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Alberta youth mobility

Janet Lane, Stephany Laverty & Dr. David Finch

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This report was written by Janet Lane, Director Human Capital Centre and Stephany Laverty, Policy Analyst at the Canada West Foundation, and Dr. David Finch of Mount Royal University's Institute for Community Prosperity.

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Canada West Foundation
110 – 134 11 Avenue SE, Calgary, Alberta T2G 0X5
Phone: 403-264-9535 Email: cwf@cwf.ca

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Executive summary

After decades of youth moving to Alberta, often to take advantage of oil booms, the trend reversed in 2016. For the first time since 1988, more youth aged 15-29 moved out of the province than moved in. Over the next five years, Alberta's net out-migration of youth aged-25-to-29 was 1,133 per year. Admittedly this figure represents just two per cent of the cohort, but because there were fewer youth in the age-group behind them, Alberta had nine per cent fewer 25-29-year-olds in 2021 than in 2016. Combined with Alberta's aging population, this trend of more young adults leaving the province than moving to it is troubling.

While Alberta's net youth migration has ebbed and flowed with boom-and-bust cycles in the oil and gas sector, over the last 50 years growth averaged about 8,000 youth per year. Despite ups and downs in the sector, Alberta could always expect youth would return to the province with the next boom. However, the world has changed and so too has the oil and gas sector. Alberta's economy and communities are in transition.

Alberta has a lot to offer youth – quality education and training pathways; diverse career opportunities; a booming tech sector; world-class outdoor adventures; abundant parks and nature trails; fabulous arts and entertainment; vibrant cities; a responsive non-profit sector; affordable housing; competitive sports teams; and some of the best healthcare in the country. Despite the compounding effects of the global energy price crash and the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta's economic and fiscal situation has changed rapidly again as oil prices have risen and the royalty regime collects more revenue. Alberta is set to lead Canada's GDP growth for the next two years. Tech firms in the province are breaking venture capital investment records and significant advancements in clean technology and non-energy sectors are further driving economic diversification. The problem to solve, then, is how to keep Alberta-born youth in Alberta, how to attract youth to Alberta from outside the province and how to retain Alberta youth once they move there.

Findings

A look at the economic data showed that youth unemployment has been higher in Alberta over the past few years than in provinces that have had stronger economies, predominantly B.C. and Ontario. Meanwhile between 2019 and 2021, Alberta saw growth in the number of job vacancies in sectors as varied as construction, manufacturing, retail trade, information and cultural industries (the technology sector), finance, accommodation and food services, and the oil and gas sector. However, B.C. has more than twice as many job vacancies as Alberta in agriculture and forestry, wholesale trade, information and cultural industries, and professional, scientific and technical services and offers higher wages in some of these sectors.

B.C. is attractive for some economic reasons despite housing affordability and availability challenges in its largest centres. It seems likely that some Alberta youth have moved to B.C.'s smaller cities, which have grown over the last six years, while youth have left small cities and rural areas of Alberta.

This study found that youth in Alberta, Vancouver and Toronto perceive that Alberta does not offer a breadth of career choices, that the province lacks vibrancy and that there is a lack of inclusion of diversity.

While youth migrate for economic reasons, quality of life is very important to them and they will move to a place they perceive will satisfy both needs. Youth in all surveyed locations say they work to live – not the other way around. In their consideration of place, they weigh factors such as the cleanliness and safety of communities, public transportation, proximity to experiences, diversity and inclusion and the reputation of a region. For many youth, their identity is linked to where they live; they want to feel good about their choice of place. Alberta is seen by many Albertan and non-Albertan youth as associated with nature, oil and gas (perceived negatively) conservative (not a positive for many youth who have a more progressive world-view), and intolerant.

On the other hand, many surveyed youth who live outside of Alberta admit that they are not very familiar with the province. Youth inside and outside of Alberta have perceptions of the province that do not reflect current realities. Decision and policy makers must understand that today's younger generations have different goals and values than the youth of the past and these affect their choice of place to live.

Life stage considerations

The population in this study crosses over between what are commonly defined as Millennials and Generation Z.[1] Participants in this study included people between the ages of 18 and 45 with two-thirds of participants aged 30 and under. Earlier research has shown that youth consider moving at various life stages framed by three "moments of truth" for young adults. The first is high school graduation, the second is post-secondary graduation, and the third is a moment in time when an individual chooses to move to advance their career or settle down. These relate roughly to three sub-cohorts: 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 years of age. The third moment of truth can occur multiple times and go beyond the age of 30. For example, someone may choose to move for career advancement several times then finally decide it is time to settle in a single location (often tied to personal relationships, including starting a family).

[1] Millennials are commonly defined as those born between 1980-96 and Generation Z are defined as those born between 1997 and 2015. Refer https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201210/dq201210b-eng.htm

The survey data explored these life stages by examining the role of age in influencing attitudes and intentions. The data identified differences across the three age cohorts, with the youngest cohort (18-24) having much higher intention of inter-provincial mobility compared to the two older cohorts. This trend is most pronounced in Alberta, with younger urban Albertans considering moves in Canada and internationally. For example, in Calgary 69 per cent of those 18-24 state an intention of leaving the province. In contrast, rural Albertans demonstrate a higher intention of moving within the province, with end goals of Calgary or Edmonton. Of course, intention does not necessarily lead to behavior. In both cases, post-secondary education or employment are facilitators allowing individuals to explore and relocate. The second age cohort (25-29) also demonstrates a similar trend. However, this group is more likely to use employment opportunities as a mechanism to relocate. Finally, the oldest age cohort (aged 30-45) has a significantly lower mobility intention compared to the two young cohorts. However, within this group there remains a significant cohort of individuals with high mobility intention.

Recommendations

The net out-migration of youth does not have to be accepted as inevitable. Some solutions which reflect youth goals and values as well as the current reality of Alberta are available. Recommended solutions fall into two main themes: Careers and Communities. Implementation of these recommendations should be informed by youth.

Recommended strategies to attract and retain youth under the theme of **Careers** include:

- Ensure children and youth understand their aptitudes and interests, have a broad understanding of the diverse career opportunities available and on the horizon and the education and training required to enter them.
- Develop competency-based post-secondary education designed to build the competencies required to move into new careers in diverse sectors in the Alberta economy and reduce the skills mismatch that exists in the province.
- Create quality experiential learning and work-integrated learning opportunities for all students that allow them to build verified competencies while gaining work experience.

The following strategies should also be considered:

- Provide opportunities to build professional networks and mentorships which provide ongoing support to youth as they start their careers.
- Create apprenticeships in a larger range of careers beyond the skilled trades that provide employers with the incentives and means to build their own workforce and youth the opportunity earn while they learn.
- Improve Labour Market Information based on real time data focused on the realities and trends of the Alberta labour market.

Recommended strategies to attract and retain youth under the theme of **Communities** include:

- Employ progressive municipal government policies that can be complemented by business-friendly higher level of government policies designed to attract investment and new employers.
- Accelerate ongoing community revitalization efforts that develop more walkable (and bikeable) living, working, and entertainment spaces that are attractive to youth.

Alberta

The problem to solve is how to keep Alberta-born youth in Alberta, how to attract youth to Alberta from outside the province and how to retain Alberta youth once they move there.

- Encourage small and medium sized (SMEs) employers to hire and retain more diverse youth through the provision of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training kits for organizations and SMEs. Larger companies already understand the economic and productivity benefits of diversity in the workplace, while smaller employers may need support to build safe and inclusive workplaces.
- Expand safe public transit both within and between communities.
- Provide safe and inclusive spaces where youth feel valued for their diversity of lived experience, thought and capabilities.

The following strategies should also be considered:

- Create, with youth involvement and from the grassroots rather than government, a new Alberta brand that emphasizes the diversity of people and opportunities in the province.
- Target talented and entrepreneurial youth in immigration programs. For example, Digital Nomad Visas could bring digital talent to live in specific areas of the province with the view that once here they will want to transition into Alberta based jobs.
- Target supports designed to improve success of immigrant youth. The global competition for talent means that youth have choices. Supports that assist immigrant youth to gain work experience, learn language and build community for themselves and their families will help them to want to stay.
- Build on the ongoing ‘Smart Cities’ approaches that advance communities and the lives of people through the use of data and connected technologies.

The current trend shows that youth are leaving and not coming to Alberta in the significant numbers seen before. To avoid the problems that arise when a population ages rapidly, Alberta will need to turn the flow of youth migration positive. A turn-around in the oil and gas sector is not the answer this time. Alberta will need to increase efforts to ensure that young people are aware of and engaged in building the diversified economy and communities of the future.

The recommendations above have come from the research that was informed by youth, both in Alberta and in other major Canadian centres. Implementation of these recommendations will help to stem the flow of young people out of the province and return Alberta to its position as the “it” place for youth in Canada.

Introduction

Youth in this study are defined as being between the ages of 15 and 29 years of age and cross two generations – commonly defined as Millennials and Generation Z.[2] Although for comparison purposes individuals up to age 45 are included.

