
Feature Article: Seasonal Patterns of Migration

Summary

Interprovincial migration, and to a lesser extent international migration, are characterized by large flows of people in the summer months and smaller numbers in the winter months. Some of the reasons for these patterns are discussed below. In order to allow a clearer view of the underlying trends in migration, the regular seasonal patterns are removed from the data.

Migration to and from British Columbia is very seasonal in its behaviour with large movements in the summer months and much smaller flows in the winter months. Figures 1 to 4 illustrate the pattern of quarterly interprovincial and international migration. Interprovincial movements and emigration are much more seasonal than immigration, which is likely influenced more by administrative actions¹. In all four components the third quarter is the peak period for migration. In the case of interprovincial migration, relatively strong movements also occur in the fourth quarter with much weaker migration in the first two quarters of the year. For international migration the second quarter is the next most common period for moving.

Some of the factors affecting interprovincial (and to a lesser extent international) migration are the desire for families with school age children to move when the children are between school years, the wish to avoid bad winter weather for longer moves using ground transportation, and the

avoidance of moves during peak business periods.

Figure 1

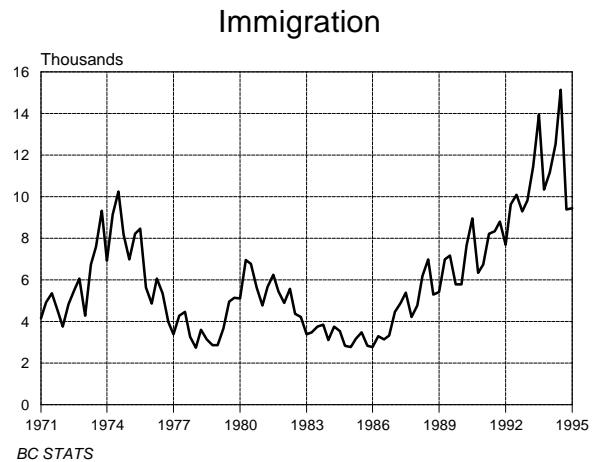
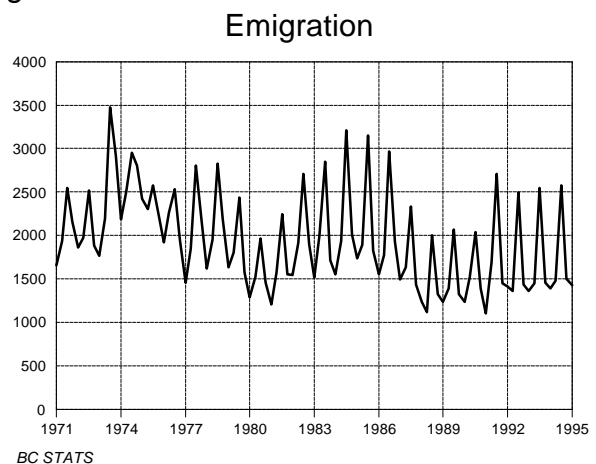


Figure 2



According to the General Social Survey² conducted by Statistics Canada in 1990, 15% of all moves in Canada in the preceding five years occurred in the month of July, 13% in June, 10% in September and 9% in each of the months of August and October. The relatively low proportion of moves in August may be a result of the

¹ Immigration is in-migration from another country and emigration is out-migration to another country.

² Che-Alford, Janet, *Residential Mobility of Canadians*, Statistics Canada, 1990.

