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HITTING THE ROAD: MIGRATION FLOWS IN B.C.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In recent years, population growth has become more balanced across the province. Average annual population growth on the Island and in the Thompson-Okanagan region has more than doubled and has outpaced the average gain seen in the Lower Mainland.
- The populations of the Cariboo and North Coast regions declined between 2008 and 2013, but both have expanded over the more recent 2013-2018 period.
- The main reason for the shift in population growth patterns is because of a significant change in migration patterns within the province. The number of people moving out of the Lower Mainland to other parts of the province has surged in recent years. The net outflow of migrants moving from the Lower Mainland to other parts of the province has climbed from around 3,000 annually to more than 10,000 persons.
- Over the same period, the net inflow of intraprovincial migrants to Vancouver Island rose from around 2,000 a year to 6,500. In the Thompson-Okanagan intraprovincial migration jumped from around 2,000 to 4,500 persons annually. The Kootenay and Cariboo regions, which typically have small net outflows of people, have seen net inflows of people moving from other parts of the province.
- Where in the province interprovincial migrants settle has also changed. The net inflow of people moving from other provinces into B.C. has fallen in recent years. For those who do migrate to B.C., Vancouver Island and the Thompson-Okanagan are now more popular destinations to settle.
- The Lower Mainland is still by far the most popular destination for international migrants. Each year immigration adds 25,000 to 30,000 people to the region's population.
- The biggest net outflow of intraprovincial migrants from the Lower Mainland is people aged 45-59. The next largest cohort of people moving out of the Lower Mainland is aged 30-44. The net outflow of intraprovincial migrants, however, has picked up across all age groups.

B.C.'s regional population growth dynamics have shifted in recent years. Population growth has slowed in the Lower Mainland but accelerated in most other regions of the province.

British Columbia is divided into eight development regions. The boundaries of these regions are used for measuring labour markets and tracking population flows, among

other things. Population growth across these regions has changed significantly over the past five years, with many parts of the province now seeing population gains in line with the Lower Mainland rather than lagging well behind it.

Figure 1 shows average annual population growth in the eight development regions (and in B.C. as

a whole) for the periods 2009-2013 and 2014-2018. Note that in six of the eight regions, population growth was stronger over the past five years than over the previous 5-year period. In the Cariboo and North Coast, the shift is from shrinking to expanding populations.

From the graph, the following differences between the two periods emerge:

- B.C.'s average annual population growth notched up from 1.3% to 1.5% between 2008-13 and 2013-18
- Population growth has decelerated slightly in the Lower Mainland, from 1.7% to 1.6%
- Populations in five other development regions grew faster in the most recent period. Of particular note:

- the average annual population growth rate doubled in the Island/Coast region;

- population in the Thompson Okanagan grew 2.6 times faster in the more recent period than between 2009 and 2013;

- there was a four-fold increase in the population growth rate in the Kootenay region;

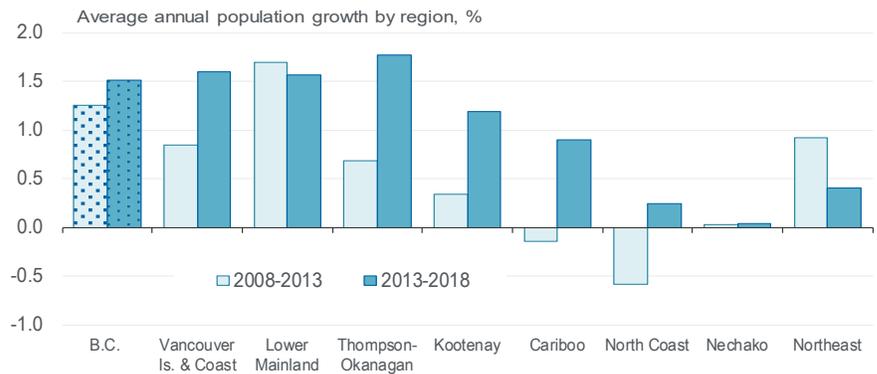
- in the Cariboo, the population declined at an average annual rate of -0.1% over the 2009-2013 period (inclusive) but then grew by 0.9% annually in 2013-2018;

- the North Coast's population went from shrinking -0.6% annually to increasing at an annual pace of 0.2%;

- Population growth also edged higher in the Nechako but slowed in the Northeast.