There are three key life stage moments when youth will decide to stay where they are or move elsewhere. These three "moments of truths" are: high school graduation, post-secondary graduation, and a moment in time when an individual moves to advance their career or settle down. This third moment of truth could occur multiple times. For example, someone may choose to move for career advancement several times then finally decide it is time to settle in a single location (often tied to personal relationships, including starting a family). These moments of truth occur roughly during three age cohorts: 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 years of age, although the third choice can be made multiple times and go well beyond the age of 30.

Questions this study addresses

- Is the perception that young Albertans are leaving correct? To what extent are they leaving? What can we expect in the near and medium future?
- What motivates young people (including young Albertans) to move from their community or province?
- What, if anything, can we do about it?

[2] Millennials are commonly defined as those born between 1980-96 and Generation Z are defined as those born between 1997 and 2015. Refer https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201210/dq201210b-eng.htm

Decisions, decisions...

Moments *of* Truth

Late Teens (15-19 years)	Young Adulthood (20-24 years)	Career Advancement (25-29+ years)
The decision point occurs when high school is completed. Most youth at this point face a choice between entering the workforce or post-secondary education. Youth must also consider where they will go to school or work.	This decision point occurs when youth have completed post-secondary education or have been working for a few years.	For the majority of youth, this decision point occurs when they have chosen a career path and are subsequently considering future options. The first track an individual may take is to advance their career. The second track are those who want a community in which to settle down and possibly start a family.

Study methodology

The study included secondary research and youth-focused primary qualitative and quantitative research.

Secondary research: Literature review
Secondary research included a review of published research on youth mobility, including why youth move and what other jurisdictions have done to retain and attract youth, and a study of the economics and quality of life in Alberta.

Secondary research: Economic data and population modelling
Aaron Murray of Derek Murray Consulting & Associates performed analysis of available population data (including the four components that comprise population growth: births, deaths, immigration, and interprovincial migration), and the economic drivers of migration. The largest focus was on interprovincial and international migration as they are the most sensitive to trends in employment and the economy. This partner also performed the statistical analysis of Statistics Canada population data.

Focus groups
A series of 12 virtual focus groups, led by Dr. David Finch and students Robyn MacDonald and Kennedy Lukey of the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University, were held between April and June 2021. These were designed to bring together small groups of young adults with similar education levels and ages, and to represent urban and rural locations.

Survey
Using insights gathered through the focus groups, survey questions were composed and administered by Stone-Olafson. This quantitative survey was conducted online with 2,001 Canadians in June 2021. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to have at least some post-secondary education and be employed, be a student, or looking for work, and be 18-45 years of age from Calgary (400), Edmonton (396), Northern Alberta (77), Central Alberta (85), Southern Alberta (129), Vancouver (417), Toronto (402) and Kitchener/Waterloo (95). (Numbers are the sample size in each location.)

Social media sentiment analysis
Dr. David Finch, Kennedy Lukey and Robyn MacDonald conducted the sentiment analysis to categorize online mentions as positive, negative or neutral to determine the author's attitude towards a subject. Awario Reach software was used to track Alberta sentiment between May 26 and September 26, 2021 on Twitter, YouTube, and blogs.[3] The Awario tool automatically assigns sentiment (positive, negative or neutral) to collected mentions. Awario scrapes publicly available posts only and no personal data is obtained during social media listening. Due to the challenges of this type of analysis, social listening sentiment analysis was used only for triangulation of previous data insights, not to source new themes.

[3] At the time this study was conducted, both Facebook and Instagram restricted access to third-party analytic tools.

Segmentation analysis of survey data

Using provincial mobility intention (PMI) as the dependent variable, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the statistical relationship of 32 independent variables on the PMI.[4] This test confirmed a statistically significant influence of both location and age on PMI.

Regression analyses were conducted on split samples by age and region. The results of this analysis identified regional consistencies which contributed to refining the dataset:

1

Rural Alberta cluster
Consolidation of the three rural Alberta regions into a single data cluster.

2

YVR/YYZ metro area cluster
Consolidation of Toronto and Vancouver into a single data cluster.

3

Alberta big city cluster
Consolidation of Calgary and Edmonton into a single data cluster.

4

Removal of Kitchener-Waterloo
Due to its small sample size (N=95) and unique characteristics.

From the results of the regression analysis, a three-level categorical variable for provincial mobility intention (PMI) was established based on the cluster's score: Low intention (scored 0-28 out of 100); medium intention (scored 29-56 out of 100); and high intention (scored 57-100 out of 100).

Each respondent was assigned to one of the three PMI categories. This allowed researchers to further explore the relationship between the independent variables and the PMI. Of the total sample, 26 per cent were defined as low, 33 per cent as medium, and 42 per cent as high intention.

The high intention clusters were then used to build a seven-segment model to support enhanced targeting for the acquisition and retention of young mobile talent in Alberta.

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4 The 32 independent variables included the construction of a series of statistically significant indices related to economy, urban vibrancy, active experience, transportation, explorer mindset, Alberta reputation. The construction of the indices followed the methodology adopted by Finch et al. (2015). The influence of these indices on specific cohorts of respondents contributed to the construction of the seven-segment model. For additional background on the construction of the indices and the segmentation model please contact Dr. David Finch at dfinch@mtroyal.ca

Finch, D., Hillenbrand, C., O'Reilly, N., & Varella, P. (2015). Psychological contracts and independent sales contractors: An examination of the predictors of contractor-level outcomes. Journal of Marketing Management, 31(17-18), 1924-1964.

Alberta's youth migration patterns have changed

Statistics Canada data are the basis of this section.

Youth migration generally follows the all-age interprovincial migration trends historically seen in Alberta. Figure 1 shows that there was a recent increase in youth out-migration in 2015-16 – led by the 25-29-year-old sub-cohort. Between 2015 and 2021, an annual average of 1,133 more individuals aged 25-29 left Alberta than came to the province. That amounts to a net out-migration of two per cent of the 25-29 age group over the period.

1,133

Between 2015 and 2021, an annual average of 1,133 more individuals aged 25-29 left Alberta than came to the province.

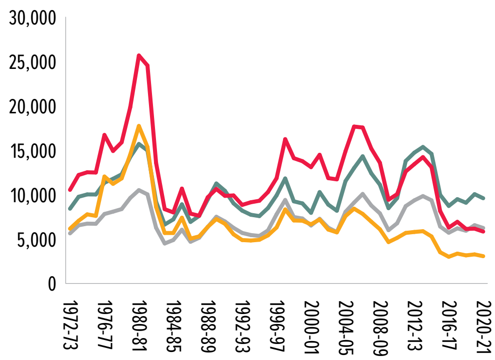
2%

Amounts to a net out-migration of two per cent of the 25-29 age group over the period.

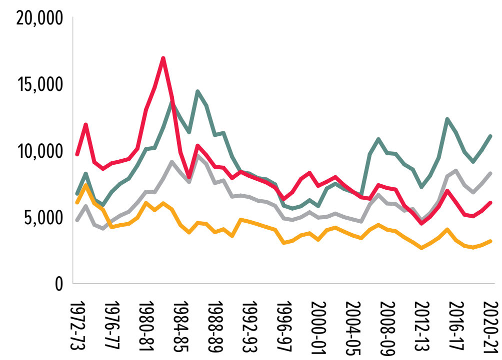
Figure 1

Alberta interprovincial youth migration by age segment

In-migration

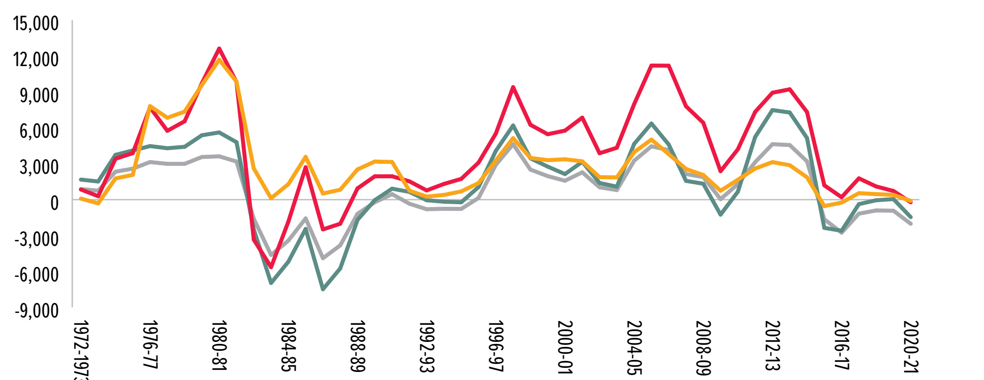


Out-migration



15 to 19 years **20 to 24 years** **25 to 29 years** **30 to 34 years**

Net youth migration

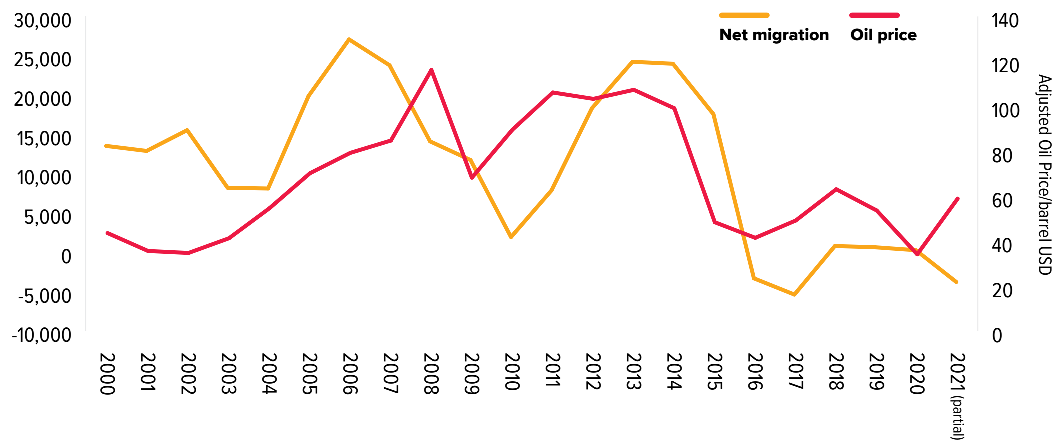


Source: Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0015-01

Alberta has traditionally imported young talent and the large declines since 2014 are concerning. It becomes more worrisome when the 30-34-year-old sub-cohort is included (as shown in the net-migration figure above). This sub-cohort tends to settle down in their new home – another cause for concern as they are less likely to return to Alberta than younger sub-cohorts. The post 2014 net out-migration has not been as large as during the early 1980's, but previously, when net youth migration turned downward, the solution was to wait for another oil boom (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Alberta's net youth migration and oil prices*



