

Interprovincial Migration in Canada

Quebeckers Vote with Their Feet

by Jason Clemens, Yanick Labrie, and Joel Emes

The movement of people from one place to another, migration, can be a powerful indicator of a jurisdiction's success or failure. One of the reasons migration is such a powerful indicator is the high cost involved for people who move from one jurisdiction to another. Uprooting one's family, disposing of family assets, the costs of job searches, and leaving the confines of what is known in search of something better is an incredibly costly action. This study focuses on the important insights Quebecers can and should glean from provincial migration data.

Net migration

On average, between 1971/72 and 2014/15, 13,238 more Quebecers left the province annually than people from other provinces moved to Quebec. Quebec is the only province to have experienced net out-migration every year between 1971/72 and 2014/15. Negative migration ranged from a low of -822 in 2003/04 to a high of -46,429 in 1977/78, one year after the election of the Parti Québécois.

On a cumulative basis, Quebec experienced the highest out-migration, losing a total of 582,470 residents. Interestingly, though, since 2003/04, Ontario's cumulative out-migration of 142,514 outstripped Quebec's (-101,497). Most Canadians who migrated between provinces over this period ended up in Alberta or British Columbia.

Controlling for population, the province of Newfoundland & Labrador recorded the largest net loss of residents at 23.1% of its 2015 population. The prairie provinces of Saskatchewan (-17.3%) and Manitoba (-17.0%) ranked

second and third, respectively. Quebec ranked fourth, losing 7.0% of its population (2015) to net migration over the period from 1971/72 to 2014/15.

Total out-migration

Quebec and, to a lesser extent, Ontario consistently experienced the lowest level of total out-migration of any of the provinces over the period from 1971/72 to 2014/15. In 2014/15, Quebec experienced out-migration of 3.9 people per 1,000 population while Ontario experienced out-migration of 5.1 people per 1,000 population. The remaining eight provinces recorded out-migration per 1,000 population of between 9.2 (British Columbia) and 23.5 people (Prince Edward Island). Put differently, the out-migration recorded in Quebec in 2014/15 was only 42.4% of the out-migration level recorded by the third-ranked province of British Columbia.

Similar results are observed when the average out-migration is measured. Over the period from 1971/72 to 2014/15, Quebec, on average, experienced out-migration of 5.4 people

per 1,000 population. This was the lowest of any province. Put simply, Quebec had the most stable domestic population in terms of out-migration among the provinces over the period from 1971/72 to 2014/15.

Total in-migration

Quebec also recorded the lowest level of in-migration, adjusted for population, of any province between 1971/72 and 2014/15. In 2014/15, Quebec experienced in-migration of 2.1 people per 1,000 population. Ontario ranked second-lowest, with in-migration of 4.5 people per 1,000 population, more than double Quebec’s level. Alberta, at almost ten times the level recorded by Quebec recorded the highest level of in-migration with 20.5 people per 1,000 population in 2014/15.

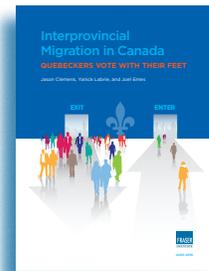
Quebec had the lowest average level of in-migration at 3.5 people per 1,000 population over this time period. Ontario recorded the second-lowest average rate of in-migration over this period: 7.5 people, which is more than double the average rate of Quebec. Alberta recorded the highest average annual rate of 26.8 people per 1,000 population.

The difference between the average annual in-migration of 3.5 people per 1,000 population (lowest in Canada) and the average annual out-migration of 5.4 people per 1,000

population (again the lowest in Canada) is what produces the average annual loss of 1.9 people per 1,000 population in Quebec through interprovincial migration.

Simply put, Quebec loses relatively few residents each year but it attracts only minimal migration from other Canadian provinces, which explains its comparatively high level of net out-migration. Indeed, over the 44-year period, the Atlantic provinces had almost twice as much in-migration (1,868,104) as Quebec (1,069,306) on a population base that is less than a third of Quebec’s.

Finally, Quebec’s net out-migration is tilted towards the young and particularly those starting or in the early stages of their careers. This out-migration of the young has in part contributed to the older age structure of Quebec’s population.



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Quebec—total out-migration and in-migration per 1,000 residents, 1971/72–2014/15