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popularity of August as a vacation month. On the other end of the spectrum, only 5% of moves occurred in each of the months of February and March. These results cover all moves of any distance and only a small proportion of those would be between provinces or from outside the country. In fact only 8% of the moves during this five year period were long-distance moves, covering more than 400 kilometres in distance. However, residents of British Columbia moved more than the average Canadian both in 1989 (21% for BC as compared to 18% for Canada) and in the five year period

Figure 3

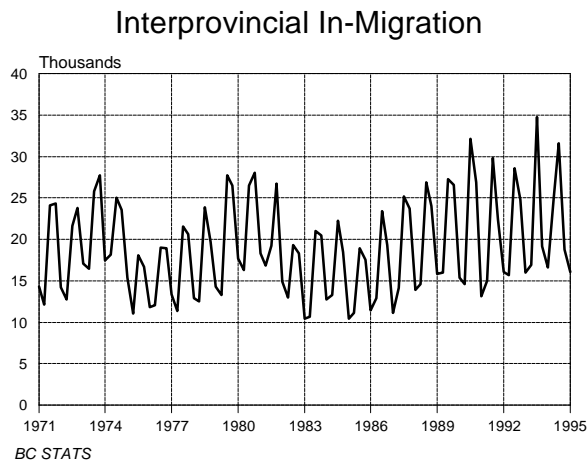
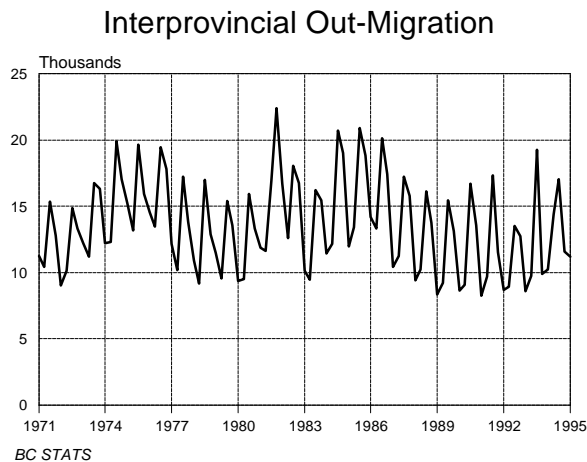


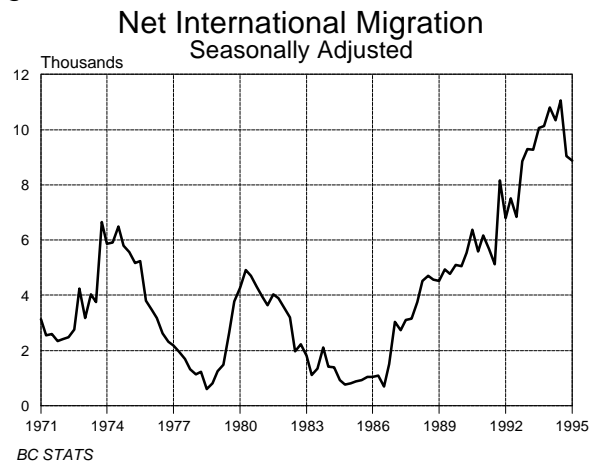
Figure 4



from 1985 to 1989 (55% for BC as compared to 50% for Canada).

Given the large seasonal fluctuations in the migration series, it is useful to remove the regular seasonal movements, thus yielding seasonally adjusted series³. In doing so, the underlying trends become more evident, although the effects of irregular events, such as unusual weather or an influx of immigrants due to a special circumstance, are still contained in the seasonally adjusted data. Figures 5 and 6 present seasonally adjusted net international and inter-provincial migration, which have been obtained by seasonally adjusting the four components shown in Figures 1 to 4.

Figure 5



From Figure 5 one can see that there has been a fairly steady increase in net international migration from 1986 until the third quarter of 1994. In the last two quarters there has been a total drop of more than 20%, bringing the level back to that recorded at the end of 1992.

³ The seasonal adjustment is performed using Statistics Canada's X11/ARIMA88 technique.

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Seasonally adjusted net interprovincial migration in Figure 6 has remained at a relatively high and stable level from 1988 until the first quarter of 1994. It then took a big jump to a record level in the second quarter of 1994, mainly as a result of unusually large movements between Alberta and British Columbia. In the last three quarters, the net interprovincial flows to British Columbia have fallen substantially with the fourth quarter of 1994 registering the lowest level since 1987.

Figure 6