*Source: Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0015-01
https://inflationdata.com/articles/inflation-adjusted-prices/historical-crude-oil-prices-table/ [5]

Since the oil price crash of 2014, oil and gas production processes have become less labour intensive, major construction phases are over, and although prices hit a seven year high in early 2022, hiring is not expected to return to previous levels. The oil and gas sector will not drive net in-migration of youth in the future as it did in the past.

More youth are leaving and fewer are coming to Alberta – a major turnaround after decades of net in-migration.

Revised Alberta population model results

The change in the youth migration pattern compounds the issue of Alberta's already aging population. A quick look at the population forecasts shows how much.

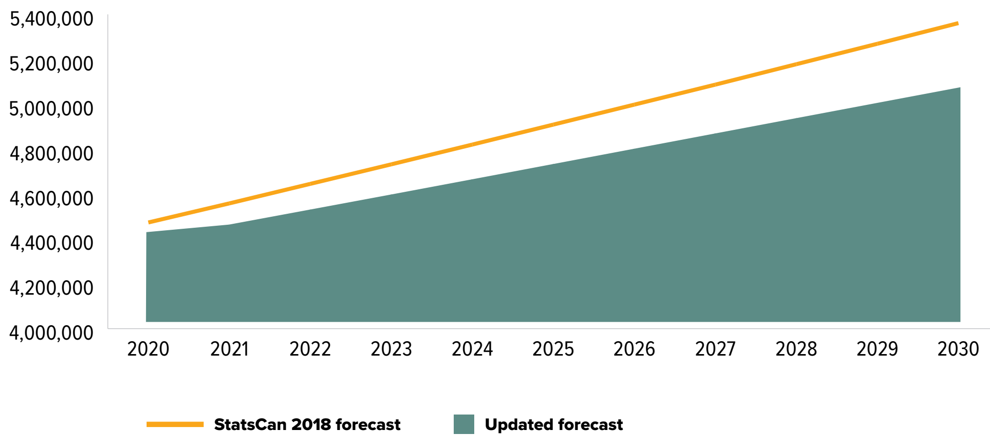
Statistics Canada's last population growth projections for Alberta were calculated in 2018. They looked at birth and death rates, immigration, emigration, non-permanent residents and interprovincial migration to make its population growth projections based on trends over subsets of the previous 25 years, which included some boom-and-bust periods.

[5] Prices are based on historical free market (stripper) oil prices of Illinois Crude as presented by Illinois Oil and Gas Association and Plains All American Oil. Typically, Illinois Crude is a couple of dollars cheaper per barrel than West Texas Intermediate (WTI) because it requires a bit more refining.

Derek Murray Consulting and Associates asked StatsCan to reset the baseline to 2020 actual population counts and to calculate a new population forecast using updated gross domestic product and business activity, cost of living relative to income, labour force demand, labour force growth and business activity as well as updated birth, death, immigration and migration numbers. The revised forecasts are based on 2016 – 2019 historical patterns that do not include the boom in 2013-2014. The revised population growth estimates are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

New projected growth for Alberta (2030)



The new forecast estimates that there will be 300,000 fewer people in Alberta by 2030 than the 2018 medium growth forecast (Table 1).

Table 1

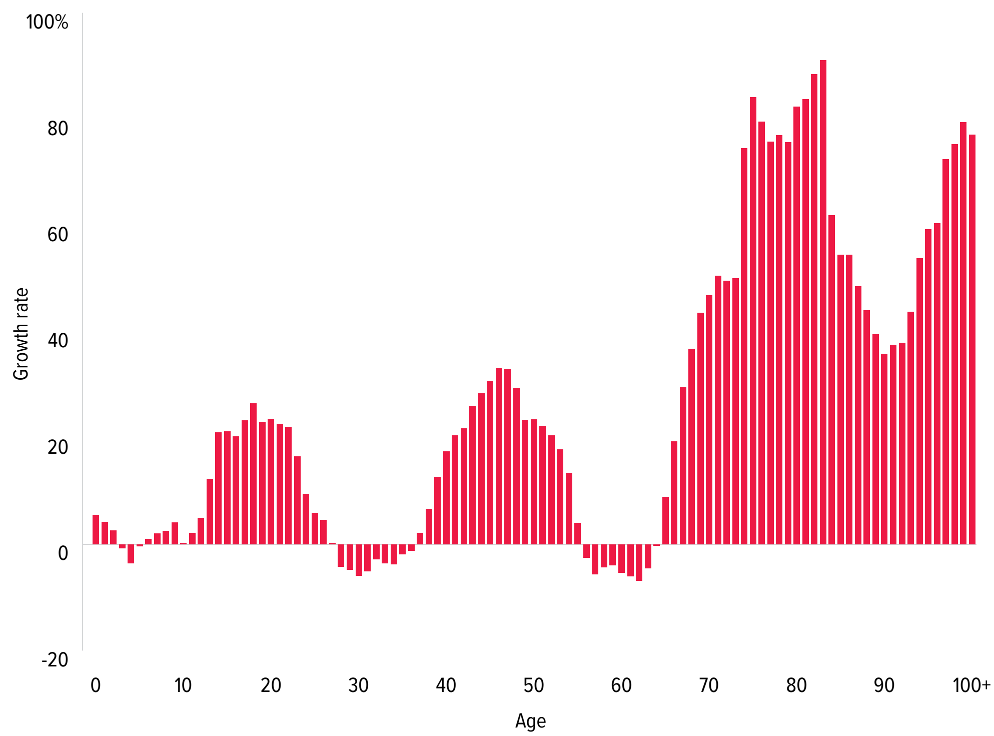
Updated growth projection compared to Statistics Canada 2018 forecast – Alberta (000s)

	2020	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**	**2026**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**
Updated forecast	4,422	4,455	4,522	4,589	4,656	4,724	4,793	4,861	4,929	4,997	5,065
2018 M1: Medium growth	4,473	4,558	4,645	4,732	4,820	4,909	4,998	5,087	5,178	5,269	5,361

Overall, Alberta will continue to grow at a pace above the national average. However, growth will not occur consistently at all age levels. The model shows by 2030 there will be significant growth in the 65+ age group relative to the 65 and under. The 74–83-year-old cohort will grow at a rate of over 80 per cent over the next ten years as the baby boom generation ages (Figure 4). [Author's Note: Census data, released February 9, 2022, shows Alberta's population on May 11, 2021, was 4,262,635; Alberta's population is growing at an even slower rate than the revised projected forecast.[6]]

Figure 4

How Alberta will age between 2020 and 2030



The forecast projects an average net negative interprovincial migration of 6,624 per year until 2030. As shown, the flow will be made up primarily of working-aged people and their children. Interestingly, the in-flow will include a few thousand retirees.

[6] Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Implications of an aging workforce

The project model's updated estimates show that the 6-25, 37-54, and 65-and-over age group will grow between 2020 and 2030 with negative population growth for the 26-36 age group.[7] In 2021 the Government of Alberta estimated that by 2046, one in five Albertan's will be over the age of 65.[8] The Government of Canada anticipates "new approaches might be required to make up for potential labour shortages, for example further integration of visible minorities, Indigenous, and people with activity limitations."[9] Immigration targets for the coming years also reflect increased need for economic immigrants and to address the immigration shortfall due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Targets are "401,000 permanent residents in 2021, 411,000 in 2022 and 421,000 in 2023."[10]

Industry is also taking note. BuildforceCanada estimates show that to fill new vacancies as well as the "expected retirement of 40,400 workers" between 2021 and 2030, the construction industry will "need to recruit 55,810 workers."[11] Oil and gas and other skilled trades also face a so-called "grey-wave."[12] While the pandemic may have briefly halted retirements because those set to retire faced economic uncertainty, RBC Economics predicted retirements will begin to pick up in late 2021.[13]

The province projects that eventually the labour force will balance. This balance will be achieved because of "continued soft economic conditions that will impact long-term unemployment; and higher post-secondary enrolment and graduation that will continue to boost the provincial workforce."[14] The federal government estimates that by 2036 in Alberta Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), there could be 4.6 individuals aged 15-and-over in the labour force for every person aged 65-and-over and not in the labour force. In 2017, this dependency ratio was 6.1 people to 1. In Alberta's non-CMA's, it is estimated the ratio will drop to 3.5 to 1 in 2036 from 5.1 to 1 in 2017.[15]

Alberta's population is aging quickly and this will be made worse if youth are not drawn to the province and also continue to leave.

