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## Canadian Megatrends

# From east to west: 140 years of interprovincial migration



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- not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- <sup>P</sup> preliminary
- <sup>r</sup> revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- <sup>E</sup> use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

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# From east to west: 140 years of interprovincial migration

## CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

Migration between provinces and territories has been part of Canadian life since Confederation, and the portion of Canadians who leave their province of birth has increased over time. Their movements have been influenced by economic cycles and the activity in various economic sectors, shaping the country’s demographic landscape. During the 20th century, this phenomena helped shift the population toward Western Canada.

While interprovincial migration has recently trended down, it continues to significantly affect the growth and age structure of the provinces and territories. From 2006 to 2011, close to 3% of the Canadian population moved to a different province or territory.

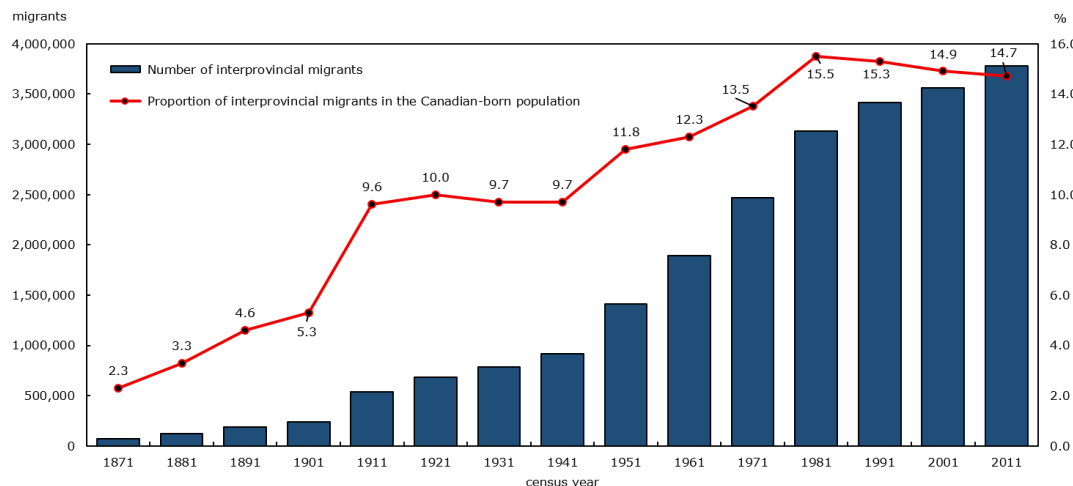
### Western settlement and the post-war period: two dynamic periods for interprovincial migration

Since Confederation in 1867, the number of people living outside of the province or territory where they were born—referred to as interprovincial migrants in this article—has increased every decade.

In 1871, when Canada consisted of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, 68,060 people were living in a province other than the one in which they were born, representing 2.3% of the 2,917,290 Canadians born in Canada.

In 1905, Saskatchewan and Alberta joined the Canadian Confederation, and these new provinces welcomed an influx of migrants. From 1901 to 1911, the number of Canadians who moved between provinces and territories more than doubled from 239,955 to 537,936, accounting for 9.6% of the Canadian-born population in 1911.

**Canadians living in a province/territory other than their province/territory of birth, number and percentage of the population born in Canada, 1871 to 2011**



Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population (1871 to 2001) and National Household Survey (2011).

From 1911 to 1941, a period marked by two world wars and the Great Depression of the 1930s, the proportion of interprovincial migrants remained stable at around 10% of the Canadian-born population.

From 1941 to 1951, the number of migrants rose from 915,726 to 1,412,556, representing 11.8% of the Canadian-born population, and continued to increase until 1981, reaching a record high of 15.5%. The strong interprovincial migration observed from 1941 to 1981 coincided with post-war economic recovery, the growth of industrial activity in Canada and oil development in Alberta, where production rose quickly after the first oil shock in 1973.

From 1881 to 2011, the number of interprovincial migrants continued to rise, but their proportion among the Canadian-born population gradually decreased. This period saw three recessions: one in the early 1980s, another in the early 1990s and a third in the late 2000s. In 2011, 3,779,990 Canadians (14.7%) were living outside of their province or territory of birth.

