

📍 Location

📄 Job type

📅 Date posted

✈️ Flights

# The Young are Restless

## Western youth migration

🔍 Search jobs

▼ Experience

▼ Job title

🚚 Truck rentals

CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION

Janet Lane & Aaron Murray

# Canada West Foundation

*cwf.ca*

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West, and by extension, Canada. Through our evidence-based research and commentary, we provide practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West, and Canada as a whole, at home and on the global stage.

This report was written by Janet Lane, Director Human Capital Centre at Canada West Foundation and Aaron Murray of Derek Murray Consulting and Associates. Research assistance was provided by Stephany Laverty, Policy Analyst at Canada West Foundation. Production of reports at the Canada West Foundation is a team effort. Sincere thanks to all the staff whose contributions enhanced the quality of this report and brought the text to life on the page.

The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Directors, donors or advisers of the Canada West Foundation.

The Canada West Foundation relies on the support of donors and corporate supporters who recognize the importance of independent, non-partisan public policy to provide evidence-based solutions.

Your financial support helps us to continue to offer our publications free online and to ensure the widest possible distribution of our work, which is critical to make a difference on public policy.

To order printed copies or to obtain the rights to copy this report, please contact us:

**Canada West Foundation**

110 – 134 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, Calgary, Alberta T2G 0X5

Phone: 403-264-9535 Email: [cwf@cwf.ca](mailto:cwf@cwf.ca)

## CONTENTS

### The Young are Restless

Western youth migration

02

## Executive Summary

04

## Introduction

05

## Interprovincial Migration

06 Western interprovincial migration (all ages)

07 Western interprovincial youth migration

09 Manitoba

10 Saskatchewan

11 Alberta

12 British Columbia

13 Where do they go when they leave home?

14

## The Economic Context

14 Unemployment

16 Enrolment in post-secondary education

18 Job growth by sector

20 Job vacancies

23 Wages

25 Prospects for youth into the future

25 Business activity

27 Cost of living relative to income

31

## Conclusion

# Executive Summary

---

**In a complete reversal of past flows, more 25-29-year-olds moved out of Alberta than moved into the province between 2015 and 2021. This raises two questions: (1) Is this result unique to Alberta? and (2) What is the economic context behind this reversal?**

Research shows that youth tend to leave their hometowns and provinces to study or for job opportunities. Their intent is to move towards what they perceive to be a better quality of life, even if they later move back to be closer to friends and family.

Youth move at three main decision points: at graduation from high school when they may leave home to study; on graduation from post-secondary education when they move to begin their careers; and five to 10 years into their careers when they move to advance their careers or to settle down and raise a family.

Youth in Canada's West are mobile, moving into and out of every province. Manitoba and Saskatchewan have experienced net out-migration over most of the last 50 years. Meanwhile, Alberta and British Columbia tend to see youth move back and forth between them with the ups and downs in their economies, with British Columbia seeing net gains since 2014. Alberta, a beneficiary of youth migration for the previous 30 years, saw a drastic decline in net youth migration in 2015 and since then, it has been negative for the last six years within the 24-29 and 30-34-year-old sub-cohorts.



---

**Jobs are coming back. Between the third quarters of 2019 and 2021, there was more growth in job vacancies in Saskatchewan (83 per cent) than in Manitoba (52 per cent), Alberta (63 per cent) and B.C. (48 per cent).**

When job prospects are discouraging at home, youth respond by either moving to where they perceive more jobs to be available or by choosing to further their education. Indeed, more young Albertans have enrolled in post-secondary schools since 2015, when job prospects in Alberta deteriorated along with the drop in oil prices. Meanwhile, enrolment of domestic students fell in the other western provinces.

B.C. led the West in all job growth between 2010 and 2019. It had the best prospects for youth between 2015 and 2019 when unemployment fell to six per cent in 2018, while in the Prairie provinces it hovered above 10 per cent. During the pandemic youth in Saskatchewan fared the best, but all provinces saw spikes in youth unemployment.

However, jobs are coming back. Between the third quarters of 2019 and 2021, while job vacancies grew in every sector in at least one western province, there was more growth in job vacancies in Saskatchewan (83 per cent) than in Manitoba (52 per cent), Alberta (63 per cent) and B.C. (48 per cent). But B.C. is still attractive to youth. In the third quarter of 2021, in some well-paying sectors (e.g., information and cultural technology, professional, scientific and technical services and health care) B.C. offered higher wages and had more than twice as many job vacancies as Alberta.

On average, youth wages remain higher in Alberta. In 2019 the premium was \$8,000 for 25-34-year-olds. Since 2012 the gap in youth wages for 16-24-year-olds across the western provinces narrowed, as it did for all ages.

Economic forecasts predict that Alberta and B.C. will have strong growth (four per cent) in 2022. While Alberta will continue at that pace, Saskatchewan and Manitoba will beat B.C. in 2023 (over three per cent compared to B.C.'s 2.5 per cent).

Youth have been drawn to the higher numbers of jobs available in some sectors in B.C. and are apparently undaunted by the higher cost of living in its major cities. Rents are higher, rental vacancies are lower, and home purchases much more expensive in Vancouver and Victoria than anywhere in the Prairies, yet youth still move there. The numbers also show that youth have left small cities and rural areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta, while the number of youth in small cities in British Columbia has grown.

Canada West Foundation's companion report, *Work to Live* took a deep dive into young Albertan's choice about where to live that shows that while they weigh economic factors, they consider other factors too. Some youth in Alberta perceive that not only their job and career prospects, but also their quality of life will be better in another province.

# Introduction

From news and opinion columns to corporate and kitchen tables, there have been many recent stories about young people who have moved out of Alberta with no plans to return.

An investigation of the issue confirmed these stories, and uncovered a larger story. Alberta is not alone among the western provinces. Manitoba and Saskatchewan have had net losses in most of the last 50 years. While Alberta has recently experienced a net negative flow of young people, the province has generally been a beneficiary of young people's migration. The data show that net migration has ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the oil and gas sector. Meanwhile, the flow of youth into and out of British Columbia has most often been positive and is usually counter cyclical to Alberta's. In 2020, youth from all Prairie provinces moved as far West as they could go.

This paper tells the story of youth interprovincial migration and the economic situation across the West that has contributed to it.

# Interprovincial Migration

---

**International immigration is the largest controllable driver of population growth, but interprovincial migration is the most important metric.**

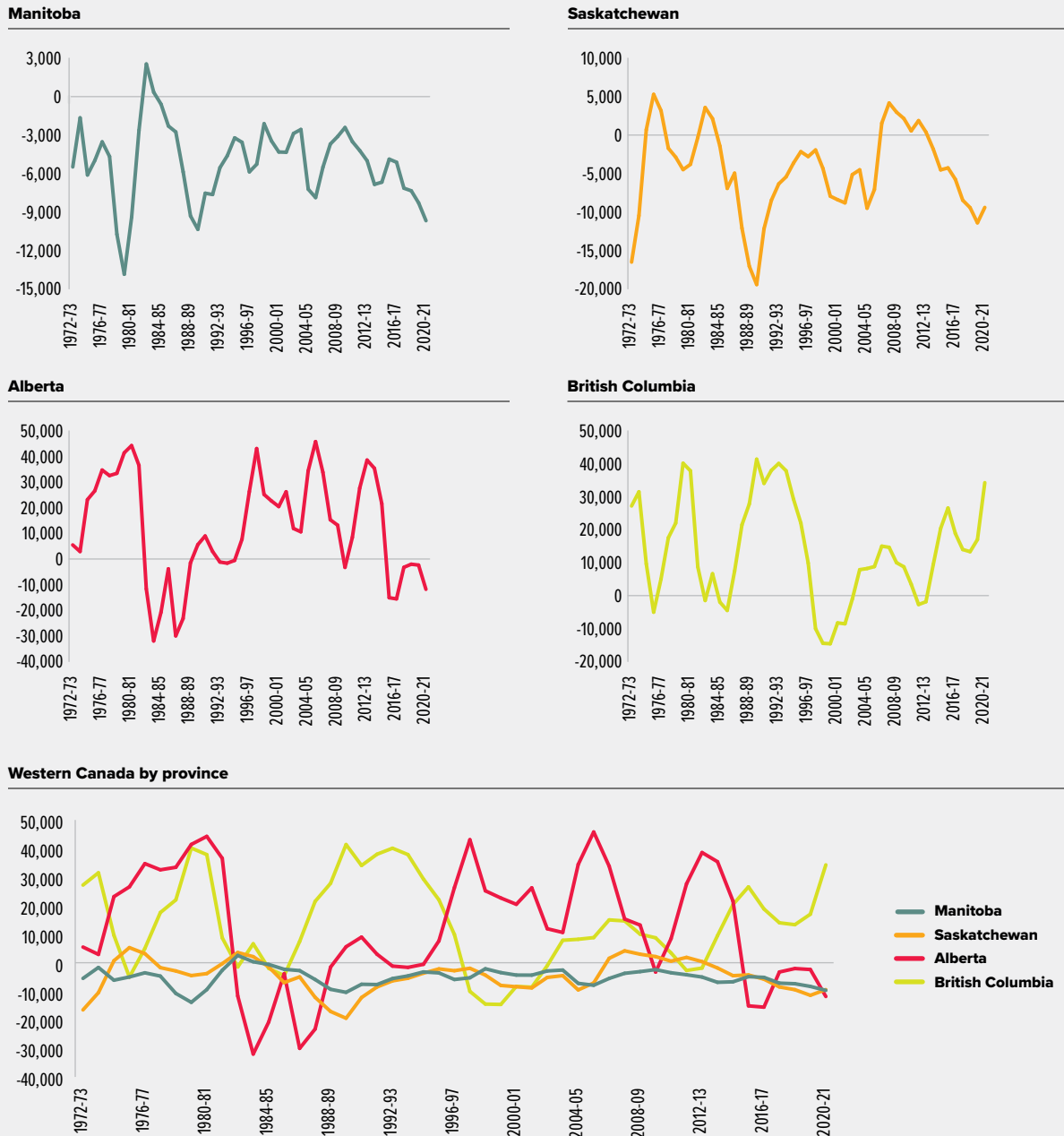
This is because while international immigration numbers are predicated on government policy, interprovincial migration is driven by individual preferences, values and economic opportunity. International immigration policies will be less beneficial to a province if youth and highly skilled people, including immigrants, leave for other jurisdictions through interprovincial migration.