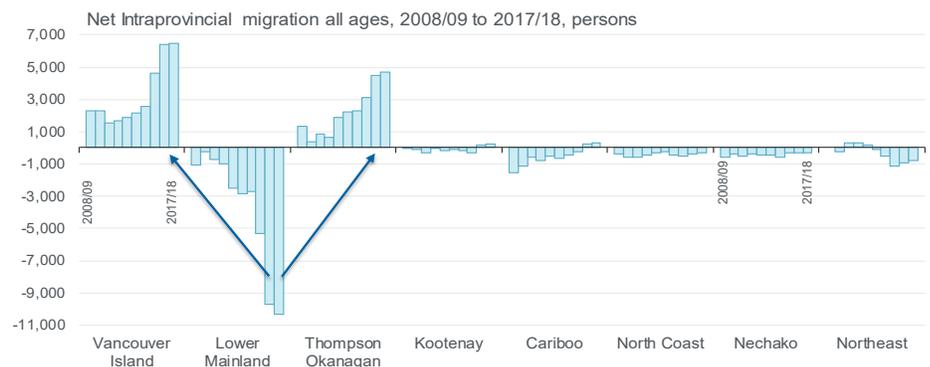
With population growth up sharply in the Thompson-Okanagan and Vancouver Island & Coast regions, and also strengthening in the Kootenay, Cariboo and North Coast regions, demographic growth dynamics across B.C. have become more balanced.

FIGURE 1: **POPULATION GROWTH INCREASES IN REGIONS OUTSIDE OF THE LOWER MAINLAND**



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 17-10-0137-01.

FIGURE 2: **MIGRATION WITHIN THE PROVINCE HAS ACCELERATED AS MORE PEOPLE MOVE OUT OF THE LOWER MAINLAND**



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 17-10-0138-01.

A CLOSER LOOK AT INTRA-PROVINCIAL MIGRATION

Trends in migration patterns are the primary reason for the change in overall population growth dynamics, particularly movements of people within the province.

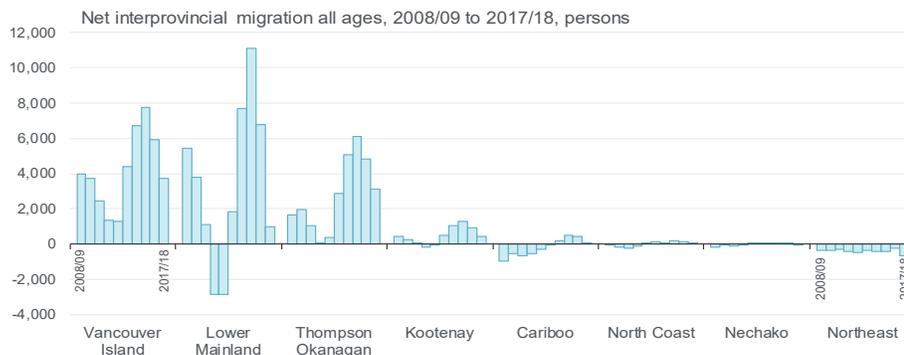
Looking first at intraprovincial migration, Figure 2 shows annual net intraprovincial migration across the eight development regions in B.C. in the past decade. Over the past three

or four years, there has been a jump in the net flow of people out of the Lower Mainland to other parts of the province.

As is evident in the graph:

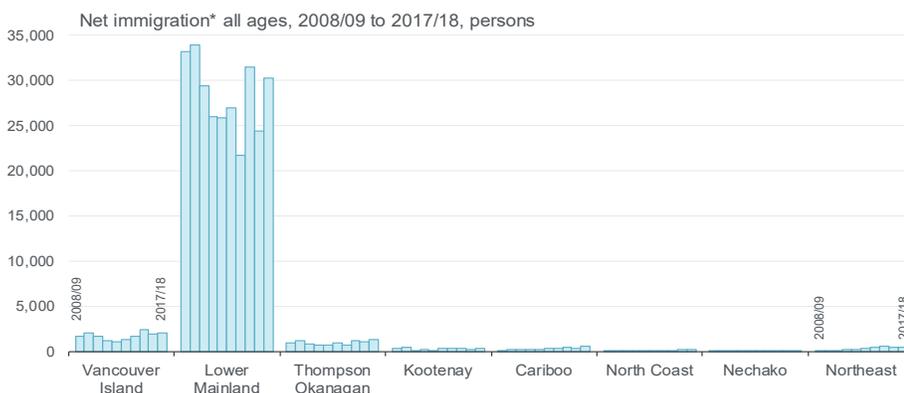
- There have long been net outflows of people from the Lower Mainland to other parts of the province.
- But the net outflow has surged from around 3,000 annually a decade ago to more than 10,000 recently.