Immigration is part of the solution to youth leaving and aging populations – but it is one that jurisdictions around the world pursue. Alberta must ensure that its immigration policies and strategies draw people of all ages, especially young adults with the skills needed by the economy and with intentions to stay and build families.

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7 Alberta Labour and Immigration. Alberta's Population. Alberta's Occupational Supply Outlook 2019-2028, November 2020. https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/53e89c83-e24e-4dcd-af41-ff4ad01501ad/resource/4c7f3d1a-fae0-4aa4-9973-b74fb15adf57/download/lbr-occ-supply-outlook-2019-28-indigenous-visible-minorities-people-with-disabilities.pdf

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12 Seskus, T. Growing grey wave set to crash on Alberta trades. CBC News, March 15, 2018. https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/oil-jobs-boomers-1.4576056

13 Agopsowicz, A. Will a return to pre-pandemic retirement and job quitting levels worsen emerging labour shortages in Canada? RBC Economics, July 12, 2021. https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/will-a-return-to-pre-pandemic-retirement-and-job-quitting-levels-worsen-emerging-labour-shortages-in-canada/?_ga=2.58032937.262026192.1626118138-2113611206.1626118138

14 Alberta Labour and Immigration. Executive Summary. Alberta's Occupational Outlook 2019-2028, October 2019. https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/8987e228-9ffa-4a2e-9f79-a9b869df2ccb/resource/502659ff-47fb-4ce3-94db-6a0c2f1f722c/download/lbr-albertas-occupational-outlook-2019-2028.pdf

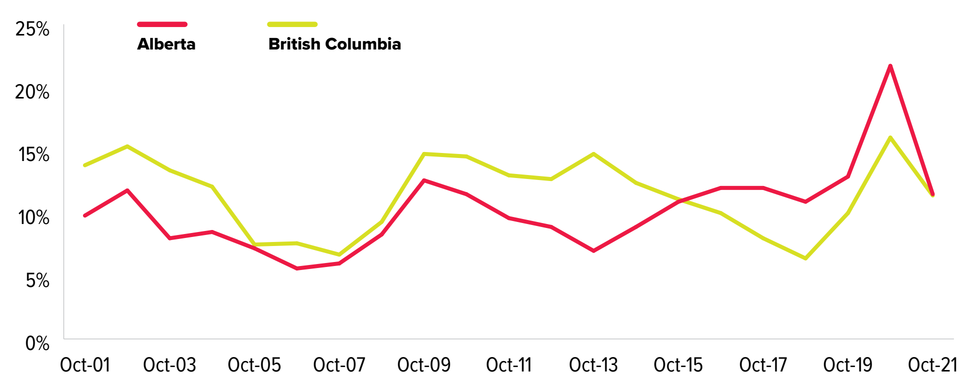
15 Martel, L. The labour force in Canada and its regions: Projections to 2036. Statistics Canada, March 20, 2019. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00004-eng.htm

Economic conditions

Youth migration turned negative for Alberta in 2015 as shown in Figure 1. That same year, youth unemployment in Alberta and B.C. was close to 11 per cent. But in 2016, while Alberta's youth unemployment grew to 12 per cent, B.C.'s dropped to 10 per cent and by 2018 the gap in rates was more than four per cent (Figure 5).

Figure 5

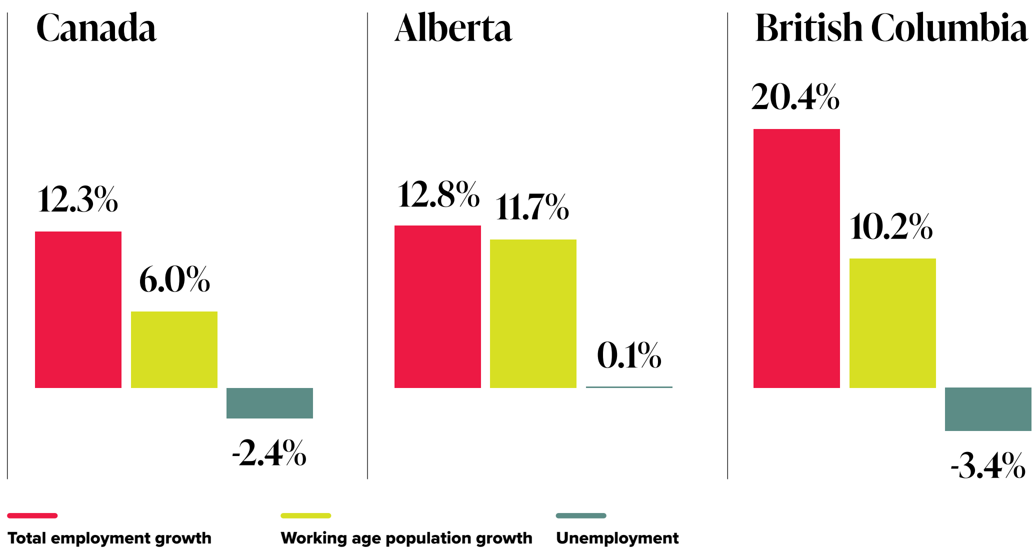
Youth unemployment rates over time (%)



Alberta's economy took a major hit in 2014-15 when oil prices crashed and youth moved to other provinces across the country. At the same time B.C.'s economy began to take off due to growth in real estate and residential and major projects construction.[16] 2015 saw the beginning of a net outflow from Alberta to B.C. that has lasted six years and has helped to boost that province's population. In Alberta between 2010 and 2019, employment and the population both grew at about the same rate. But in B.C. employment grew twice as fast as the population (Figure 6). This resulted in a drop in the unemployment rate in B.C. while there was no change in Alberta.

Figure 6

Changes in population growth and employment and unemployment rates (2020-2019)



Alberta's economy was beginning to recover in 2018-19 but was hit hard again (GDP was -8 per cent) during the first year of the pandemic when oil prices took another hit. As indicated by the number of job vacancies (Table 2), the Alberta economy is growing again, but not to the same extent as B.C's. The grey highlights indicate sectors where B.C. has more than twice as many job vacancies, and the green highlights indicate offers of higher wages in B.C. than in Alberta.

[16] https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2018081-eng.htm

Table 2

Job vacancies and wages offered by sector for Alberta and British Columbia (Q3 2021)

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

Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0325-01

Statistics Canada does not keep track of which jobs are most filled by youth aged 15-29. A look at the data collected by type of job gives information at the three-digit National Occupation Classification level. A look at the most recent data (Q3, 2021) shows that most job vacancies in both Alberta and B.C. were motor vehicle drivers, occupations in food and beverage preparation and service, paraprofessional services and cleaning. These available jobs are plentiful in both provinces. Alberta also had job openings for service supervisors and heavy equipment operators while B.C. had shortages of nurses and carpenters. Except for recent nursing graduates and carpentry journeypersons, this level of data does not provide enough information to determine if B.C. has more jobs of interest to young adults than Alberta.

B.C.'s lower youth unemployment rate and high number of available jobs is offset by much worse housing affordability (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3

Housing affordability – purchases

	2020 Avg. sale price* (full year)	2021 Avg. sale price* (January to June)	% of monthly income for mortgage
Ottawa	$465,903	$561,701	19%
Calgary	$252,181-$539,127	$266,868-$588,541	9.72%-21.44%
Victoria	$1,016,698	$1,199,028	47%
Toronto	$931,131	$1,089,536	47%
Vancouver	$1,061,323	$1,172,858	50%

Source: Housing Affordability in Canada: 2021 RE/MAX Report

Table 4

Housing affordability – rental rates for 2-bedroom apartments (2020)

City	Toronto	Calgary	Edmonton	Vancouver	Victoria
Rents	$1,206	$886	$881	$1,259	$1,019

There is some indication that youth may not be drawn to just the larger cities in B.C. Small cities and rural areas of Alberta have lost youth over the last few years, while youth have moved into small cities in B.C. (Table 5).