That said, people have always moved back and forth between Canadian provinces, drawn to real and perceived economic advantages and the lure of a better quality of life including proximity to family. Interprovincial migration across Canada in the 1970's averaged more than 350,000 individuals per year and hit a peak of 438,000 in 1974-75. In general, however, it has held steady between 250,000 and 300,000 persons per year across the country for the last couple of decades.

# Western Interprovincial Migration (all ages)

Over the last 50 years, the West has seen hundreds of thousands of people come and go. While Alberta and British Columbia have been big net gainers over this period, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have never been the beneficiaries of interprovincial migration in the same way, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Net interprovincial migration (all ages)



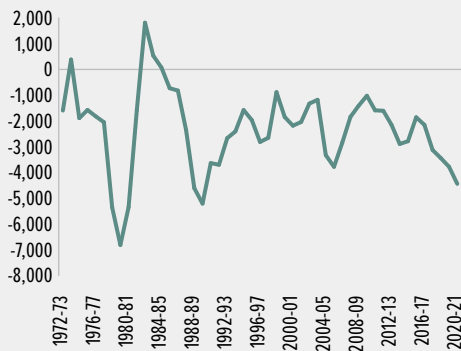
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01



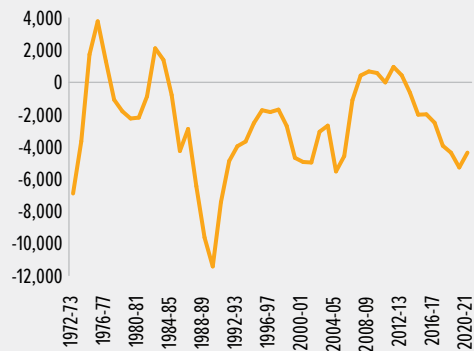
# Western Interprovincial Youth Migration

Figure 2: Net interprovincial migration (aged 15-34)

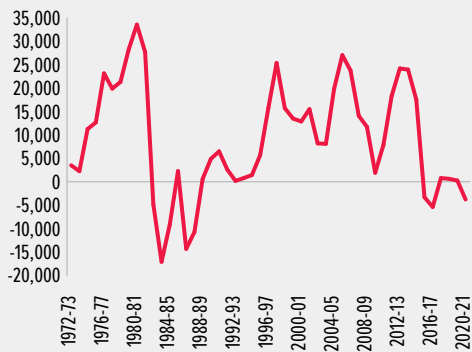
### Manitoba



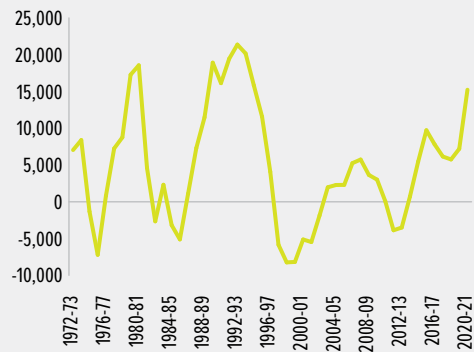
### Saskatchewan



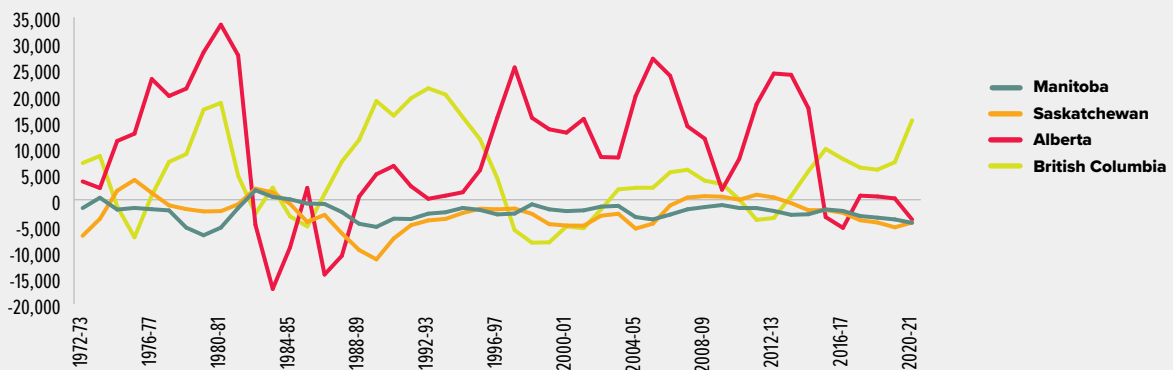
### Alberta



### British Columbia



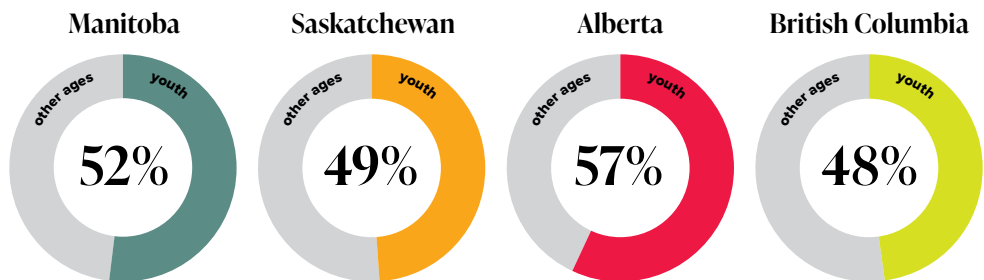
### Western Canada by province



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01

---

## Share of net migration by young adults for the western provinces over the past ten years (aged 15-34)



## Western interprovincial youth migration

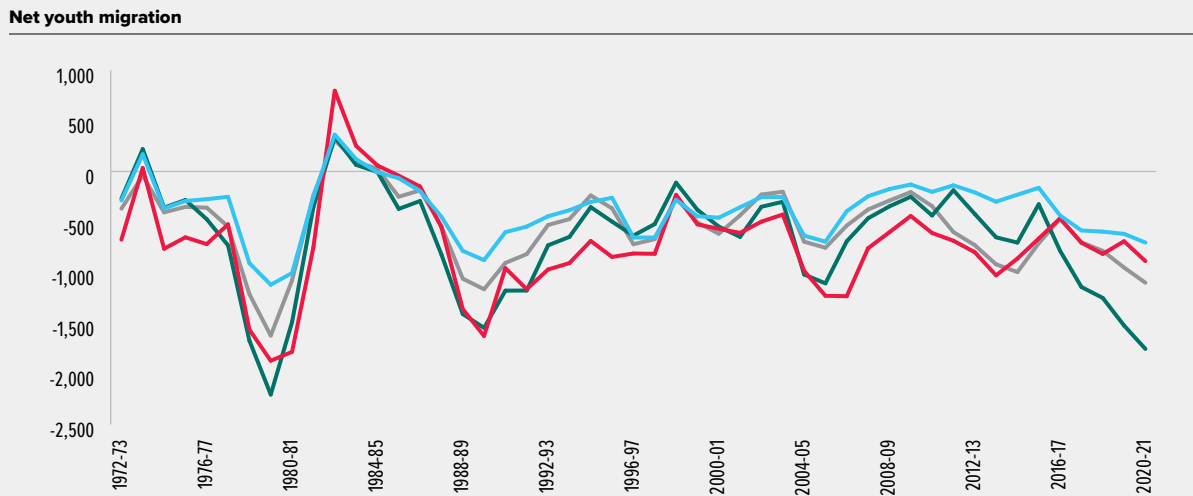
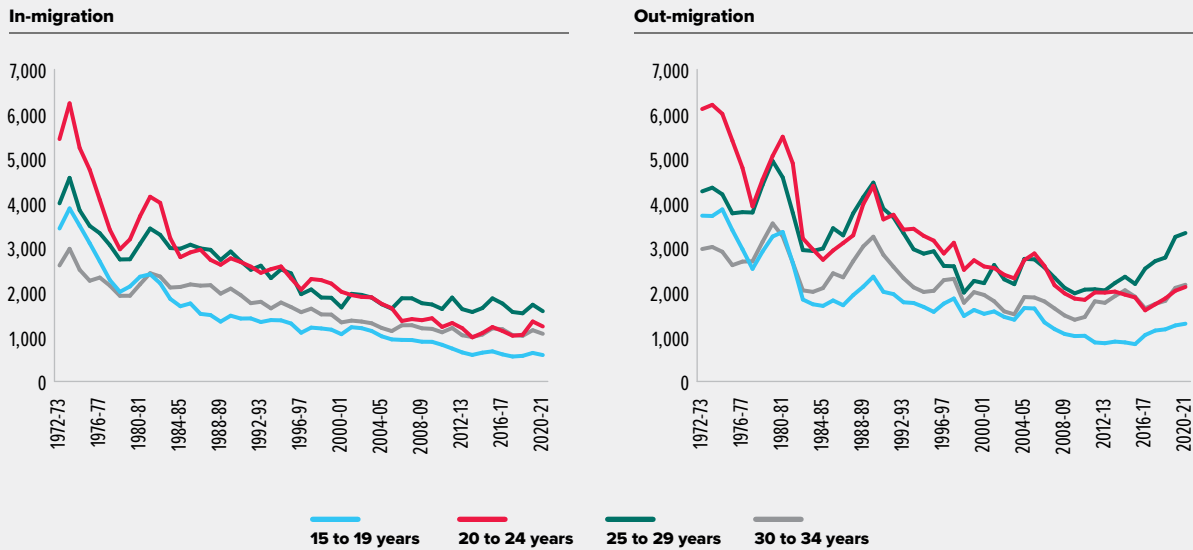
Youth are even more mobile than the general population. Figure 2 breaks out the net migration of young adults aged 15-34 for the western provinces. Over the past ten years 57 per cent of Alberta's net migration has been the 15-34-year-old age group. Alberta's youth migration share is higher than its western counterparts; in Manitoba it is 52 per cent, for Saskatchewan 49 per cent and in British Columbia it is 48 per cent.

