

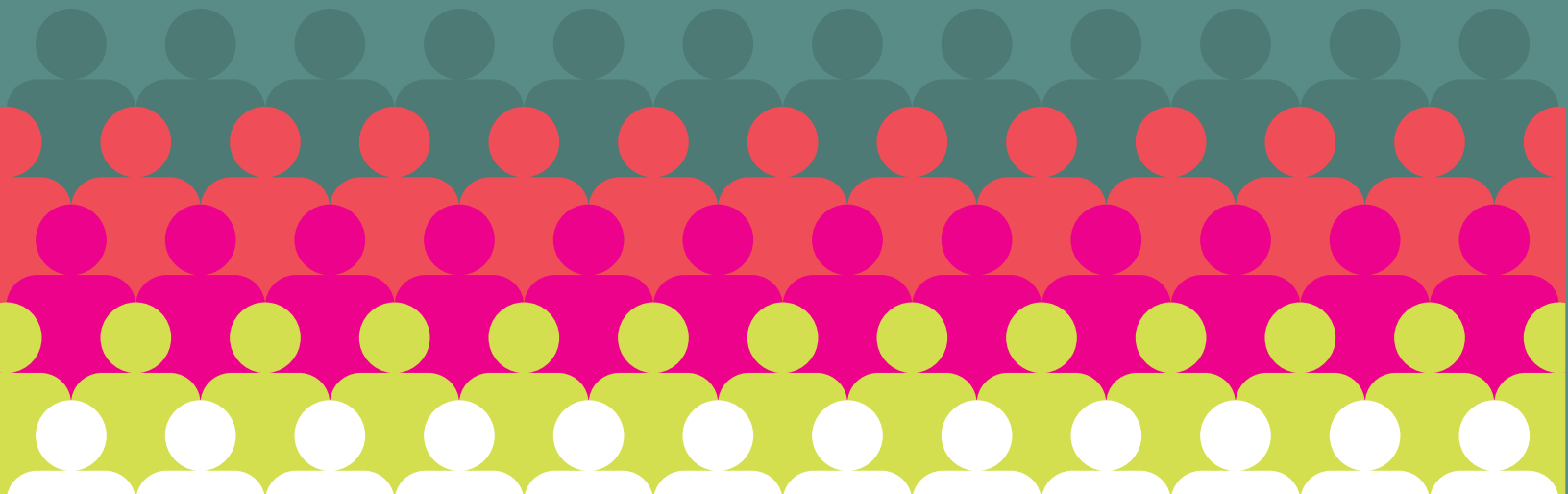
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Executive Summary  
September 2024

CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION

# Finding Their Place: Manitoba youth mobility

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# Canada West Foundation

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This report was written by Stephany Laverty, Senior Policy Analyst, Skills, Innovation and Productivity and Janet Lane, Former Director, Skills, Innovation and Productivity and now Senior Fellow, at the Canada West Foundation.

## **Acknowledgements**

Manitoban youth were integral to the success of this report and we sincerely appreciate the time and thoughtfulness that young people across the province gave to the surveys and focus groups and their willingness to speak to researchers at conferences and events.

Special thanks to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and Government of Manitoba as this project was funded through the Government of Manitoba's COVID-19 Long-Term Recovery Fund. Thanks also to members of the project steering committee including representatives from:

Business Council of Manitoba  
The Government of Manitoba  
Rural Manitoba Economic Development  
YES! Winnipeg

And, thank you to the team at Canada West Foundation and to our partners at Léger and Derek Murray Consulting and Associates for their work on this report.

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# Executive Summary

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## **Manitoba is rich in diversity in both its people and opportunities.**

It has one of the youngest populations in Canada. It is diverse with large First Nations, Métis, Francophone and immigrant communities who call Manitoba home. The province's arts and cultural sector reflects the richness that creativity and diversity bring. Its economy, with jobs in sectors that range from biosciences to transportation and logistics, aeronautics and manufacturing, offers many meaningful work opportunities for youth. And while other provinces experienced wild economic fluctuations during the pandemic, Manitoba's wide range of industries and businesses helped maintain economic stability with youth employment rates that are still better than the national average.

Despite all of this, youth are leaving.

This follows a decades-long trend. Those leaving the province include youth who born here in the province and those who immigrated from outside of the country.

