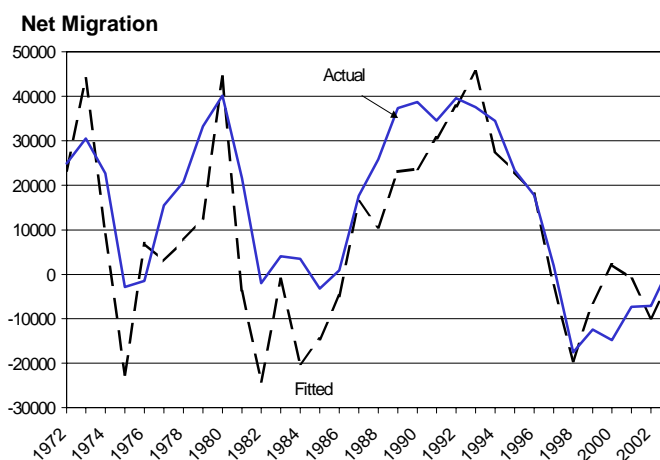
Unlike international migration, interprovincial migration is not regulated directly by government policy, although it is still influenced by a wide variety of factors. Unregulated migration can be viewed essentially as a combination of "push" factors that pressure a migrant to move, and "pull" factors that attract a migrant to a particular location. Consequently, movement between provinces under this Push-Pull hypothesis results from differences in economic, social, and geographic conditions in respective areas.

Social and geographic conditions generally change more slowly than economic conditions. Hence, it is the economic factors, particularly the relative economic conditions between resource based regions and manufacturing centres, that must be considered when predicting changes to net interprovincial migration. These factors can cause interprovincial migration to swing relatively quickly from net inflows to net outflows and vice versa.

Statistical analysis indicates that over the past thirty years, fluctuations in British Columbia net interprovincial migration have

been correlated to a significant degree with differences in the growth of the British Columbia economy relative to the rest of Canada (primarily Ontario), as measured by real Gross Domestic Product, and to a lesser degree with the relative difference between the British Columbia and Alberta unemployment rates. The following chart shows that these variables, when combined in a regression equation, can predict with reasonable accuracy the actual net interprovincial migration for B.C.

Model of net interprovincial migration



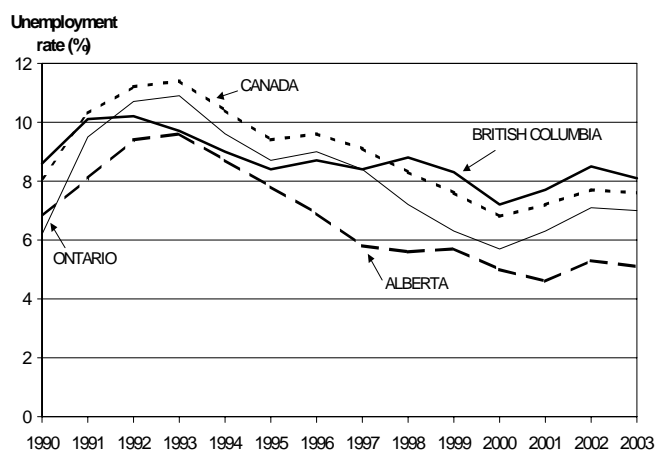
Many other economic factors likely play a role in influencing population movement (e.g. housing prices); however, in many instances empirical data on these factors are not available for a sufficient historical period to conduct statistical analysis. In addition, in order to forecast migration, consideration must be given to the practicality of forecasting the theorised determinants of migration. Both these constraints put limits on the number and type of variables considered as indicators of interprovincial migration. Consequently, the factors noted above do not uniquely describe inter-provincial migration flows, but rather are the ones that fit the criterion of statistically significant correlation with past migration flows, and have the potential to be forecast themselves.

The levels of interprovincial migration from Alberta, Ontario and the rest of Canada are

¹ Total Emigrants from BC as measured by Statistics Canada, March 2004.

also a reflection of the relative unemployment rates. Over the last twenty years, with the exception of 1993, B.C. has always had a higher unemployment rate than Alberta (2.6 percentage points on average), but for much of that period, B.C. has received population from Alberta. The exceptions were the mid-seventies and early eighties, when the differential reached the 4 to 5 percentage point mark, and the last six years.

In 2003, the gap between unemployment rates in B.C. and Alberta narrowed.



From 1993 through 1997, B.C. had a net migration of 17,700 persons from Alberta. Between 1998 and 2003 the flow reversed and Alberta received a net number of 56,647 persons from B.C. This contributed substantially to the large total net inter-provincial outflows from BC of over 57,000 people between 1998 and 2003. However, for the first time in six years, BC had positive net inter-provincial migration in 2003 with 2,094 more people coming to the province than leaving. Last year, the difference between Alberta and BC's unemployment rate decreased marginally from 3.2% in 2002 to 3.0% in 2003. The positive figures for net migration to BC has been a result of fewer people leaving the province rather than more people arriving. Given the decrease in the net outflow in the last two years, it is anticipated that the outflow to Alberta will continue to slow during 2004.

In 2003, after several years of relative weakness, the overall economic growth in B.C. (as measured by real GDP) moved closer to the national annual average. Last year, the Canadian economy grew by 1.6 per cent, while economic indicators suggest that real GDP growth in this province was 1.5 per cent.² Economic growth in Canada is expected to be stronger in 2004 (2.7%), while B.C.'s economy is expected to grow even more rapidly (2.8%). As a result, the inflow of people to B.C. from other parts of the country is expected to continue to increase in 2004.

Given the above considerations, the net outflow of British Columbians to Alberta is expected to be lower and offset by net inflows from the rest of the country, resulting in a projected net inter-provincial inflow of 5,000 persons in 2004, higher than the 2,094 in 2003.

Risks to the Forecast

The main risk to the 2004 migration forecast is the interprovincial component. If the economic conditions in B.C., relative to the rest of Canada improve more slowly than anticipated, the increase in net inflow of population could be reduced or reversed.

Another uncertainty is the forecast of B.C.'s share of Canadian immigration. If the share is lower than expected or the level of immigration to Canada falls below the immigration plan, then the forecast of international migration to B.C. could be too optimistic. As well, emigration may not decline, but rather as economic conditions improve there may be more people moving to Asia, particularly India and China.

² The figures for BC GDP are from the BC Ministry of Finance 2004/05 Budget.

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