A look at sub-sets of the youth cohort tells an even more interesting story. While youth are often defined as being aged 15-29, here we also look at the numbers of 30-34-year-olds who leave the Prairie provinces and head elsewhere. This sub-group is more likely to settle down in their new province. Figures 3, 4, 5 and 7 show interprovincial youth migration for each province in more detail.

# Manitoba Interprovincial Migration

There has been a recent uptick in out-migration of youth that is most pronounced in the 25–29-year-old cohort. In-migration has steadily declined since 1984.

Figure 3: Manitoba interprovincial youth migration by age segment

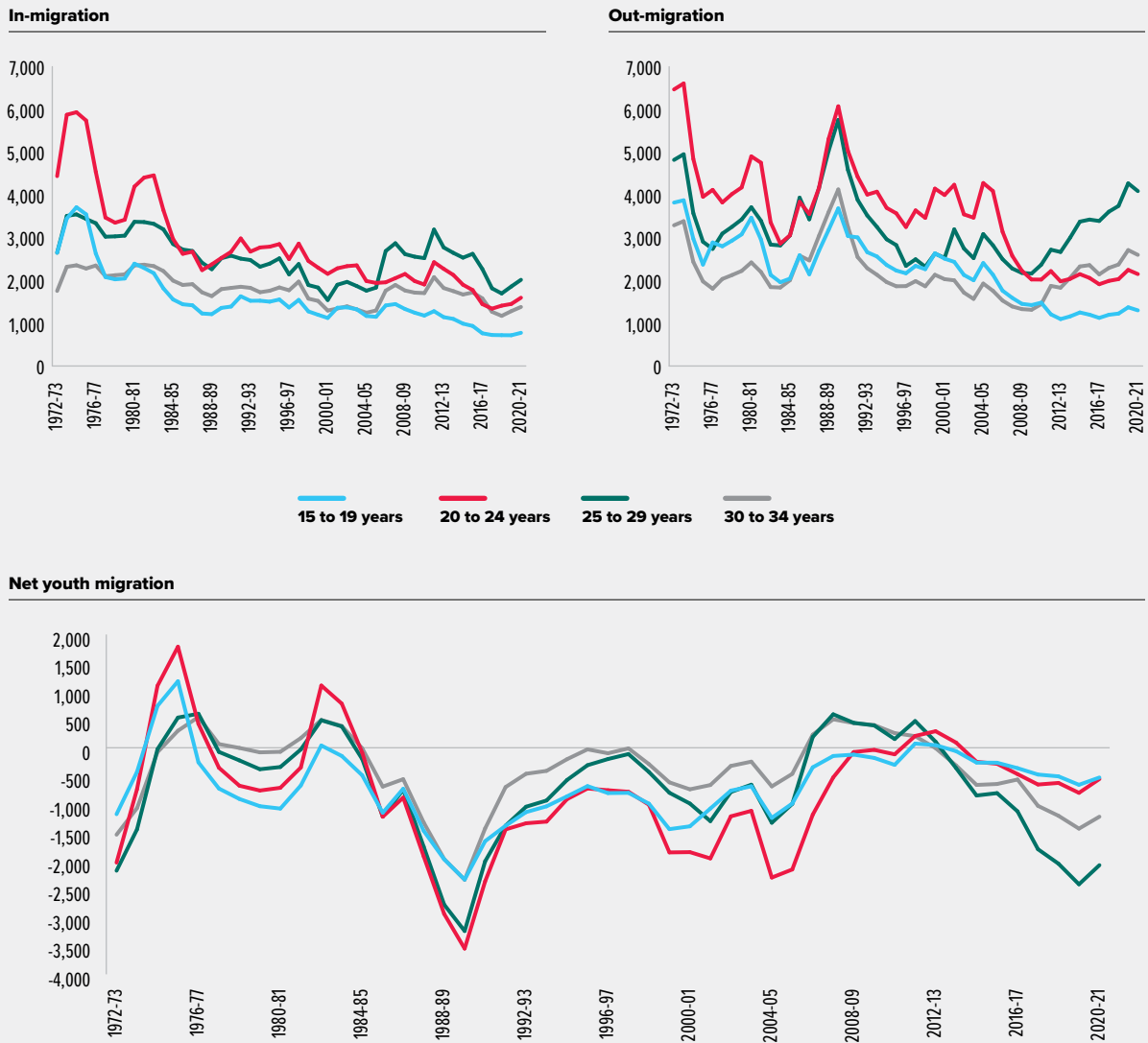


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01

# Saskatchewan Interprovincial Migration

As in Manitoba, there has been a recent increase in out-migration in the 25–29-year-old cohort.

Figure 4: Saskatchewan interprovincial youth migration by age segment



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01

# Alberta Interprovincial Migration

Net migration of youth since 2015 has been either negative or close to zero after being positive for more than 30 years.

Figure 5: Alberta interprovincial youth migration by age segment

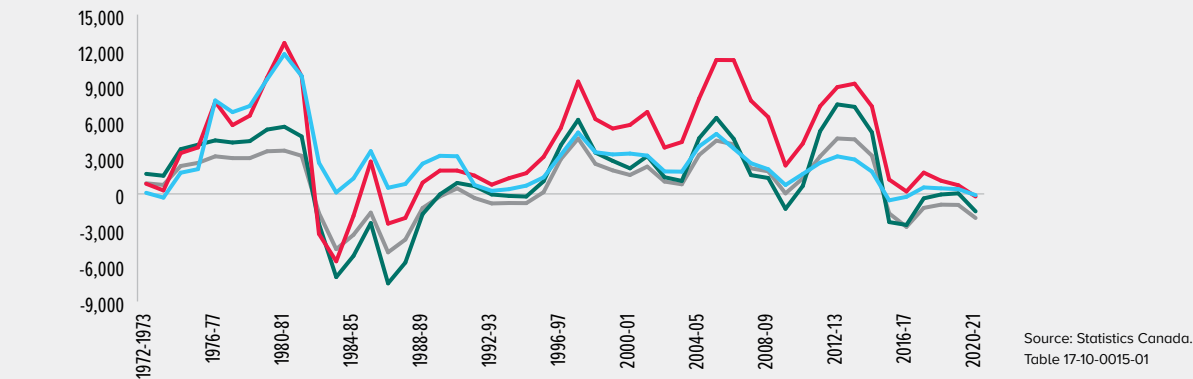
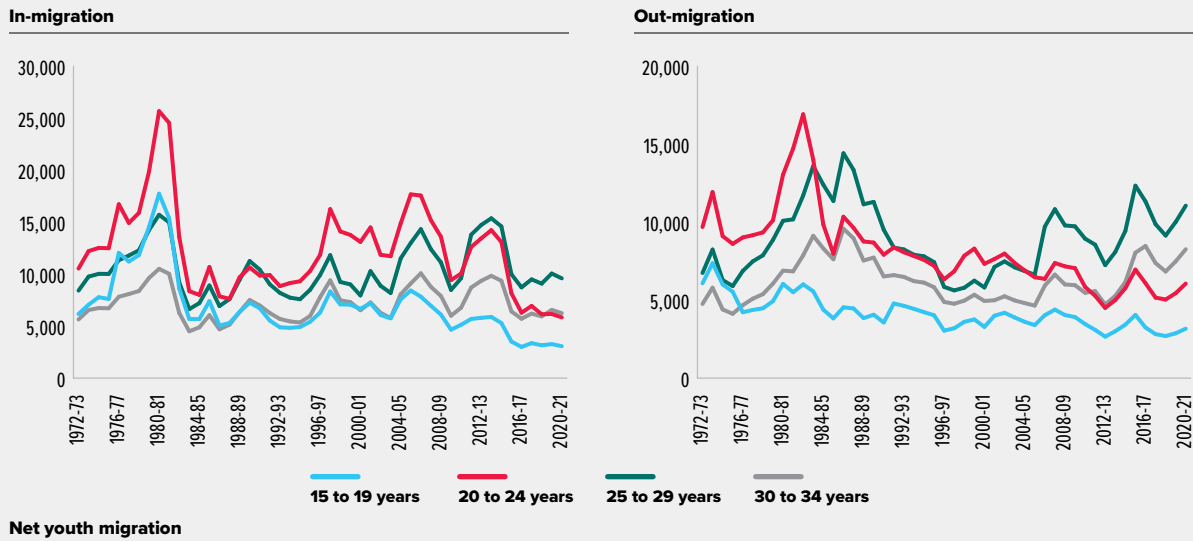