Out-migration is a challenge that must be resolved if the province is to continue to grow and thrive. To find the root causes of this trend, a project administered by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce through funding from the Government of Manitoba's COVID-19 Long-Term Recovery Fund was launched, asking the Canada West Foundation to investigate the following research question:

***How can the Government of Manitoba and the business ecosystem support the attraction and retention of young talent to the province?***

Canada West Foundation completed an extensive literature review and a broad investigation into the reality of life in Manitoba. This information has been compared to the perceptions expressed by 1,584 young adults (aged 18-45 years) from across Canada (400 in Manitoba and 300 each in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton) and 116 employers from across the province through online surveys. Additional surveys of newcomers, First Nations youth, Francophones, and post-secondary alumni added to the understanding of the perceptions of young adults in Manitoba and their mobility intentions. This information has been verified through focus groups and roundtables as well as a variety of interviews.

### **Context**

Canada West Foundation published two pertinent reports in 2022. The first, *The Young are Restless: Western Youth Migration*, illuminated youth migration and economic patterns across Western Canada. The second, *Work to Live: Alberta Youth Mobility*, discussed the reasons why, between 2015 and 2021, and in a complete reversal of the usual pattern, more youth had left Alberta than moved to it. Canada West Foundation was contracted to conduct a similar study to determine the attitudes of youth in Manitoba.

Manitoba results show that except for the first year of the pandemic, the province has consistently experienced net out-migration of about one per cent of young adults aged 25-34 every year since 1986.

Students leaving high school decide whether to enter the workforce, upgrade their education or enter post-secondary studies. In their early 20s, youth decide to continue their chosen path, return to school from the workforce, or enter the workforce after further studies. In their late 20s or early 30s, youth consider where they can best advance their career and/or settle down.

## **Findings**

Long standing perceptions of Manitoba as rural and Winnipeg as unsafe tell part of the story for why youth may choose to leave or not come to Manitoba.

On the other hand, Manitoba youth may regard Winnipeg as an attractive location for post-secondary education as the tuition rates are comparatively cheaper than in other provinces and a move to the city allows youth to stay close to family. Rural youth also perceive Winnipeg to have more career opportunities than their home communities (in many cases this could be true).

One distressing finding is that since the pandemic, youth have increasing pessimism about their ability to live and be successful anywhere.

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## **Cost of living**

The top economic factors to attract and retain youth are housing/rental costs, low tax rates and vehicle expenses/affordability of travel home.

But while Manitoba offers comparatively affordable housing and rental options, that gap is closing. Income and property taxes are amongst the highest in the western provinces. Middle income earners are particularly hard pressed.

Travel and transportation are comparable to other provinces while vehicle insurance rates are more affordable. Flights to the north are expensive across all provinces while bus travel is cheaper but time consuming.

Tuition is affordable for both domestic and international students, but tuition costs were not as significant of an attraction or retention factor. People will pay for education if they believe it sets them up for success.

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## **Workforce attraction and retention**

Manitoba's economy is relatively more diverse than those in the other western provinces and its youth fared comparatively well during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods for unemployment.

The minimum wage increase was a step in the right direction for young talent in the province as the gap between minimum wage and living wage is the lowest amongst the cities which are most attractive to youth. However, wages are still comparatively lower in Winnipeg than other large western Canadian cities.

In addition to wages, benefits including advancement opportunity, flexible hours and remote work options are attractive to youth. While the majority of employers in Manitoba do offer these benefits, hourly earners are more likely to be ineligible for them, and fewer rural employers offer them. There are wage disparities within groups – women, particularly First Nations women, face a pay gap and are likely to face additional barriers to employment which make them more reliant on government support.

The combined challenge of wages that are less competitive and fewer other benefits may make it more difficult for Manitoba to both attract and retain talent compared to other jurisdictions. Businesses outside Winnipeg reported they were less likely to engage with post-secondaries to ensure students meet job requirements, which may also partially explain why employers struggle to find workers with the skills they need.

First Nations youth would leave the province to work for an Indigenous employer – only five per cent of businesses in Manitoba are First Nations owned and operated.

Recognition of learning and competencies built outside of formal education or in other countries remains a barrier to workforce entry for young people. For example, newcomers may have to pay tuition to obtain credentials that they have already earned elsewhere.

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## **Beyond the economics**

Manitoba respondents to the surveys were more likely to consider a move to another province or community due to social factors than economic or quality of life factors.

In fact, safety, family, and clean communities/reputation of province were the top social factors for Manitobans to consider. Crime, particularly violent crime, is both a perceived and real issue in Winnipeg. As people outside Manitoba tend to view Manitoba as synonymous with Winnipeg, those issues become extrapolated to the rest of the province by provincial outsiders.

There is a close connection between poverty and violent crime rates. Manitoba has the second highest child poverty rate for both youth under the age of 18 and under the age of six. While the rates were in decline in 2019 and 2021, there was a reversal of those trends in 2021 after pandemic supports were removed. Overall and violent crime rates for Manitoban youth also spiked in 2021 after trending downward over the past decade.