FIGURE 3: MOST INTERPROVINCIAL MIGRANTS SETTLE IN THE SOUTH AND CENTRAL REGIONS OF THE PROVINCE



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 17-10-0138-01.

FIGURE 4: IMMIGRATION OVERWHELMINGLY CONCENTRATED IN THE LOWER MAINLAND



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 17-10-0138-01.

* Immigration less emigration

annually to around 8,000 over the past decade or so.

Figure 3 shows net interprovincial migration in each of B.C.'s eight development regions. Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland and the Thompson Okanagan all saw substantial positive net inflows of people from other provinces.

- Interprovincial migration is quite volatile. The Lower Mainland has seen net interprovincial migration drop from a peak of 11,000 a decade or so ago to 7,000 a few years ago to just 1,000 in 2017/18.
- During the most recent five-year period, net interprovincial migration has been stronger on Vancouver Island and in the Thompson Okanagan than it was in the preceding five-year period.
- The Kootenay and Cariboo regions have also experienced stronger net inflows of interprovincial migrants in recent years.

INTERPROVINCIAL MIGRANTS SETTLE IN THE LOWER MAINLAND

International immigration is the other key component of population growth. The vast majority of immigrants coming to B.C. settle in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley.

- In recent years, the net inflow¹ of international immigrants (immigration less emigration) into the Lower Mainland has been between 25,000 and 30,000 per annum. While immigration levels do change from year-to-year, net immigration into the Lower Mainland has exceeded 25,000 annually for many years. Looking

- Over the same period, the net inflow of intraprovincial migrants to Vancouver Island rose from around 2,000 a year to 6,500.

- Net intraprovincial migration in the Thompson Okanagan has climbed from just over 2,000 to around 4,500 annually.

- The Kootenay and Cariboo regions have gone from small net outflows to small positive net inflows.

INTERPROVINCIAL MIGRATION ALSO HELPING LIFT REGIONAL POPULATION GROWTH

Interprovincial migration — the movement of people between provinces — is the second component of migration. Except for the odd year, net interprovincial migration to B.C. (that is all of B.C.) has been positive. It did, however, drop from more than 20,000 persons

¹ It should be noted that some Lower Mainland residents re-locate to other countries. This emigration must be subtracted from gross immigration to determine the actual increase in the region's population due to international migration flows.

ahead, this is likely to increase as the federal government continues to ramp up annual immigration targets.

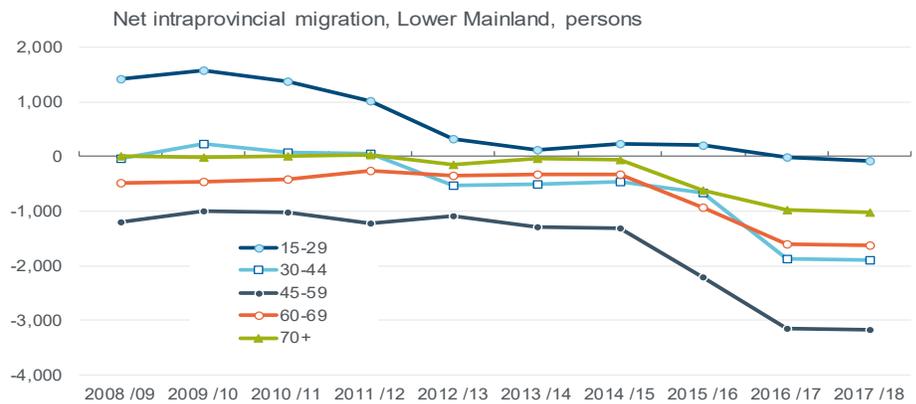
- Vancouver Island receives a regular inflow of international immigrants as well, typically around 2,000 annually.
- The Thompson Okanagan region tends to have a net international inflow of around 1,200 (this is up from 800 a few years back).