Figure 6: Alberta youth migration compared to oil prices

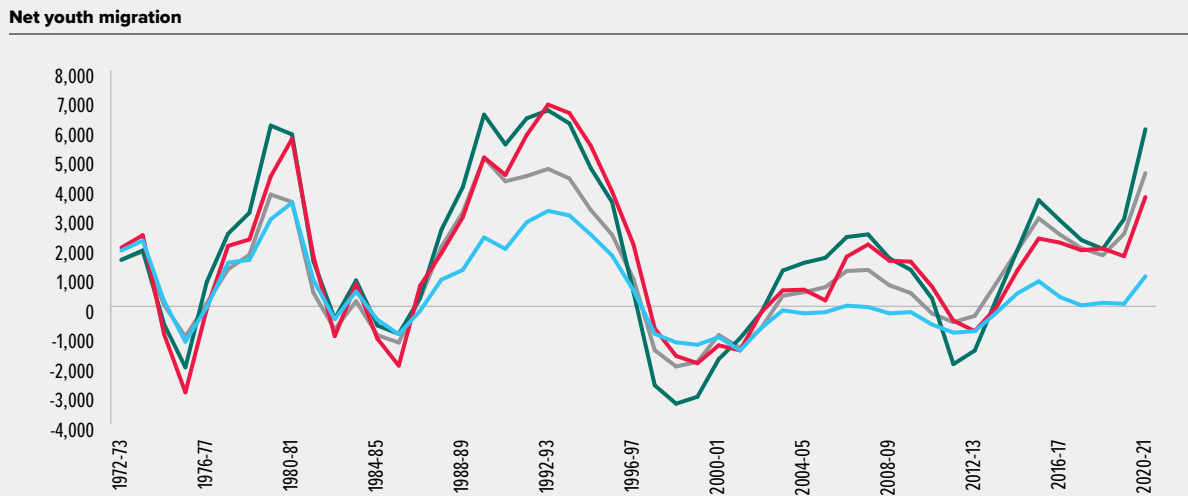
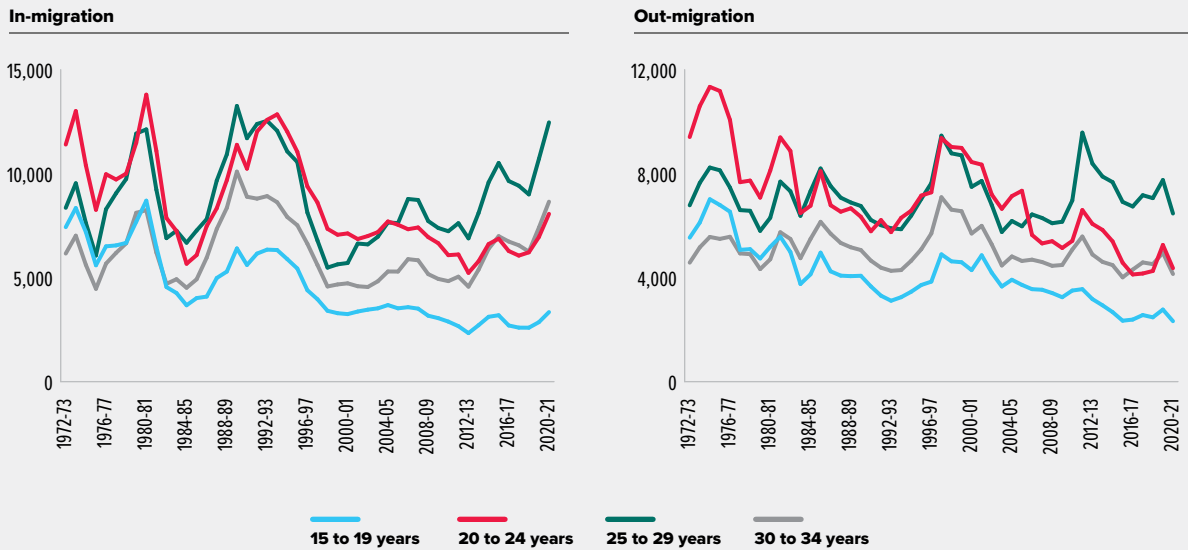
The relationship between youth net migration in and out of Alberta has been closely correlated with the rise and fall in oil prices as shown in Figure 6. In recent years, as the cyclical nature of the oil and gas sector responds to global shifts in demand for fossil fuel, Alberta has lost some highly skilled people. These workers have been the key resource that drove growth in the economy.

Source: <https://inflationdata.com/articles/inflation-adjusted-prices/historical-crude-oil-prices-table/>, Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0015-01

# British Columbia Interprovincial Migration

Large numbers of young people have moved into British Columbia. Like Alberta, British Columbia has, over the last 50 years, seen net inflows and outflows of youth, often in a counter-cyclical pattern to that of Alberta.

Figure 7: British Columbia interprovincial youth migration by age segment



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01

## Where do they go when they leave home?

Manitobans most often move to either Ontario or Alberta with Ontario overtaking Alberta as the primary destination in 2015-2016. Saskatchewan residents' migration to Ontario and British Columbia has grown steadily since 2014-2015; however, Alberta remains the primary destination.

Unsurprisingly, given the crash in oil prices in 2014-15 which drove many workers to 'go home,' outbound Alberta migration peaked for most destination provinces in the 2015-2017 period. Normally, Albertans move to either British Columbia or Ontario; but since 2018 British Columbia has been the preferred destination for Albertans.

Outbound migration from British Columbia has been in decline for all destinations since 2011-12. While Alberta remains the most popular destination, those numbers declined substantially since 2015.

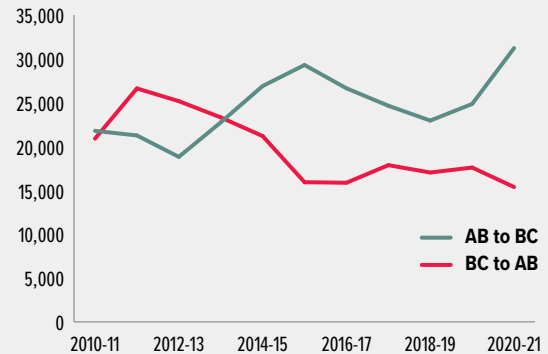
Migrants have moved between Alberta and British Columbia through the years (Figure 8). However, since 2014 substantially more people have moved to British Columbia from Alberta than the other way round.

Youth are mobile. Research has shown that youth move at three major inflection points in their lives. First, for post-secondary education; second, after graduation for their first career job; and third, to settle down in a career-advancing role or to raise a family – sometimes both.<sup>1</sup>

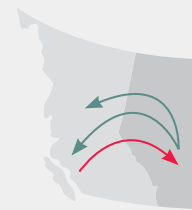
The largest sub-cohorts of youth who have migrated to other provinces in the recent past are those in the age groups 24-29 and 30-34. Their primary motive for migration is better economic opportunities.

But is the grass really greener on the other side of provincial borders?

Figure 8: Movement of people between British Columbia and Alberta



Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 17-10-0022-01



Since 2014 substantially more people have moved to British Columbia from Alberta than the other way round.

Since 2018 British Columbia has been the preferred destination for Albertans.

*Youth  
are Mobile*

Three main decision points

- ① Post-secondary education
- ② First career job
- ③ To settle down in a career-advancing role or/and to raise a family

<sup>1</sup> David Finch et al: Calgary at the Precipice

# The Economic Context

---

**To understand why youth are willing to move back and forth across the West and why British Columbia has recently become so attractive, we looked at selected economic drivers.**

**First a look at job prospects.**

---

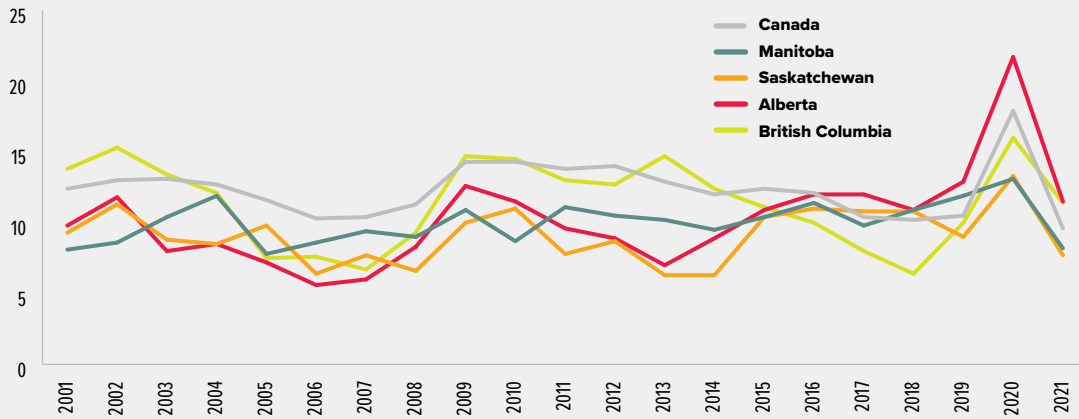
## **Unemployment**

After 2001, youth unemployment was often the lowest in Alberta and Saskatchewan and between 2009 and 2013 it was highest in British Columbia. Things began to change in 2013. Unemployment fell rapidly in British Columbia as its economy began to grow and then rose in Alberta and Saskatchewan due to the 2014 crash in oil prices. Pandemic-fueled unemployment was an issue for many people; however the youth demographic was hit particularly hard. All western Canadian provinces hit historic highs for youth unemployment during the height of the pandemic; in Alberta it reached 21.7 per cent (Figure 9).

Figure 10 shows how youth net migration (aged 15-34) is impacted by unemployment rates. When employment increases in a province, youth move in to fill the demand for labour and vice versa.