There have been recent changes in the Alberta fiscal situation – oil prices have risen and ranged between $80-$100 in February 2022, bringing windfalls into provincial coffers. As well, investments into clean technology and the emerging non-energy sectors, petrochemical manufacturing, transportation, renewable energy and agricultural infrastructure are diversifying the Alberta economy.[17]

[17] https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9c81a5a7-cdf1-49ad-a923-d1ecb42944e4/resource/7b308e01-13cc-4121-8b99-819dc7f816e9/download/2021-22-mid-year-fiscal-update-and-economic-statement.pdf

Table 5

How the provinces grew over the last 6 years (2015-2021) – urban and rural growth

	15-34	All
Alberta		
Rural	-7.0%	-0.2%
Lethbridge	6.2%	8.8%
Calgary	0.1%	9.1%
Edmonton	2.3%	9.8%
Small cities	-10.5%	1.3%
Province	-1.5%	6.6%
British Columbia		
Rural	-1.2%	4.8%
Kelowna	14.7%	12.3%
Abbotsford	10.8%	11.1%
Vancouver	7.9%	7.6%
Victoria	6.1%	8.7%
Small cities	9.7%	9.2%
Province	7.7%	8.0%

*Rural is defined as those areas outside census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations. **Small cities have a population of at least 10,000, but under 100,000. ***Cities are census metropolitan areas. Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0135-01

Job vacancies are growing in Alberta, and employers report increased difficulty in finding enough employees with the right skills, or levels of skills to meet demands.[18] Meanwhile unemployment remains higher than everywhere else in the country (except Newfoundland and Labrador). Alberta has both a labour surplus and labour and skills shortages, indicating there is opportunity in Alberta – for the people with the required skills.

The economic drivers of youth migration for the last few years have been mixed. Youth moved to where jobs were more plentiful but not necessarily to where housing was more affordable. The research in this study asked what else might drive youth migration.

For a more in depth look at the extent and economics of western youth migration, please see the companion report *The Young are Restless*, published by Canada West Foundation.

[18] Ibid; https://www.businesscouncilab.com/competitive-and-sustainable-economy/alberta-businesses-are-optimistic-november-business-expectations-survey-results/; Labour shortages are back with a vengeance, putting small business recovery at risk | CFIB (cfib-fcei.ca)

Choosing "place"

Previous research shows that the selection of place is one of life's most fundamental decisions.[19] While economic reasons are understood to be a main driver of migration, quality of life factors also drive migration. A job offer that provides more money and career advancement may not be attractive if the job seeker does not perceive the job's location to offer a good quality of life.

An individual's personal values frame their definition of quality of life which incorporates three dimensions:

01

Economy

The role employment and affordability play in defining quality of life.

02

Place

The role tangible and intangible attributes play in defining quality of life.

03

People

The role of friends and family in defining quality of life.[20]

Like any other purchasing decision, how an individual prioritizes and weighs the importance of each of these quality-of-life factors frames their mobility attitudes and intentions.

[19] Lazzeretti, L., & Capone, F. (2016). How proximity matters in innovation networks dynamics along the cluster evolution. A study of the high technology applied to cultural goods. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5855-5865; Broekel, T., & Boschma, R. (2012). Knowledge networks in the Dutch aviation industry: the proximity paradox. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 12(2), 409-433; Funk, R. J. (2014). Making the most of where you are: Geography, networks, and innovation in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 193-222.

[20] Glaeser, E. L., & Gottlieb, J. D. (2016). Urban resurgence and the consumer city. Urban Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland), 43(8), 1275–1299. https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980600775683

The influence of economy

This study's survey results found that the "importance of career opportunities" outweighed "family" and "urban vibrancy." Economic factors are foundational in defining quality of life for young people, because employment opportunities provide essential financial capacity.

A City of Calgary study found 60 per cent of those 18-24 defined a new job opportunity as the primary driver for relocating (compared to 38 per cent for those 25 and older).[21]

This does not suggest non-economic quality of life factors are not valued, rather it suggests that economic factors are essential enablers to broader quality of life goals.

The influence of place

One of the most significant factors that emerged in both the focus groups and the quantitative survey is the role of place (i.e., where a person currently lives) in anchoring attitudes. In an Alberta context, the data demonstrates a significant divergence between urban and rural Albertans on identity and intentions. Place appears to frame participants' social values and provides a lens to define quality of life. While rural Albertans identify with their province and define themselves as Albertans, urban Albertans (Calgarians in particular) identify with their city and define themselves as Calgarians, which says something about the strength of Calgary as a place.

Moreover, urban Albertans have far greater intentions of moving outside Alberta, namely to other large cities, whereas the relocation intentions of rural Albertans remain within the province, primarily to Calgary and Edmonton. Respondents in both Vancouver and Toronto have their own distinct characteristics. For example, 89 per cent of respondents in Vancouver and 84 per cent of respondents in Toronto stated they "love where they live." In comparison, this rate was 80 per cent, 74 per cent and 64 per cent for Calgary, Edmonton and northern Alberta respectively. Place also contributes to factors defining quality of life such as importance of transportation, urban vibrancy and active experiences. Finally, place influences important contextual factors such as an individual's socio-economic characteristics, employment and family mobility trends.

The influence of people

Consistent with previous labour mobility research, personal relationships emerged as the central anchor for place. In most cases this was framed by family and friends. However, in many cases the role of people is also framed by the value of professional networks. Participants recognized that these networks are an investment and play an important role in achieving their professional goals. The theme of people also incorporates a broader goal of finding a place where they feel they belong. This sense of belonging was often framed by people who shared values associated with active living, diversity and environmental protection.

[21] This discussion extends between social identity, self-categorization and organizational identification. Turner et al. (1987), Grieve and Hogg (1999), Hogg and Terry (2000), Patchen (1970), Ashforth, Rogers & Corley (2010), Riketta (2005).

The link between social identity and place emerged as a key insight in both the focus groups and in the survey data. For most people, where they live is not just a place but an extension of their own identity.

The intersection of social identity and place reputation

The survey showed that choice of place is influenced by the interaction of an individual's perception of quality of life in terms of people, place, economy, life stage and the influence of social identity and reputation.

The link between social identity and place emerged as a key insight in both the focus groups and in the survey data. For most people, where they live is not just a place but an extension of their own identity. If you identify as a tech entrepreneur, you may think of yourself (project yourself) as belonging in Silicon Valley. If you identify with progressive social values, you may project yourself as a good fit in Vancouver.

This projection is called social identity and it is a mechanism used to rationalize one's place in the world.[22] The role of social identity is well established in consumer marketing and branding in categories ranging from automotive to technology.[23] Similarly, understanding how social identity influences a young person's choice of place is critical to establishing strategies to attract and retain talent. Therefore, exploring how social identity interacts with place reputation is an important consideration.

Reputation is in the eye of the beholder. In this context, how a young person perceives a place is essential. Whether this perception reflects reality is secondary. Therefore, how young talent perceive a city or province will influence mobility choices. Perception is the outcome of both direct and indirect engagement with a place. This may come from someone's direct and personal experience, or it may be the outcome of different forms of media (social or mass).

[22] Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 239-263.

[23] Lam, S. K., Ahearne, M., Hu, Y., & Schillewaert, N. (2010). Resistance to brand switching when a radically new brand is introduced: A social identity theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 128-146; Glance, D. (2014). The psychology behind Apple's fans. Blind loyalty or just wanting to belong? The Conversation. Available at https://theconversation.com/the-psychology-behind-apples-fans-blind-loyalty-or-just-wanting-to-belong-31671

Youth mobility intentions

This section discusses the intentions of youth to move into or out of Alberta and why. Data comes from the survey. The Talent Mobility Framework (Figure 7) was developed from analysis of the focus group and survey results including Tables 6 and 7.

Figure 7

Talent mobility framework

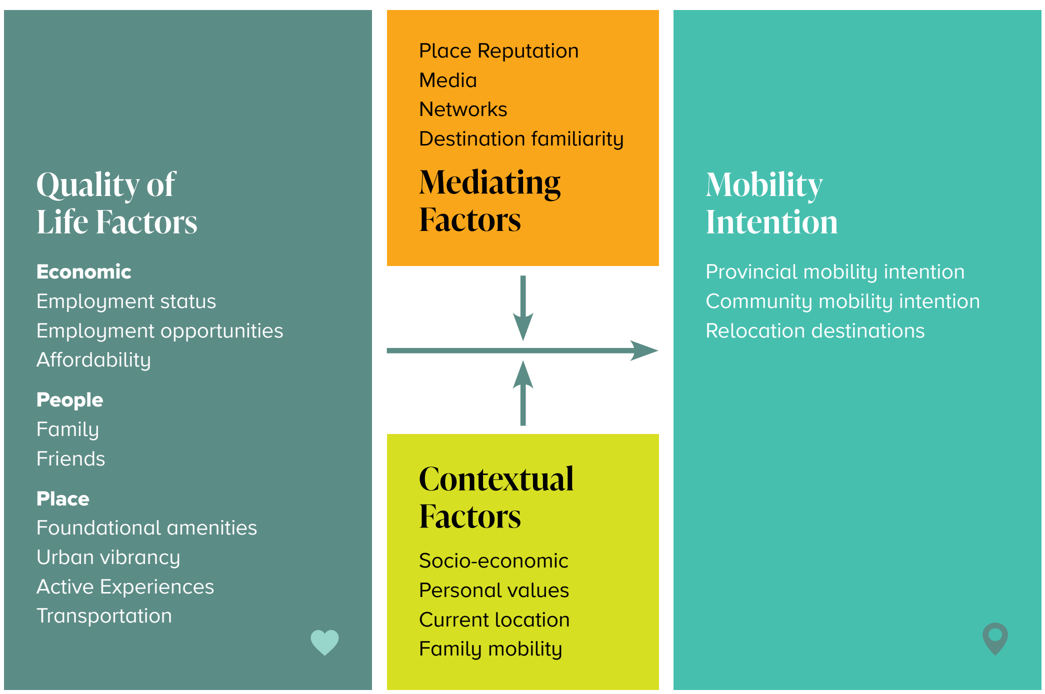


Table 6

Likelihood survey respondents would consider leaving their home province

		Calgary	Edmonton	Northern Alberta	Central Alberta	Southern Alberta	Vancouver	Toronto
I would move from the province I live in:	**For a better quality of life**	65%	67%	64%	55%	52%	51%	49%
	For a specific job offer	67%	68%	51%	46%	51%	48%	51%
	For better employment opportunities	66%	64%	56%	52%	48%	48%	46%
	To be closer to family	28%	29%	31%	19%	29%	31%	29%

Quality of life factors are weighed along with economic factors in Table 7.