## Interprovincial migration contributed to the rapid settlement of the Western provinces

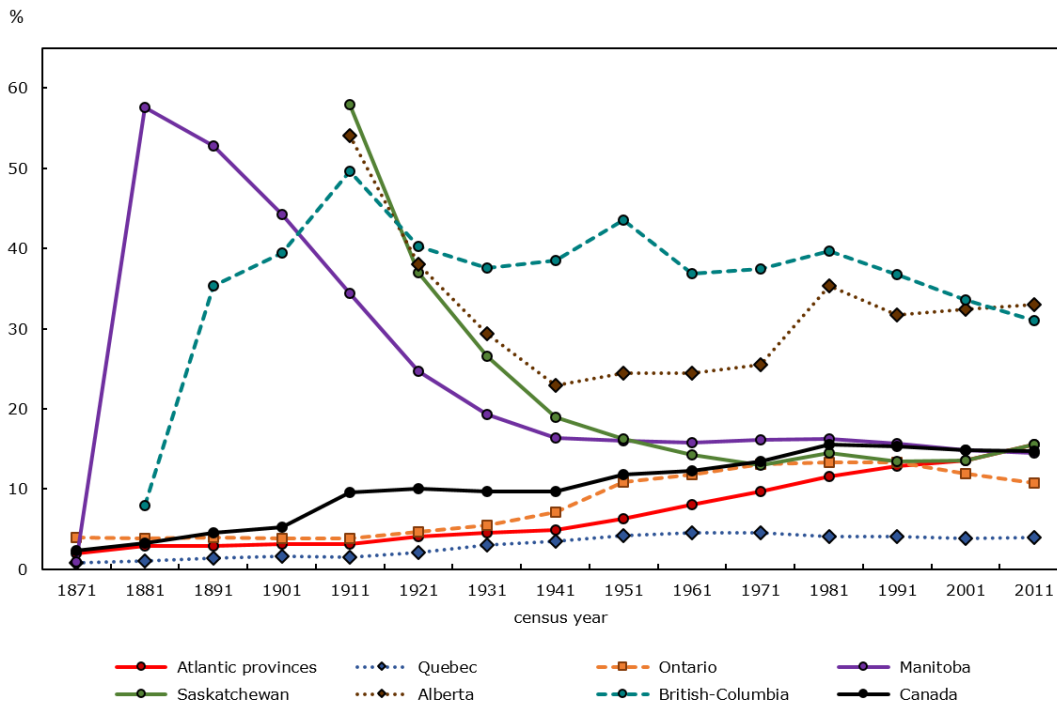
The Western provinces were settled mostly after Confederation. This settlement happened very quickly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the proportion of people born outside these provinces reaching very high levels.

In Manitoba, in 1881, 57.6% of the population was born outside the province. At that time, this province contained more people born in Ontario (18,744) than people born in Manitoba (17,448).

In British Columbia, the proportion of interprovincial migrants rose from 7.9% in 1881 to 49.6% in 1911. Proportions of interprovincial migrants were also very high in Saskatchewan (57.9%) and Alberta (54.0%) in 1911, six years after the provinces joined the Confederation.

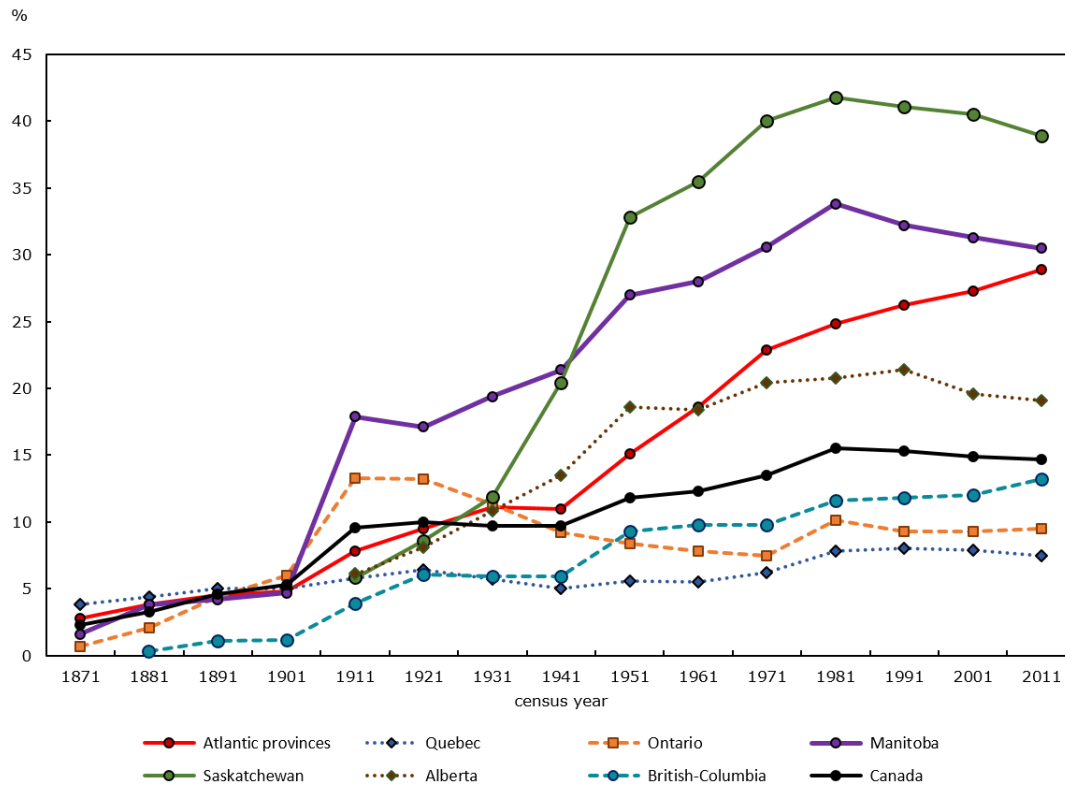
While international immigration is often cited to explain the rapid settlement of Western Canada, the contribution of interprovincial migration clearly cannot be ignored. For example, in 1911, for every 100 international immigrants, Saskatchewan had 58 interprovincial migrants and Alberta had 41.