AGE COHORTS OF INTRAPROVINCIAL MIGRANTS

As noted above, the most significant shifts in B.C. migration patterns over the past several years have been in the intraprovincial component. What are the characteristics of these intraprovincial migrants? Figure 5 breaks down B.C. intraprovincial migration into five age cohorts.

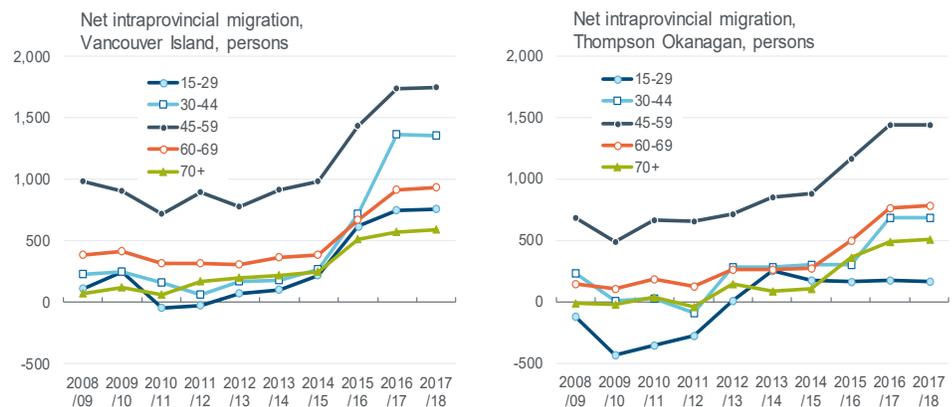
- As shown, the biggest net intraprovincial outflow is for people aged 45 to 59. This has roughly tripled in recent years, from a net loss of just over 1,000 persons (aged 45-59) to over 3,000.
- People in their core working years aged 30-44 represent the next largest outflow. For this group the outflow has more than tripled (from ~500 to ~1,800)
- The largest increases in intraprovincial outflows have occurred in older cohorts, with a five-fold increase in outmigration from the Lower Mainland of people aged 60-69 and a higher outflow among people aged 70 and over as well.

FIGURE 5: **MORE PEOPLE LEAVING THE LOWER MAINLAND ACROSS ALL AGE GROUPS**



Source: Statistics Canada.

FIGURE 6: **INTRAPROVINCIAL MIGRATION**



Source: Statistics Canada.

The age profile of the people migrating to other parts of the province reflects the changes being seen in the Lower Mainland.

- The biggest net intraprovincial inflows into both the Vancouver Island and Thompson Okanagan regions (Figure 6) are of people aged 45-59; this same cohort accounts for nearly one third of all the outflow from the Lower Mainland.

- Both of these regions have also seen a sizable jump in the number of intraprovincial in-migrants aged 30-44, particularly Vancouver Island.
- Interestingly, comparatively few persons aged 15-29 are relocating to the Thompson Okanagan.

SUMMARY

The Lower Mainland receives the vast majority of international migrants arriving in B.C. In recent years, there has been a net annual outflow of roughly 6,000 people moving from the Lower Mainland to other parts of B.C. However, combined net immigration and net interprovincial migration have lifted population in the Lower Mainland by an average of 35,000 annually over the past several years. In other words, net intra-provincial out-migration is significantly exceeded by the number of newcomers moving to the region from abroad and from other provinces.

Vancouver Island has long had net inflows of intraprovincial migrants, interprovincial migrants and international migrants. In the last few years, the total net population inflow has roughly doubled in size to roughly 14,000 annually. Similarly, the Thompson Okanagan has also long enjoyed net inflows of all three types of migrants and the total inflow to the region has also doubled in recent years

In the Kootenay region, the three components of migration have lifted population by an average of 1,200 persons annually in the past half-decade. The inflow has been boosted by the change from small net outflows of intraprovincial migrants to small net inflows.

In the Cariboo, population growth was negative due to sizable outflows of intraprovincial migrants as well as interprovincial migrants. In recent years, these two components have turned positive and are now adding to the population in the Cariboo

The North Coast, Nechako and Northeast continue to experience modest net outflows, due mostly to intraprovincial migration. As noted at the outset, however, population growth remains positive because of the natural increase in each of the three regions.

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