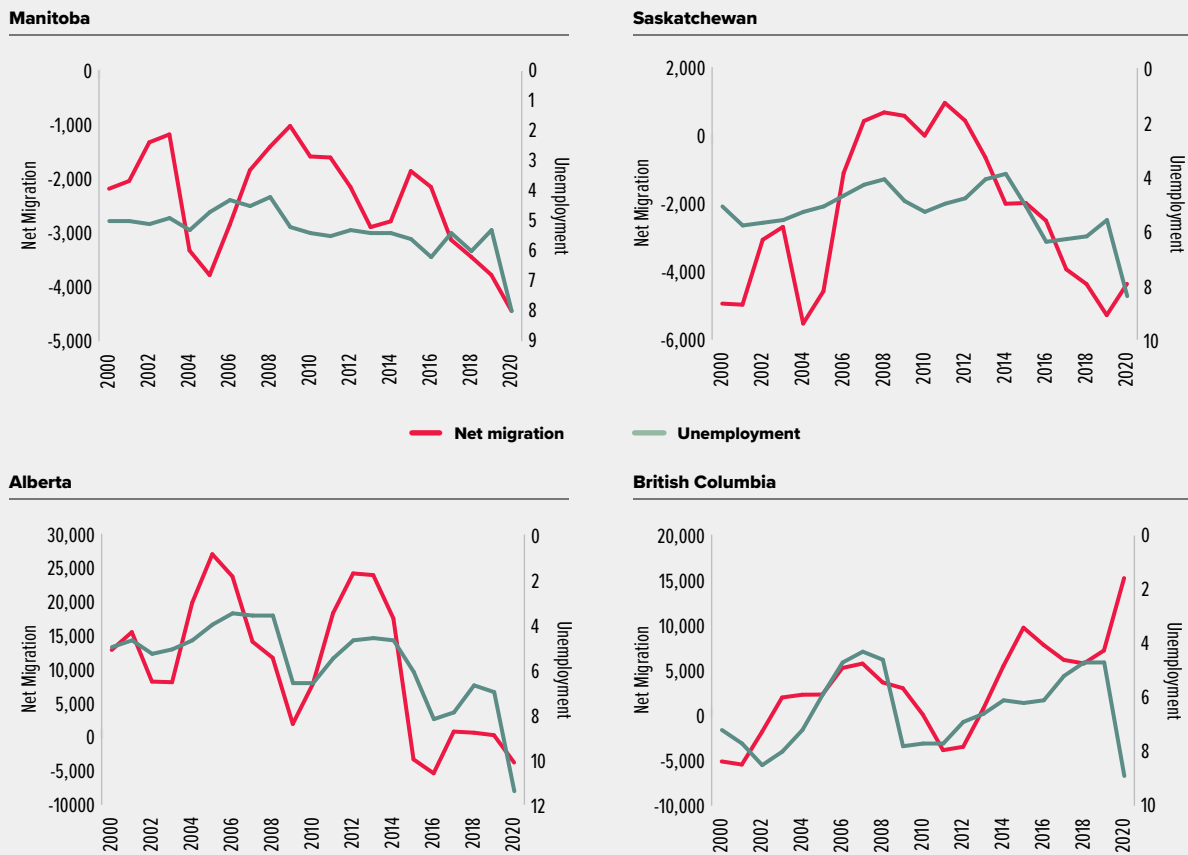


**Figure 9: Western youth unemployment (aged 15-24)**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0017-01

**Figure 10: Youth net migration versus unemployment rates (aged 15-34)**



Source: Statistics Canada. Tables 17-10-0015-01 and 14-10-0327-01

## The Economic Context

Manitoba does not see swings in youth migration the way Alberta and British Columbia do, nor does it see large swings in unemployment levels. However, there remains a relationship between higher unemployment and higher levels of interprovincial net migration. Conversely, lower unemployment is related to fewer youth leaving the province.

For Saskatchewan, sustained unemployment below five per cent has triggered positive interprovincial migration for the province. Unemployment above six per cent has a negative impact on net migration typically leading to lower levels of youth migration.

While unemployment spiked higher in every province during the early months of the pandemic, Alberta in non-pandemic times has had the highest volatility in its unemployment rate, ranging from 3.6 per cent to 11.4 per cent over the past 20 years. Interprovincial net migration is also highly volatile and follows unemployment levels closely. Unemployment levels below five per cent have led to peaks in net migration while unemployment levels above six per cent lead to significant drops in net migration.

British Columbia shows a strong relationship between unemployment and net interprovincial migration. However, that relationship appears to have weakened since 2015. The province is very attractive to young adults for more than just economic reasons.

In 2021, youth unemployment rates have come back to more normal levels and have the potential to improve in the future as job vacancies in many sectors are on the rise.

Another choice that youth often take during times of high youth unemployment is to head back to school.

---

### Enrolment in post-secondary education

Post-secondary education (PSE) enrolment rose substantially in Alberta over the downturn in 2015-19, but not in Saskatchewan (Table 1). (Note, for the next few tables Canada and Ontario are included for comparison.)

**Table 1: Change in PSE enrolments (2015-2019)**

Canada	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
6.3%	10.3%	2.9%	1.0%	9.8%	8.8%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 37-10-0015-01

During downturns, students enrol in PSE anticipating that more education will prepare them for better jobs in the economy. However, the PSE sector has been under financial stress in recent years and many institutions have turned to international students to help fill budget gaps. Consequently, the growth in international students over the period was substantial, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Growth in international students (2015-2019)**

Canada	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
69.7%	99.9%	41.4%	37.2%	41.0%	57.4%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 37-10-0015-01

When the numbers of international students are removed from total enrolments, only Alberta has a rise in domestic enrolments over the period (Table 3).

**Table 3: PSE enrolments of domestic students (2015-2019) (% change)**

Canada	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
-1.6%	-1.6%	-2.3%	-2.6%	6.5%	-0.8%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table: 37-10-0015-01

International students have been netted out of the totals because while roughly a quarter of them go on to become permanent residents after graduation and enter the workforce, the rest leave the country. As well, the net figures make comparisons easier – some provinces outside of the prairies have invested heavily in attracting international students.

As mentioned earlier, youth sometimes migrate to attend post-secondary schools. In 2018-19, about 12 per cent of British Columbia’s post-secondary students were from other provinces and territories, while Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba numbers were about 10, 11 and eight per cent respectively.

The Prairie provinces still have proportionately fewer PSE graduates than British Columbia (and Ontario and Canada as a whole). Table 4 shows the number and share of people aged 15-29 that graduated from PSE between 2015 and 2019 (total domestic graduates only).

**Table 4: Domestic graduates (2015-2019) out of the potential youth population in 2019**

	Canada	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
<b>2019 Population aged 15-29</b>	7,216,357	2,937,380	282,212	227,104	850,778	979,778
<b>Domestic PSE graduates 2015-2019</b>	2,324,106	918,162	56,826	48,255	195,867	276,351
<b>Share</b>	32.2%	31.3%	20.1%	21.2%	23.0%	28.2%

Source: Statistics Canada Tables 37-10-0164-01 and 17-10-0005-01

To meet the demands of the West’s new economy, this must change. While enrolments are up, Tables 1-4 show that the Prairies still have a steep climb to meet the current Canadian average of new graduates entering the economy. When the economy was stronger, Alberta imported skilled talent educated in other provinces and countries.

Once they graduate from high school or PSE, almost every young adult enters the workforce full-time. Next, we looked at which segments of the economy had their best job prospects.



---

**British Columbia's job growth outpaced that of the country between 2010 and 2019, which accounts for some of its attractiveness to young working-aged adults.**

---

### **Job growth by sector**

Overall, Canadian job growth between 2010 and 2019 was driven by growth in the services sector as Table 5 demonstrates.

#### **Goods-producing sector**

Growth in the Canadian goods-producing sector was driven by construction which was responsible for generating 94 per cent of jobs in the sector in 2010-2019. The largest source of growth in construction was in specialty trade contractors which increased by 126,000 jobs. The largest percentage growth was in other heavy and civil engineering construction which grew by 182 per cent.

The second-largest driver was the mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction sector. The sector was driven by job growth in the metal or mining category (63 per cent growth). However, jobs directly involved with oil and gas extraction only grew by eight per cent and jobs that support the oil and gas sector fell by 11 per cent.

#### **Services-producing sector**

The service sector added 1.8 million jobs between 2010 and 2019. The largest percentage growth in service-producing was in transportation and warehousing with 28 per cent growth. In terms of actual jobs, health care and social assistance added the most positions with 465,000 jobs. Another major driver of job growth was in the professional, scientific, and technical services category which added 318,000 jobs throughout Canada.

Table 5 shows job growth in both the goods and service-producing sectors by province, with the subcomponents broken out. Agriculture, transportation and warehousing, and finance and insurance are the only sectors in which growth in British Columbia did not outpace growth in the country as a whole. Items highlighted in green show much higher sector growth in a western province than the Canadian average.

British Columbia's job growth outpaced that of the country for the period, which accounts for some of its attractiveness to young working-aged adults.

**Table 5: Change in job numbers and growth by sector, by province (2010-2019)**

	Canada		MB		SK		AB		BC	
	Jobs	Growth	Jobs	Growth	Jobs	Growth	Jobs	Growth	Jobs	Growth
<b>Total, all industries (000's)</b>	<b>2,078.3</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>7.90%</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>7.6%</b>	<b>258.2</b>	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>451.5</b>	<b>20.4%</b>
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	<b>246.9</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>-1.8</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>18.0%</b>
Agriculture	-7.9	-2.6%	-0.8	-3.0%	-3.0	-6.9%	-0.6	-1.2%	-0.9	-3.0%
Forestry and logging and support activities for forestry	-2.0	-3.9%	0.0	0.0%	-0.2	-22.2%	0.5	15.6%	1.4	8.5%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	13.7	5.4%	-1.4	-23.0%	-2.7	-10.8%	2.4	1.8%	4.5	18.6%
Utilities	-1.5	-1.1%	-1.0	-13.3%	1.8	40.9%	5.1	27.4%	1.4	12.3%
Construction	233.2	18.9%	11.7	29.7%	2.5	5.8%	28.7	14.2%	51.6	26.1%
Manufacturing	14.9	0.9%	4.5	7.4%	-0.4	-1.3%	5.4	4.2%	20.2	13.3%
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	<b>1,831</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>11.0%</b>	<b>216.8</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>373.4</b>	<b>21.0%</b>
Wholesale trade	8.1	1.3%	-3.3	-15.3%	1.7	8.0%	8.7	11.5%	8.6	10.7%
Retail trade	146.6	7.1%	0.2	0.3%	-1.3	-2.1%	12.4	5.3%	26.3	9.3%
Transportation and warehousing	226.9	28.0%	6.3	17.7%	0.7	2.8%	25.3	23.3%	29.2	24.8%
Finance and insurance	77.7	10.1%	-0.4	-1.6%	-0.7	-3.2%	-9.9	-14.3%	7.4	7.8%
Real estate and rental and leasing	49.6	16.0%	-0.1	-1.2%	0.3	3.8%	-0.8	-2.0%	17.4	38.2%
Professional, scientific and technical services	318.8	26.2%	5.6	23.2%	3.9	17.0%	29.1	19.6%	67.2	41.1%
Business, building and other support services	82.0	12.0%	2.5	12.6%	3.5	29.2%	8.8	12.3%	21.0	22.2%
Educational services	188.9	16.1%	4.2	8.9%	5.3	13.6%	26.2	20.7%	30.6	20.0%
Health care and social assistance	465.1	22.9%	15.2	17.0%	12.8	19.1%	70.1	32.6%	74.2	28.4%
Information, culture and recreation	7.6	1.0%	1.0	4.6%	2.4	13.0%	0.1	0.1%	21.6	19.2%
Accommodation and food services	127.8	11.8%	1.4	3.4%	8.9	28.7%	14.7	11.4%	28.5	16.6%
Other services (except public administration)	49.7	6.5%	1.1	4.17%	2.8	11.2%	9.6	9.6%	28.0	29.2%
Public administration	82.3	9.0%	1.2	3.43%	1.7	11.0%	22.5	25.3%	13.3	12.6%
<b>Working Age Population Growth (000's)</b>	<b>1415.1</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>75.8</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>310.5</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>318.0</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