Table 7

Factors considered important in considering a move to a location

		Consider very important
Economic Factors	Career opportunities	93%
	Lower cost of living/housing costs	88%
	Diverse economy	82%
Place Factors	Clean and safe community	96%
	Easy city/community to get around in	92%
	Inclusive city/community – welcoming of everyone	87%
	Easy access in and out of the city/community	87%
	Close to nature/natural areas	86%
	Diverse restaurants and entertainment options	80%
	Education/learning opportunities for continual growth	79%
	Ideal weather conditions	76%
	Reputation of region	76%
People Factors	Proximity to professional network	75%

Economic factors

When asked about Alberta's economic situation, respondents replied as follows (Table 8):

Table 8

Survey respondents who agree statements about Alberta are accurate – economic factors

	Albertans	Vancouver and Toronto familiar with Alberta	Vancouver and Toronto unfamiliar with Alberta
Alberta offers education/training opportunities for me to grow and enhance my skills	76%	49%	30%
Alberta has a low cost of living (e.g. housing, taxes)	56%	64%	43%
Alberta offers the same opportunities for working/living as other major cities	64%	46%	25%
Alberta offers opportunity for me to move up within my field	64%	34%	22%
Alberta has a diverse economy	34%	31%	21%

When asked where they might search for a new job in the next year, youth responded as shown in Table 9. Those in Vancouver and Toronto were less likely to say that they would look outside their current community for employment opportunities within the next year than youth in Alberta.

Table 9

Where survey respondents might consider employment opportunity within next year

		Calgary	Edmonton	North Alberta	Central Alberta	South Alberta	Vancouver	Toronto
Likelihood to consider employment opportunity by location within next year:	**In your current city/community**	47%	51%	32%	36%	34%	55%	55%
	Toronto	16%	9%	4%	2%	2%	18%	–
	Ottawa	10%	8%	4%	2%	2%	7%	14%
	Vancouver	22%	17%	6%	5%	10%	–	13%
	Edmonton	11%	–	21%	12%	8%	5%	6%
	Calgary	–	22%	17%	11%	22%	9%	6%
	Anywhere in Alberta	20%	20%	14%	22%	16%	4%	4%
	Somewhere else	11%	8%	12%	6%	9%	6%	8%
	Will not be looking for new employment opportunities within the next year	36%	32%	39%	47%	47%	34%	34%

The changing perception of Alberta's major industry

The focus groups found that one of Alberta's historical strengths, the oil and gas sector, is now considered one of the most significant liabilities among young adults. The liability is rooted in their strong commitment to fight climate change and the view that reducing fossil fuel consumption is an essential step. The survey also supports this view of Alberta as oil and gas dominating the economy. When asked what are the first words that come to mind when thinking about Alberta, 29 per cent of those outside Alberta and 18 per cent of Albertan youth gave oil and gas as their number one response.

A career in oil and gas was not an option for most participants. Moreover, the dominance of this sector in the provincial narrative contributes to an overriding perception that most professional pathways in Alberta lead to the oil and gas sector. When asked what percentage of Albertans work directly in oil and gas extraction, participants consistently estimated around 40 per cent, about six times higher than reality. As a result, when asked about professional pathways in other sectors, many participants simply assumed they would need to leave Alberta to pursue careers in areas ranging from digital, arts and finance.

Place factors

The link between social identity and place emerged as a key insight in both the focus groups and in the survey data. The results suggest that young people in cities are far more likely to identify with their city than their country. Very few identify with their province. The survey gives some interesting insight into how Alberta youth identify with their communities and migration potential. Respondents in Calgary were more likely to associate with their city or country first rather than their province like respondents from other regions of Alberta. Respondents in other major centres hardly identify with their province at all (Table 10).

Table 10

How respondents identify their place of belonging – place factors

		Calgary	Edmonton	Northern Alberta	Central Alberta	Southern Alberta	Vancouver	Toronto
Thinking about the region you relate to most; how would you best describe yourself on a day-to-day basis?	**The city/community I live in**	49%	28%	12%	5%	16%	41%	54%
	The country I live in	37%	39%	31%	33%	29%	40%	33%
	The province I live in	13%	24%	47%	59%	41%	10%	6%
	None of the above, I don't really associate with any	7%	9%	10%	4%	14%	8%	7%

Respondents in Calgary relate less strongly with their province and more strongly with their city than other Albertans. Calgary has struggled to establish and maintain an identity in comparison to other municipalities in the province.[24] It has served as the white-collar business centre for a province with an economy that has been driven by oil and gas production and agriculture. The history and context of the city is different than that of Edmonton, Lethbridge and rural areas. Calgary has also suffered the most office-based job losses compared to the rest of the province as management shifts and ownership transfers which may contribute to the less positive perspective on the sector compared to the rest of the province.[25] This may be why Calgarians are more likely to leave the province for better job opportunities compared to other Alberta respondents.

With the rise of remote work and the increase in flexible work opportunities, particularly since the pandemic, it will be interesting to see how families make relocation decisions if proximity to employment is not a factor. Historically, remote work opportunities have only been available to those who work in the creative sector, those who are in knowledge economy type work and don't need to work 9-5, or those in public sector roles as local governments need employees.[26] Whether COVID-19 sees a permanent increase in counter-urbanization for these and other types of workers remains to be seen.

Vibrancy

In choosing place, the survey results also show that respondents consider traffic and transit, tax rates, politics and a vibrant downtown area as important, while nightlife and sports are lower in importance (Table 11).

Table 11

Vibrancy factors considered important when choosing place*

Factor	Respondents	Factor	Respondents
Low traffic congestion	71%	Creative arts and culture scene	61%
Quality of transit	71%	Active festival/major events scene	56%
Low tax rates	69%	Participate in organized sport/ recreational activities	47%
High quality/recognized schools	67%	Vibrant nightlife	41%
Political views of a region	64%	Attend professional sports	30%
Vibrant downtown	63%		

*Respondents who consider factors very important or important

24 Klingbeil, C. Signs of the times: Calgary's evolving identity. *CBC News*, February 19, 2017. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/signs-welcome-1.3708892

25 Varcoe, C. Varcoe: Oilpatch workers ponder leaving sector as megamerger triggers layoffs. Calgary Herald, October 28, 2020. https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/varcoe-oilpatch-workers-ponder-leaving-sector-as-megamerger-triggers-layoffs

26 Sandow, E. and Lundholm, E. Which families move out from metropolitan areas? Counterurban migration and professions in Sweden. *European Urban and Regional Studies 2020*, Vol. 27(3) 276–289. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776419893017

People factors

Being close to family and friends is an important factor to consider but not a major factor in the likelihood to move.

- 74 per cent of respondents said it was important to consider proximity to family when considering a location, but only 35 per cent said that they would be likely to consider moving out of the province in which they live to be closer to family.
- 74 per cent of respondents said it was important to consider proximity to friends when considering a location, but only 25 per cent said that they would be likely to consider moving out of the province in which they live to be closer to friends.

In addition, 42 per cent of younger respondents are influenced to consider moving because they see others leaving. Overall that number was 35 per cent.

As shown in Table 12, respondents unfamiliar with Alberta, and even many Albertans, do not understand how diverse the population is (Calgary is the third most diverse city in the country).[27]

Table 12

Survey respondents who agree statements about Alberta are accurate – people factors

	Albertans	Vancouver & Toronto familiar with Alberta	Vancouver & Toronto unfamiliar with Alberta
Alberta seems to attract people who move more than others	58%	49%	26%
Alberta has a diverse population and international outlook	54%	36%	21%

Other factors

The link between social identity and place emerged as a key insight in both the focus groups and in the survey data.

Place reputation
Youth in Calgary, Edmonton and northern Alberta are less likely to agree that where you live says a lot about you (56, 54 and 45 per cent respectively) than youth in Vancouver and Toronto (70 and 68 per cent respectively).

Only 10 per cent of youth in Vancouver or Toronto would consider moving to take a job in Alberta.

[27] Population | Life in Calgary https://www.lifeincalgary.ca/about-calgary/population

Favourability perceptions of Alberta (by Albertans and those outside of Alberta) are relatively low compared to British Columbia and Ontario. Overall, surveyed respondents (including a substantial portion of those in Alberta) hold a much more favourable perception of Vancouver, Toronto and Europe as relocation destinations. For example, 44 per cent of respondents from outside of Alberta state they would never consider moving to Calgary and 52 per cent would never consider moving to Edmonton.