**Proportion of Canadians living in a province other than their province of birth (interprovincial in-migrants), by region of destination, 1871 to 2011**



**Notes:** Alberta and Saskatchewan joined the Canadian confederation in 1905. Data for British Columbia for 1871 are not available.  
**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population (1871 to 2001) and National Household Survey (2011).

**Proportion of Canadians who left their province of birth (interprovincial out-migrants), by region of birth, 1871 to 2011**



**Notes:** Alberta and Saskatchewan joined the Canadian confederation in 1905. Data for British Columbia for 1871 are not available.  
**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population (1871 to 2001) and National Household Survey (2011).

British Columbia continued to be a destination for interprovincial migrants, with these accounting for more than 30% of the provincial population in every census during this century.

The proportion of interprovincial migrants in Alberta fell sharply from 54.0% in 1911 to 22.9% in 1941. However, this proportion has risen almost constantly since the start of oil development in 1947, reaching 31.0% in 2011, the highest of all Canadian provinces.

The proportion of interprovincial migrants in Manitoba and Saskatchewan fell quickly after peaking in 1881 and 1911. The proportion of interprovincial migrants in these provinces remained stable after 1941, varying between 13.0% and 19.0% and nearing the proportion observed for the country.

However, in the mid-20th century, these two provinces became exporters of interprovincial migrants. From 1901 to 1981, the proportion of people born in Manitoba who were living in another province or territory rose from 4.7% to 33.8%. In Saskatchewan this proportion increased from 5.8% to 41.8% from 1911 to 1981. Since 1951, Saskatchewan has been the Canadian province with the largest proportion of migrants living in another province or territory.

**Many interprovincial out-migrants from the Atlantic provinces since the post-war period**

In the Atlantic provinces, Ontario and Quebec, interprovincial migration made a much smaller contribution to population growth than in Western Canada. From 1871 to 1941, relatively few interprovincial migrants chose to settle in these provinces, representing less than 10% of the population.

After the Second World War, the Atlantic provinces and Ontario began to record higher proportions of interprovincial migrants, approaching the proportion observed for Canada. The proportion of interprovincial migrants living in Quebec has always been low, peaking at 4.6% in 1961 and 1971.

Historically, a relatively large proportion of interprovincial migrants have been born in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario. From 1901 to 1911, Ontario was a major source of migrants who went west. The number of migrants born in Ontario rose from 113,096 to 296,629 (+162%) over this 10-year period, or from 6.0% to 13.3% of the province's population.

Furthermore, out-migration levels in the four Atlantic provinces have constantly risen since the end of the Second World War. The proportion of Atlantic-born Canadians who live in another province or territory rose from 11.0% in 1941 to 28.9% in 2011, almost twice the national rate. In 2011, interprovincial out-migrants born in the Atlantic provinces mostly resided in Ontario (40.6%), the western provinces (31.2%) or in another Atlantic province (18.5%).

## **Note to readers**

The provinces are included in the analysis as of the census after they joined Confederation. Although the Northwest Territories and Yukon joined Confederation in 1870 and 1898, respectively, they are included in the analysis as of 1911, because, between 1871 and 1911, the geographic boundaries of the provinces and territories were substantially modified.

## **Definitions**

### **Interprovincial migration:**

Interprovincial migration represents movement between provinces or territories involving a change in the usual place of residence. Individuals who have returned to their province of birth are not considered to be migrants.

### **Interprovincial out-migrant:**

A person who takes up residence in another province or territory is an out-migrant with reference to his or her province or territory of origin.

### **Interprovincial in-migrant:**

A person who takes up residence in another province or territory is an in-migrant with reference to his or her province or territory of destination.

## **References**

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