 Higher sector growth in a western province than Canadian average

Source: Table: 14-10-0023-01 (formerly CANSIM 282-0008)



---

**Some sectors have grown so quickly they experience large job vacancies. In Canada, vacancies reached an all-time high at the end of September 2021 with over one million jobs unfilled.**

---

### **Job vacancies**

Vacancies in the West rose as much as 83 per cent during the recovery from the first phases of the pandemic. In Canada, vacancies reached an all-time high at the end of September 2021 with over one million jobs unfilled.<sup>2</sup>

Table 6 lists provincial job vacancy rates by sector in the third quarter of 2021 compared with the third quarter in 2019 – prior to the pandemic. Vacancies in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, construction, management, and healthcare and social assistance are well above pre-pandemic levels. The level of job vacancies (an indicator of labour shortages) can impact a sector’s ability to grow. Labour shortages may cause an increase in wages, which in turn could attract young people – especially if youth already have or can acquire the competencies required to meet entry level jobs in relevant sectors.

While British Columbia also experiences many job vacancies, the highlighted items are sectors in the Prairie provinces where job vacancies have increased by more than they have in British Columbia. Employers in these sectors may be able to attract some young people back to the Prairies.

Table 7 shows that British Columbia has, in many sectors, more than twice as many job vacancies than Alberta (grey highlights) and in some sectors offers higher wages too (green highlights). Both contribute to the province’s attraction to young talent.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211125/dq211125a-eng.htm>

Vacancies in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, construction, management, and healthcare and social assistance are well above pre-pandemic levels. The level of job vacancies can impact a sector's ability to grow as it is an indicator of labour shortages.

**Table 6: Increase in job vacancies (Q3 2019 To Q3 2021) by sector, by province**

	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
<b>ALL</b>	52.4%	82.7%	63.3%	48.3%
<b>Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting</b>	105.9%	108.6%	-9.3%	-28.8%
<b>Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction</b>	n/a	57.9%	159.7%	45.3%
<b>Utilities</b>	n/a	-16.7%	32.1%	60.5%
<b>Construction</b>	46.9%	228.3%	110.9%	81.6%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	43.4%	39.3%	91.9%	43.4%
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	26.6%	23.1%	31.0%	39.9%
<b>Retail trade</b>	33.1%	36.7%	60.5%	32.9%
<b>Transportation and warehousing</b>	105.7%	121.2%	40.8%	44.6%
<b>Information and cultural industries</b>	203.3%	38.0%	70.8%	25.2%
<b>Finance and insurance</b>	3.6%	122.4%	46.6%	39.0%
<b>Real estate and rental and leasing</b>	n/a	n/a	28.9%	36.5%
<b>Professional, scientific and technical services</b>	51.4%	121.5%	31.5%	33.8%
<b>Management of companies and enterprises</b>	n/a	11.1%	60.4%	70.4%
<b>Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services</b>	70.7%	75.7%	14.6%	56.1%
<b>Educational services</b>	138.2%	78.3%	5.8%	0.5%
<b>Health care and social assistance</b>	23.7%	94.8%	69.4%	87.3%
<b>Arts, entertainment and recreation</b>	89.1%	7.5%	62.1%	84.4%
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	148.2%	137.9%	95.7%	68.9%
<b>Other services (except public administration)</b>	-3.9%	23.9%	51.2%	28.2%
<b>Public administration</b>	80.4%	74.3%	21.9%	43.8%

Source: Statistics Canada Table: 14-10-0326-01

Labour shortages may cause an increase in wages, which in turn could attract young people – especially if youth already have or can acquire the competencies required to meet entry level jobs in relevant sectors.

**Table 7: Job vacancies and wages offered by sector for Alberta and British Columbia**

	Alberta		British Columbia	
	# of vacancies	Av. hourly wage	# of vacancies	Av. hourly wage
<b>All</b>	86,385	\$23.50	157,575	\$23.45
<b>Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting</b>	975	\$24.05	4,345	\$19.45
<b>Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction</b>	4,545	\$33.55	1,170	\$35.75
<b>Utilities</b>	185	\$41.60	305	\$39.00
<b>Construction</b>	9,795	\$27.90	17,450	\$28.45
<b>Manufacturing</b>	4,605	\$24.65	8,575	\$21.80
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	2,750	\$25.90	4,895	\$22.85
<b>Retail trade</b>	10,465	\$17.75	18,270	\$18.30
<b>Transportation and warehousing</b>	6,280	\$26.45	10,050	\$24.80
<b>Information and cultural industries</b>	965	\$30.35	3,010	\$33.65
<b>Finance and insurance</b>	2,470	\$27.90	3,670	\$28.15
<b>Real estate and rental and leasing</b>	1,225	\$25.90	2,170	\$21.85
<b>Professional, scientific and technical services</b>	4,655	\$34.05	9,570	\$35.20
<b>Management of companies and enterprises</b>	425	\$31.75	690	\$32.50
<b>Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services</b>	3,540	\$21.70	8,635	\$21.35
<b>Educational services</b>	1,810	\$27.40	2,950	\$29.25
<b>Health care and social assistance</b>	6,405	\$24.45	17,300	\$28.55
<b>Arts, entertainment and recreation</b>	2,075	\$17.45	3,595	\$18.25
<b>Accommodation and food services</b>	17,720	\$16.05	33,045	\$16.65
<b>Other services (except public administration)</b>	3,900	\$22.15	5,735	\$22.05
<b>Public administration</b>	1,585	\$27.45	2,135	\$29.60

Source: Statistics Canada Table: 14-10-0326-01

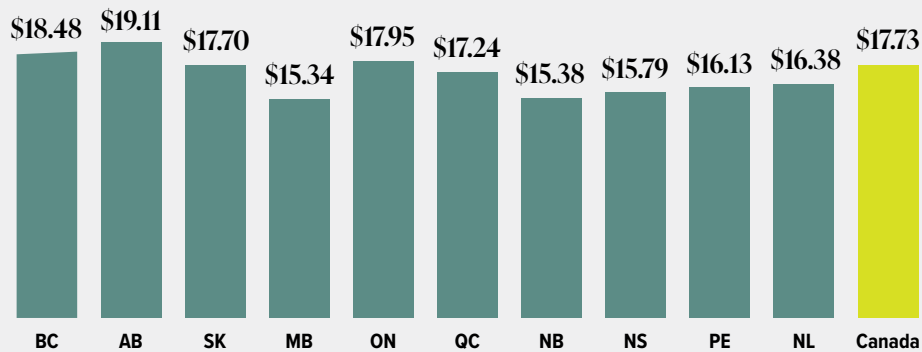


**Figure 11: Changes in employment vs working-age population and unemployment (2010-2019)**



Source: Statistics Canada. Tables 14-10-0327-01 and 17-10-0005-01

**Figure 12: Hourly wages for youth aged 15-24**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0340-01

Normally, there are more working age people than jobs – not everyone participates in the workforce. When job growth outpaces working-age population growth, unemployment levels drop, more people participate in the workforce, part-time workers will work more than one job, older people stay in the workforce longer and some jobs go unfilled. This happened in British Columbia and Canada as a whole, and to a lesser extent Saskatchewan, between 2010 and 2019.

### Wages

Once a young person (aged 15-24) has found a job, their wage is likely to be higher than the national average if they are in Alberta or British Columbia. In Saskatchewan they would earn the national average. A youth in Manitoba will, on average, earn the second lowest wage in the country – fully \$2.40 per hour less than in Ontario and \$3 less than in Alberta and British Columbia (Figure 12).

# Annual Wages

**Work part-time**  
Youth (aged 16-24) →  
Wage gaps between the provinces have narrowed since 2010.

**Work full-time**  
Youth (aged 25-34) in Alberta →  
Earn at least \$8,000 more per year than their counterparts in other western provinces.