Media
The survey results also point to the importance of family and friends in obtaining information (Table 13).

Table 13

Preferred information sources for respondents

		Alberta	Vancouver and Toronto
Respondents get their information from:	**Friends and family**	73%	73%
	Online communities (e.g. Reddit)	57%	59%
	Social media	56%	58%
	Local News	48%	47%
	National news	38%	37%
	Other	10%	6%

Social identity contributes to a broader worldview and is reinforced through echo-chambers – young adults do not pay as much attention to national news as to their social media feeds. This is evidenced in measures of the influence other people moving has on mobility intentions. As noted above, 42 per cent of younger respondents are influenced to consider moving because they see others leaving. This principle of social contagion is a critical factor that accelerates the conversion of intention to behaviour.

Networks
Not surprisingly, networks (either personal or social) play an anchoring role. In the context of those from outside of Alberta, networks help fill the significant knowledge gap identified in the survey. For those inside Alberta, networks and echo-chambers reinforce dominant values and attitudes, while insulating opposing views. This can result in a social tipping point within networks.[28]
The implications for young talent mobility are that attitudes and behaviours associated with place may be anchored to the dominant narrative of a social group, regardless of its factual accuracy. Therefore, the perceptions of young adults are as important as the facts.[29]

Just over half of Alberta respondents (56%) say it is better to stay in one city to have an established network, whereas 63% in other markets say the same thing.

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28 Rogers, E. M. (2010). *Diffusion of innovations*. Simon and Schuster; Granovetter, M., & Soong, R. (1988). Threshold models of diversity: Chinese restaurants, residential segregation, and the spiral of silence. *Sociological Methodology*, 69-104; Spohr, D. (2017). Fake news and ideological polarization: Filter bubbles and selective exposure on social media. *Business Information Review*, 34(3), 150-160.

29 Why Calgary? Exploring the Reputation – Reality Gap available at: https://cityxlab.squarespace.com/s/Why-Calgary-Reputation-Reality-Gap-Final.pdf

Destination familiarity
Many respondents in Vancouver and Toronto are not familiar with Alberta – only 29 per cent said they had a firm understanding of the province.

Not surprisingly, familiarity is a significant predictor of intentions towards Alberta. Those who are familiar with Alberta are more than twice as likely to consider it as a relocation destination. Simply put, those who perceive they are familiar with the province see Alberta much more positively than those who do not.

Mobility intention

Respondents in Alberta are only slightly more interested in moving than their counterparts in Vancouver and Toronto. The difference is that Albertans are less likely to move within their province and more likely to move away from their province. The data identified differences across the three age cohorts, with the youngest cohort (18-24) having much higher intention of inter-provincial mobility compared to the older two age cohorts. (Note: in the past, the youngest cohort had the lowest actual outmigration of all three cohorts – see Figure 1.)

Women and people with lower family incomes are also more likely to move (Table 14). The degree to which respondents considered moving decreases as income increases, but this is confounded with income increasing with age as older respondents are less interested in moving than younger ones.

Table 14

Likelihood to consider moving by age, gender and income in the next 3-5 years

Age and gender	18 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 45	Male	Female	Overall likelihood
The city/ community I live in	76%	55%	43%	49%	62%	57%
The province I live in	57%	45%	32%	38%	46%	44%

Family income	<$60K	$60K-$100K	$100K-$150K	$150K+	Prefer not to say	Overall likelihood
The city/ community I live in	69%	58%	44%	49%	65%	57%
The province I live in	53%	47%	28%	39%	49%	44%

One value that respondents from within and outside of Alberta agreed on is that they work to live not live to work (86% overall).

Relocation destinations

Albertans considering a move within Alberta would choose to move to Calgary over Edmonton. Calgarians would choose Vancouver, Europe and the U.S. over anywhere else in Canada. (Table 15).

Table 15

Likelihood for surveyed Alberta youth to move within 3 to 5 years

	Current Location	Calgary	Edmonton	Northern Alberta	Central Alberta	Southern Alberta	Vancouver	Toronto
Would consider moving to:	**Vancouver**	74%	69%	57%	39%	53%	–	75%
	Europe	71%	66%	62%	49%	57%	63%	62%
	Calgary	–	71%	78%	62%	68%	41%	37%
	United States	55%	45%	44%	48%	41%	50%	48%
	Toronto	52%	46%	38%	22%	24%	57%	–
	Ottawa	49%	47%	42%	27%	35%	36%	55%
	Montreal	49%	45%	36%	21%	28%	45%	52%
	Edmonton	38%	–	79%	52%	52%	30%	22%
	Asia-Pacific	39%	33%	35%	26%	26%	38%	34%
	Regina	15%	16%	19%	26%	22%	12%	8%
	Middle East	12%	10%	12%	12%	12%	10%	11%

Contextual factors

Contextual factors in the framework include values. One value that respondents from within and outside of Alberta agreed on is that they work to live not live to work (86% overall). Other values are evident in the factors that respondents consider important in finding their place (Tables 6, 7 and 11). Individuals put different weight on these values in line with their own preferences. The specific values of groups of respondents with high mobility intention become evident through the segmentation analysis, as shown in the next section.

Northern Albertans are most likely to move out of their community and Calgarians are the most likely to move out of province.

Current location

Youth everywhere are likely to be mobile, but of the respondents in this study, northern Albertans are most likely to move out of their community and Calgarians are the most likely to move out of province (Table 16).

Table 16

Likelihood of moving by location – moving intentions

		Calgary	Edmonton	North Alberta	Central Alberta	Southern Alberta	Vancouver	Toronto	Overall likelihood
Likelihood to move from:	**The city/ community I live in**	61%	57%	65%	49%	47%	61%	59%	59%
	The province I live in	62%	42%	43%	25%	33%	39%	31%	40%

*Respondents very likely or fairly likely to move

Family mobility

Youth with a history of moving – themselves or with their family – are more likely to consider moving again.

Youth with high mobility intentions

This section includes only respondents with a high intention to move score.

Table 17

The seven segmentation profiles of those most likely to move (*PMI – Provincial Mobility Intention)

	01 **Toronto & Vancouver movers**	02 **Alberta big city movers**	03 **Rural Alberta movers**	04 **Second generation movers**
Summary	Young people living in Toronto & Vancouver. High PMI*.	Young people living in Calgary or Edmonton. High PMI.	Young people in rural Alberta. High PMI.	Young people whose parents relocated to Canada. High PMI.
Key Drivers	• Diverse career opportunities • Professional networks • Inclusivity is foundational • Urban vibrancy	• Diverse career pathways • Identify with their city • Inclusivity • Urban vibrancy	• They seek diverse career pathways and feel constrained by local options • Inclusivity • Urban vibrancy	• Ethnic diversity and inclusivity • Urban vibrancy • Fear of missing out • Torn to leave their city/tied to family
Opportunity	Talent acquisition	Talent retention	Talent retention	Talent acquisition (Calgary and Edmonton) and retention (rural Alberta).

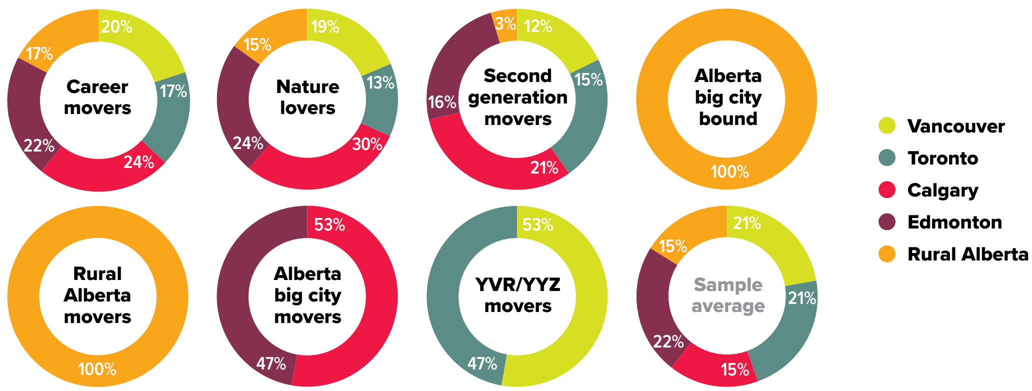
	05 **Alberta big city bound**	06 **Nature lovers**	07 **Career movers**
Summary	Rural Albertans. High to medium intention of moving to Calgary and/or Edmonton.	Access to nature and recreation important Vancouver and Calgary potential destinations. High PMI.	Intent to search for a new job within next year. Career drivers very important. High PMI.
Key Drivers	• New and diverse career opportunities • Feel constrained; not drawn to large out-of-province metropolitan centres • Deep Alberta identity with friends and family in Calgary and Edmonton	• Seek balance • Career is important • Access to outdoor recreation • Progressive and inclusive • Vancouver is their dream	• Diverse career opportunities • Build roots and professional network • Value urban amenities, but they are secondary to career
Opportunity	Talent acquisition (Calgary and Edmonton) and retention (rural Alberta)	Talent acquisition and retention	Talent acquisition and retention

What can be learned from the segments?