While youth spent increasingly more time online prior to the pandemic, the overnight shift to virtual environments for social life, learning and work redefined how youth who have digital access connect with their friends, employers and community. Youth who lacked broadband access, and who live in low-income communities, were more disconnected. This transition disrupted the essential period when youth build connections outside their families and childhood friends.

Youth understand that Manitoba has an abundance of nature and value clean and green spaces but safety concerns and the homebody, virtual nature of this generation of youth may make them less likely to get out and enjoy those spaces.

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### **Manitoba's cooler than you (and they) think**

Manitoba has become synonymous with Winnipeg for those who live outside the province. The rest of the province is relatively unknown unless individuals have a personal connection to the province.

Of the quality-of-life factors surveyed, youth value walkability, urban recreation and outdoor recreation. They want things to do in their communities and do not want to have to travel far to get to those activities. If they do have to travel, they want quality transit options. Manitoba fares comparatively well in quality-of-life factors which attract youth.

While the majority of Winnipeg respondents view their province in a favourable light, a higher proportion of respondents in other major cities see their province favourably.

Among the focus group participants there was a pervading sense that areas outside Winnipeg were boring with limited diversity of food, arts, and culture. This aligns with the perceptions of those outside Manitoba.

Winnipeg has one of the best bikeability scores in Western Canada, second only to Victoria and Vancouver, while walkability is comparable to cities across the prairies.

Manitoba's intra-provincial transit is behind that of Alberta, B.C., Ontario and southern areas of Saskatchewan. Transit within communities is limited to certain communities, such as Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson. Winnipeg is one of the only major cities in Western Canada to not offer LRT service and reliability and transit safety are issues.

Those outside Manitoba view the province as comparatively colder in temperature and more snowy than other parts of the country. While the cold certainly starts earlier in the year and lasts longer, the city does not get as much average snowfall as Edmonton or Saskatoon and is more comparable to Calgary.

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## Further observations

There are huge opportunities for Manitoba's young people to experience an affordable quality of life that is not as readily available to their counterparts in the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the stories being told prevent people from considering the province as a place to realize their aspirations. There are also long-standing, real challenges that the province faces and there are no easy solutions or quick fixes.

Youth want communities that offer a diversity of experiences and people. Perhaps this is why, despite its cost, British Columbia has been a draw for youth from all demographics. While Manitoba has an abundance of outdoor recreation, communities outside Winnipeg are often seen and described as boring – even by the youth that live in those communities. While Winnipeg offers such diversity, the city is comparatively more expensive than other parts of the province. Youth also view Winnipeg as a place to start a career but view other major cities as having more long-term potential, particularly in emerging industries which are more attractive to this generation.

Youth may have different motivating factors depending on their cultural community. A large proportion of immigrant youth, especially those who have been in Manitoba for more than 10 years, indicated a willingness to move to another province and present a large portion of out-migration from Manitoba each year. More recent newcomers want communities which are inclusive and have policies that support newcomer settlement and integration.

The issues faced by First Nations youth persist, especially in the North. While First Nations youth are less likely to leave the province, they are more at risk of intra-provincial migration – moving from rural communities to urban centres such as Brandon and Winnipeg. First Nations youth respondents to the surveys also indicated they are willing to consider moving to another province – especially for a job with an Indigenous-owned business.

Francophone youth have limited options within the province for post-secondary education. If they do choose to stay in the province, they choose Université de Saint-Boniface. Francophone communities outside of Winnipeg are often more rural and have the same perceptual challenges of other rural communities. Francophone youth looking for larger, younger Francophone populations may consider areas in Ontario or Quebec.

## Conclusions

Manitobans collectively can work together to change these and other narratives. Where perceptions are more negative than reality, there is an opportunity to reframe and address misperceptions to show the opportunity that Manitoba offers. Where reality and perceptions align, Manitobans can come together to form the solutions that they view work best from their own experience and deep understanding of their communities and contexts.



# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for sharing their time, knowledge and experience. Their contributions have been invaluable and improved the depth and quality of this work.

Assiniboine Community College  
Brandon Chambers of Commerce  
Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba  
David Zynoberg and Monica Gadsby, Seven Oaks School Division – MET Schools  
FDC Regional Economic Development Commission  
Flin Flon Arts Council  
Flin Flon Chamber of Commerce  
Immigrant Centre Manitoba  
Jacqueline Keena, EMILI  
New Flyer  
Ori.Gatou Creative Solutions Inc.  
2023 UCN-Linkages, The Pas  
Ranique McLaughlin, Hidden Gemz  
Robert Lavallee  
Shaun Loney, Encompass Co-op  
Skownan First Nation  
Staff and students at Hapnot Collegiate  
The City of Flin Flon  
University College of the North  
University of Manitoba  
Westman Immigrant Services  
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