Figure 13: Annual wages for 16-24-year-olds

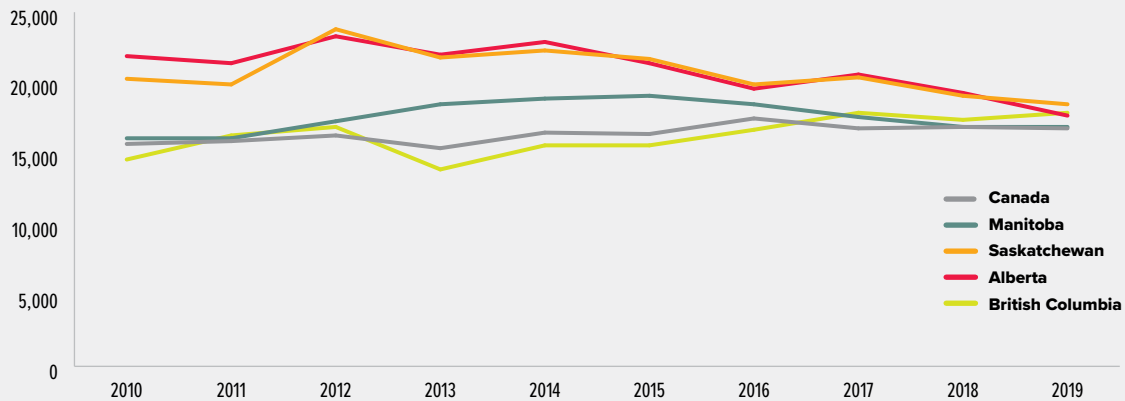
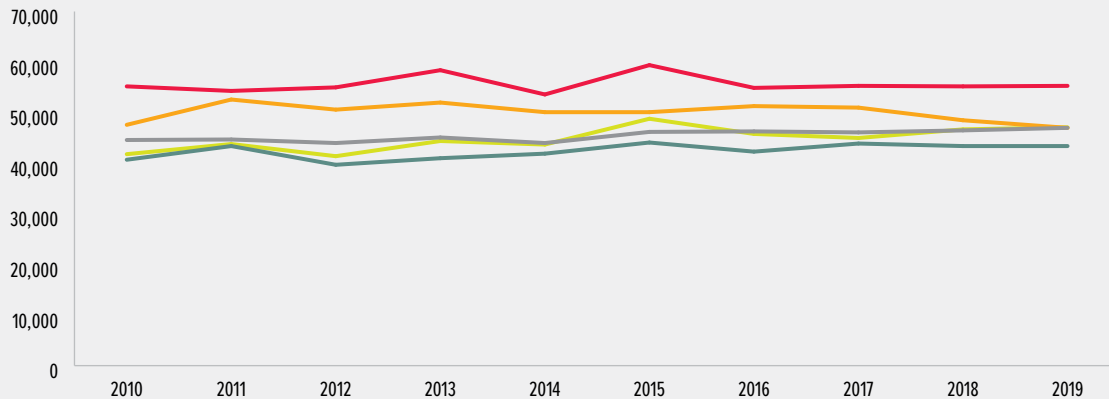


Figure 14: Average wages for 25-34-year-olds

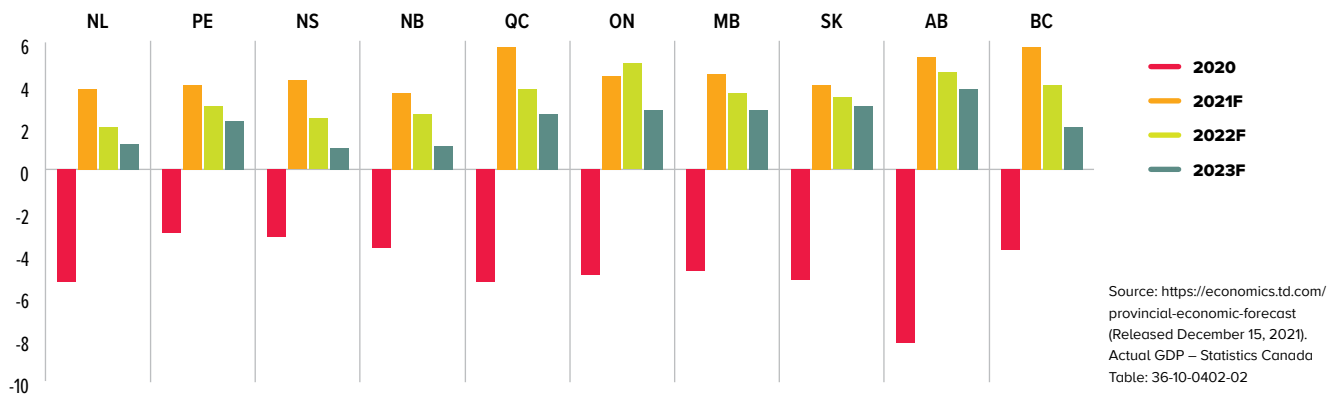


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0239-01

Annualized average wages show that for the youngest working youth cohort, who often work only part-time, wage gaps between the provinces have narrowed since 2010 (Figure 13). While incomes for the youngest cohort in Alberta and Saskatchewan were relatively high at the peak of the last oil and gas boom, they have dropped since 2014 and now approximate those of British Columbia, which rose over the period.

On the other hand, youth aged 25-34 in Alberta, who usually work full-time, still earn, on average, at least \$8,000 more per year than their counterparts in other western provinces (Figure 14).

Figure 15: Actual and forecast GDP for Canada by province (2020-2023)



### Prospects for youth into the future

Overall, western provinces have strong projected GDP growth. Current projections show above average growth as the region recovers from the pandemic’s negative impact on GDP in 2020. While the country is in a pandemic recovery, there is little in GDP projections that might push population growth off track (Figure 15).

In December 2021, TD Economics forecast that Alberta and B.C. will have good growth over the next three years. However, unlike British Columbia, growth in 2021 for Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta did not overcome the losses of 2020. Alberta suffered the worst drop in GDP in 2020 (-8.2 per cent), so future growth starts from a lower base.

To estimate where there may be good prospects for youth in each of the provinces, we looked at the recent history of two major indicators – business activity as represented by the change in numbers of businesses and job growth in various sectors.

### Business activity

Overall, the number of active Canadian businesses have increased by 3.8 per cent since 2015 (Table 8). However, active business numbers declined in Saskatchewan and Alberta. This table demonstrates the total number of businesses, which does not indicate employment. However, business activity is a key indicator of overall economic health and business formation.

Research for our companion report, *Work to Live*, which included a large survey of youth in Alberta, Vancouver and Toronto, found that young people move for economic reasons – and also toward places that better meet their quality-of-life expectations. Cost of living contributes to quality of life.

Table 8: Change in the number of active businesses (September 2015 to September 2021)

	Canada	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
<b>September 2015</b>	879,305	27,254	25,568	125,732	140,065
<b>September 2021</b>	906,758	28,028	24,708	117,168	151,578
<b>Change</b>	27,453	774	-860	-8,564	11,513
<b>% Change</b>	3.1%	2.8%	-3.4%	-6.8%	8.2%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 33-10-0270-01



---

## Housing is more affordable in Alberta even though average wages have declined over the last few years.

---

### Cost of living relative to income

Housing in the western cities, with the exception of Victoria and Vancouver, is comparatively affordable (Table 9). Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are all more affordable in terms of proportion of monthly income required to service a mortgage, than the national average. There are some indications that there has been a shift from urban demand to rural and bedroom communities, particularly in the pandemic. It remains too early to determine if this is a longer-term trend.

Since 2010, affordability has improved in Saskatchewan and Alberta while the national average has become less affordable. Housing affordability, as measured by the number of years of gross annual wage needed to pay for an average house, is shown in Table 10. Interestingly, housing has become more affordable in Alberta even though average wages have declined over the last few years. While prices have risen in other major metropolitan markets, the Alberta metro house price index has remained relatively stable through 2020.<sup>3</sup>

When youth move to a new province they usually live, at least at first, in rental accommodation. Figure 16 shows typical rents for a two-bedroom apartment in structures with three or more units in major centres. The Prairie cities' rents are lower than those in British Columbia. And as shown in Figure 17, it is easier to find a home to rent in the Prairie cities than in the areas with higher home purchase costs.

Homes in the major cities in B.C. are expensive and apartments, although more affordable, are hard to find. So why do youth pour into that province from the much more affordable Prairie provinces? Are they all moving to the expensive locations or are they spreading out across the province?

Some answers are found in the StatsCan estimates of population growth for various locations in the provinces – in terms of youth and for the population overall – for the last 20 years and the last six years (Table 11). These estimates include all the factors for population growth including births, deaths and immigration, and not just interprovincial migration.

<sup>3</sup> Teranet and National Bank, Housing price index [https://housepriceindex.ca/#chart\\_compare=c11,ab\\_calgary,ab\\_edmonton,ab\\_lethbridge](https://housepriceindex.ca/#chart_compare=c11,ab_calgary,ab_edmonton,ab_lethbridge) accessed January 26, 2022.

**Table 9: Housing affordability – Canadian Housing Affordability Report (RE/MAX 2021)**

	2020 Average sale price* (full year)	2021 Average sale price* (January-June)	% of monthly income for mortgage
<b>St. John's Metro</b>	\$300,196	\$307,619	11%
<b>Regina</b>	\$305,000	\$325,000	12%
<b>Winnipeg</b>	\$305,645	\$335,055	13%
<b>Edmonton</b>	\$365,638	\$390,482	14%
<b>Ottawa</b>	\$465,903	\$561,701	19%
<b>Calgary</b>	\$252,181 – \$539,127	\$266,868 – \$588,541	9.72% – 21.44%
<b>Windsor</b>	\$381,162	\$542,046	24%
<b>London</b>	\$555,000	\$636,053	28%
<b>Hamilton</b>	\$629,961	\$784,721	30%
<b>Victoria</b>	\$1,016,698	\$1,199,028	47%
<b>Toronto</b>	\$931,131	\$1,089,536	47%
<b>Vancouver</b>	\$1,061,323	\$1,172,858	50%

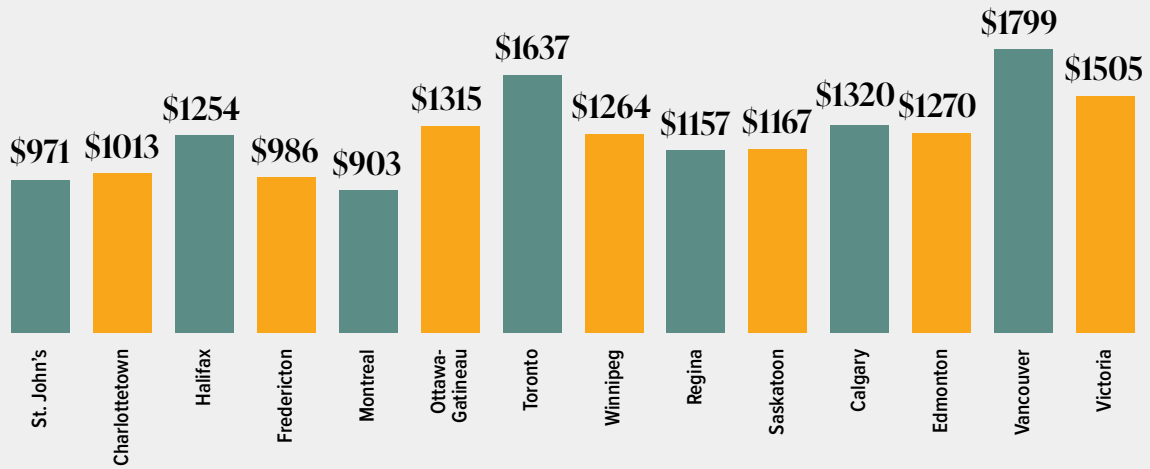
Source: RE/MAX 2021 Housing Affordability Report

**Table 10: Housing affordability over time**

	Q3 2010	Q4 2012	Q2 2014	Q2 2016	Q2 2018	Q2 2020	Change %
<b>British Columbia</b>	11.5	11.2	12	13.9	14.7	13.4	16.5%
<b>Ontario</b>	7.2	8	8.9	10.1	10.7	11.2	55.6%
<b>Quebec</b>	6.2	6.7	6.1	6.2	6.4	6.7	8.1%
<b>Alberta</b>	6.7	6.8	6.8	7	6.6	6	-10.4%
<b>Manitoba</b>	5.3	6.2	6.1	5.9	6.1	6	13.2%
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	4.8	5.1	4.7	5	5.6	5.7	18.8%
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	4	4.3	3.8	4.1	5	5.5	37.5%
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	5.3	6.1	6	5.9	5.6	5	-5.7%
<b>Newfoundland/Labrador</b>	5.3	6.2	5.7	4.7	4.7	4	-24.5%
<b>New Brunswick</b>	3.9	4.1	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.8	-2.6%
<b>Canadian average</b>	7.4	7.8	8.5	9.6	9.5	9	21.6%

Source: <https://www.livingin-canada.com/house-affordability-canada.html>. Affordability measured by the number of years of gross average wage needed to buy an average house.

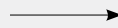
Figure 16: Rents in major centres



Source: Statistics Canada Table: 34-10-0133-01

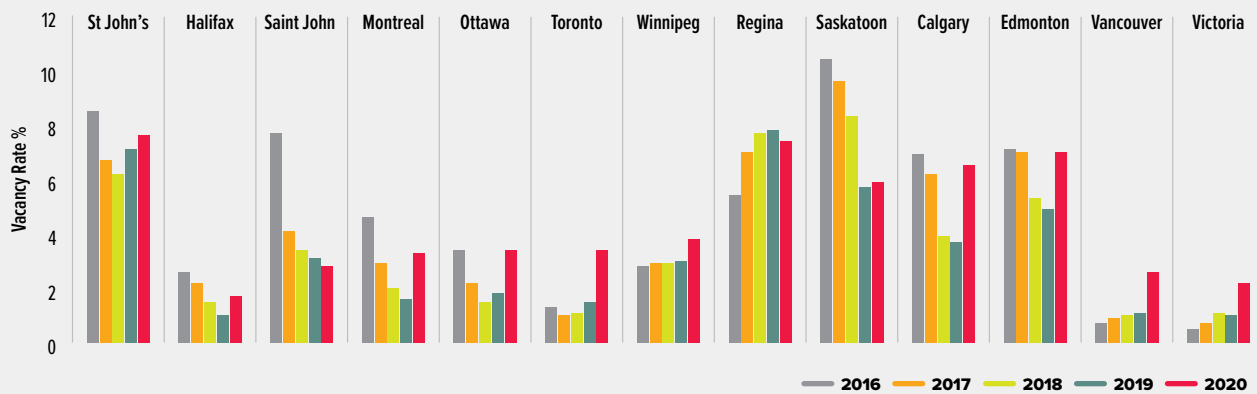
*Cost of Living*

When youth move to a new province they usually live, at least at first, in rental accommodation.



The Prairie cities are more affordable than those in British Columbia.

Figure 17: Rental vacancy rates across Canada



Source: Statistics Canada Table: 34-10-0127-01

**Table 11: How the provinces grew over the last 20 years (2001-21) and the last 6 years (2015-21) (urban/rural growth)**

	2001-2021 (20 years)		2015-2021 (6 years)	
	15-34	ALL	15-34	ALL
<b>Manitoba</b>				
<b>Rural*</b>	9.7%	11.0%	2.3%	3.7%
<b>Winnipeg</b>	23.6%	22.2%	8.3%	8.2%
<b>Small** cities</b>	33.8%	34.7%	5.7%	7.9%
<b>Province</b>	20.7%	19.9%	6.4%	6.8%
<b>Saskatchewan</b>				
<b>Rural*</b>	-5.8%	-1.8%	-4.8%	-1.2%
<b>Regina</b>	26.5%	32.9%	3.4%	9.9%
<b>Saskatoon</b>	36.6%	44.8%	3.5%	12.4%
<b>Small** cities</b>	4.6%	10.4%	-6.0%	1.2%
<b>Province</b>	14.0%	17.9%	-0.6%	5.2%
<b>Alberta</b>				
<b>Rural*</b>	-0.1%	11.0%	-7.0%	-0.2%
<b>Lethbridge</b>	42.0%	43.7%	6.2%	8.8%
<b>Calgary</b>	38.0%	57.8%	0.1%	9.1%
<b>Edmonton</b>	44.1%	52.6%	2.3%	9.8%
<b>Small** cities</b>	29.8%	50.3%	-10.5%	1.3%
<b>Province</b>	31.5%	44.5%	-1.5%	6.6%
<b>British Columbia</b>				
<b>Rural*</b>	-14.5%	6.3%	-1.2%	4.8%
<b>Kelowna</b>	51.4%	44.4%	14.7%	12.3%
<b>Abbotsford</b>	26.5%	32.7%	10.8%	11.1%
<b>Vancouver</b>	28.6%	32.0%	7.9%	7.6%
<b>Victoria</b>	20.1%	25.5%	6.1%	8.7%
<b>Small** cities</b>	13.3%	22.1%	9.7%	9.2%
<b>Province</b>	20.7%	26.5%	7.7%	8.0%

\*Rural is defined as areas outside Census Metropolitan Areas (larger cities) and census agglomerates.

\*\*Small cities have a population of at least 10,000, but under 100,000.

\*\*\*Cities are Census Metropolitan Areas.

Source: Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0135-01



---

**In Edmonton and Calgary, zero or low growth of young adults coupled with overall growth of 9.1 per cent and 9.8 per cent respectively, means their populations will age quickly unless there is change. The lack of young talent will also create problems for employers.**

The first observation is that with few exceptions, youth exhibit a relatively slower rate of population growth than rest of the population. In particular, their growth in smaller cities and rural areas is lower than their growth in the cities with the exception of Winnipeg over 2001-2020.

The second observation about Table 11 is that there were losses of the youth cohort in small cities and rural areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan over the last six years, while the same cohort grew in small cities in British Columbia faster than the population overall. While this does not prove that young adults are moving to British Columbia's smaller centres as well as its larger cities, it does indicate that this is very likely. Young adults involved in the oil and gas services sector, the backbone of the economy in some locations in Alberta and Saskatchewan, may have been able to make the transition to similar sized locations in British Columbia and to find good jobs there. This would help to explain the current shortage of workers in the oil patch in Alberta. Interestingly, the growth rates in Vancouver and Victoria are slower than the provincial rate, likely due to affordability challenges.

The third observation is that while there was growth in both youth and the overall population in all provinces over the longer period, there were actually fewer 15-34-year-olds in Saskatchewan and Alberta over the last six years. With a generally aging population, this pattern is of particular concern.

One last observation is that the larger Prairie cities have a big problem. Calgary and to a lesser extent Edmonton have fared the worst. Zero or low growth of young adults coupled with overall growth of 9.1 per cent and 9.8 per cent respectively, means their populations will age quickly unless there is change. The lack of young talent will also create problems for employers. The good news is that at least four large global technology companies have recently announced that thousands of new jobs will be created in Calgary in the next few years and the Edmonton region will be home to major new energy, clean tech and petrochemical companies. Meanwhile, Saskatchewan has announced four large canola crushing plants and completion of the world's largest potash mine that will create construction opportunities which will be attractive to younger people.



# Conclusion

Overall, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have economies that have learned to manage fairly constant net youth out-migration. Until recently, Alberta has not normally had to deal with stagnant or declining youth populations. This new reality will have significant impact on a province that built its economy on access to youth in-migration and a growing youth population. Consistent in-migration has driven housing demand, employment and GDP growth, all of which will be impacted by the fall of youth populations.

While some economic factors have led to increased youth migration into British Columbia, recent job growth and the unemployment rate in their home provinces being key, others provide a disincentive. Housing affordability and availability are more problematic in the larger West Coast cities and will get worse as more youth choose to move there. And job vacancies in British Columbia, while touted widely as being a draw for youth, also exist in many sectors on the Prairies.

Given the aging population and the increase in demand for skilled workers, the focus for all provinces must turn to attracting and retaining youth, particularly highly skilled youth. National and international competition for highly skilled youth is increasing. In this competitive environment, it is critical to understand the movement of youth as well as the underlying reasons for that movement. Having people with the skills to fuel future economic growth will be a determinant for economic success.

The companion follow on study on what drives Alberta youth to migrate out of the province, and youth in other provinces to stay away, illuminated major perception issues in both groups. Alberta is viewed as not having diverse job opportunities or career pathways, as being less welcoming of diversity, and as less vibrant than other provinces in Canada. These perception issues must be overcome if the province is to reverse recent youth out-migration trends. This is discussed in the companion piece, *Work to Live: Alberta youth mobility*.

# Good for the West. Good for Canada.

The Canada West Foundation is an independent, non-partisan public policy think tank that focuses on the policies that shape the West and, by extension, Canada. Through our evidence-based research and commentary, we provide practical solutions to tough public policy challenges facing the West and Canada as a whole, at home and on the global stage.