Location context plays an important role in understanding mobility intentions
Career movers with strong mobility intentions were equally distributed across all surveyed regions while nature lovers with strong mobility intentions were less likely to be in Toronto. Second generation youth with strong mobility intentions were more prevalent in Calgary and Edmonton compared to the other regions (Figure 8).

Figure 8

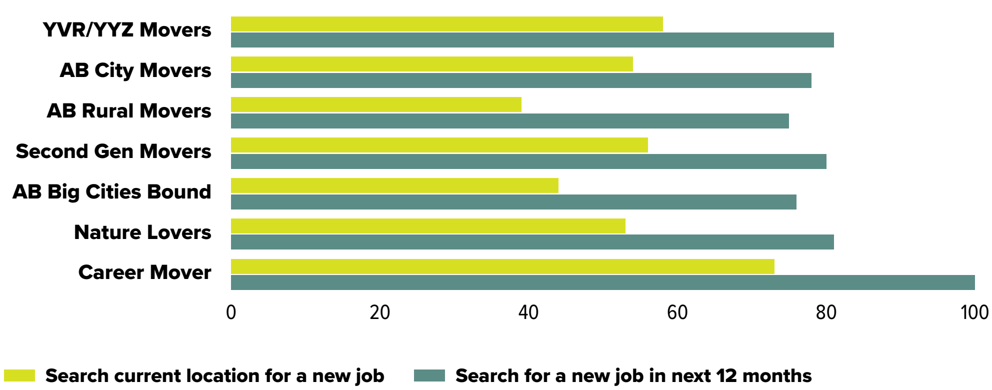
Current location (%)



Career
Figure 9 shows the significant role that career plays in talent mobility. These high mobility intention respondents also had higher overall job search intention than intention to search in their current location. Career movers lead all segments as they are currently searching for a new job. All segments expect to search for a new job within the next twelve months.

Figure 9

Job search intention (score 0-100)

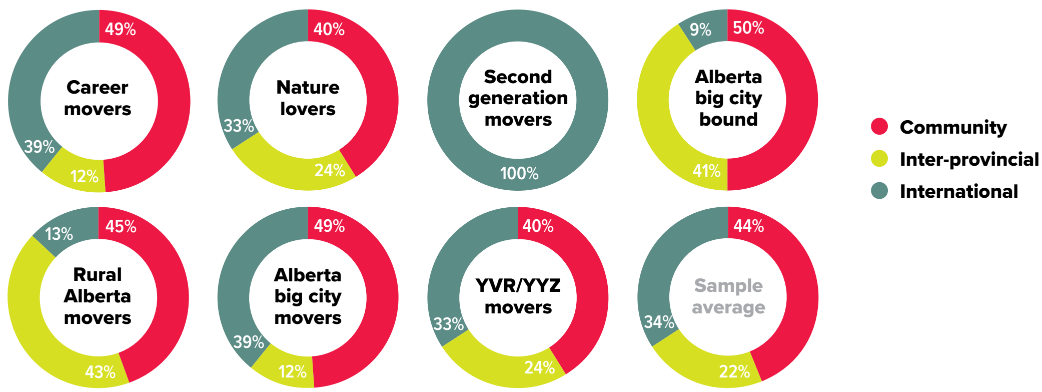


Parental history of relocation influences whether youth will move again

Parental relocation varies significantly by segment. The most important variation is associated with inter-provincial and international relocation. Not surprisingly, international relocation is concentrated in urban segments. In general, respondents with a history of moving beyond their community have a high mobility intention. In an Alberta context, this is important as two times more Albertan respondents report that their parents moved from another province compared to those outside of Alberta (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Parental history of moving



Quality of life factors with economic components influence movement decisions

Figure 11 considers three quality of life factors which can affect economic opportunity and scores them accordingly for each segment. In all cases, the economy index (which includes affordability) and importance of career opportunities score extremely high. The Career Mover segment leads all segments for the economy index and importance of career opportunities. The perceived value of professional networks is relatively consistent in all segments but is lower in segments anchored in rural Alberta.

Figure 11

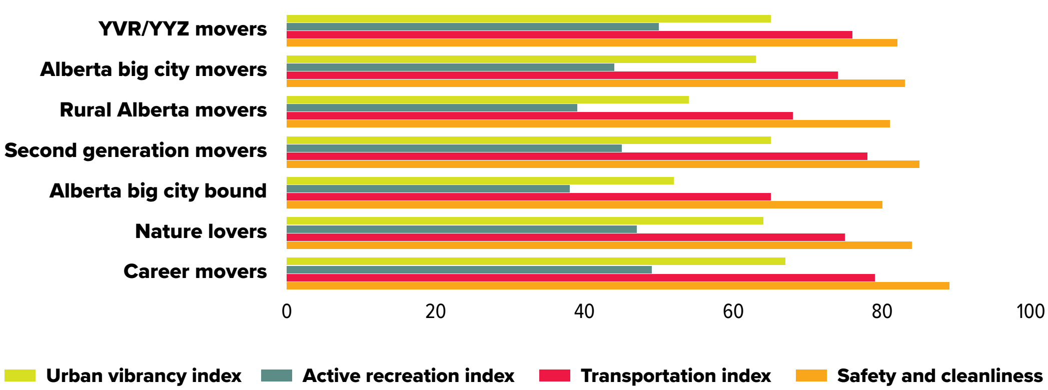
Economic opportunity quality of life factors (score 0-100)

Safety and cleanliness lead in terms of community fundamentals for priority

Figure 12 considers four community fundamentals (urban vibrancy, active recreation, transportation and safety and cleanliness) related to quality of life and scores them accordingly for each segment. In all segments, safety and cleanliness are table stakes. Similarly, transportation is viewed as an important factor in all segments, but is lower for those in rural segments. Urban vibrancy is also a crucial factor but like transportation is lower in rural segments. Active recreation is the lowest of all community fundamental factors.

Figure 12

Importance of community fundamentals

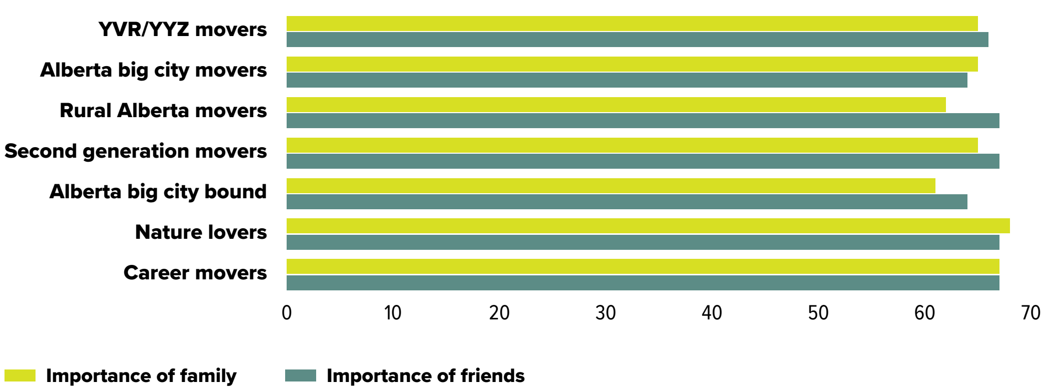


Friends and family

Rural and second-generation segments score friends significantly higher than family (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Importance of friends and family across segments



Career opportunities and safe and clean communities are the primary quality of life drivers for all youth segments.

Quality of life summary
Career opportunities and safe and clean communities are the primary quality of life drivers for all youth segments.

Table 18 provides a colour coded summary of the top and bottom individual ranked place drivers by segment. Both career opportunities and safe and clean are the two leading place drivers for all segments. The other leading drivers include inclusivity and affordability. Similarly, the bottom five have consistencies, with professional sports and access to recreation having the lowest rank. The difference between the top and bottom rankings provides additional guidance in understanding the unique characteristics of each segment. For example, affordability ranks higher in Vancouver and Toronto Movers as this segment is anchored in more expensive locations. In contrast, Alberta Big City Movers and Alberta Big City Bound both identify access to nature as one of their top five drivers.

Table 18

Quality of life drivers by segment (top and bottom)

	YVR/YYZ movers	Alberta big city movers	Rural Alberta movers	Second generation movers	Career movers	Nature lovers	Alberta big city bound
Top five by segment	Career opportunities	Career opportunities	Career opportunities	Career opportunities	Career opportunities	Career opportunities	Career opportunities
	Safe & clean	Safe & clean	Safe & clean	Safe & clean	Safe & clean	Safe & clean	Safe & clean
	Affordable	Inclusive	Inclusive	Inclusive	Diverse economy	Affordable	Inclusive
	Inclusive	Affordable	Affordable	Easy commute	Affordable	Inclusive	Affordable
	Easy access	Access to nature	Easy commute	Affordable	Inclusive	Easy commute	Access to nature
Bottom five by segment	Festivals	Schools	Vibrant downtown	Political views	Festivals	Political views	Vibrant downtown
	Political views	Festivals	Festivals	Festivals	Political views	Festivals	Festivals
	Night life	Night life	Recreation	Night life	Night life	Night life	Recreation
	Recreation	Recreation	Night life	Recreation	Recreation	Recreation	Night life
	Professional sports	Professional sports	Professional sports	Professional sports	Professional sports	Professional sports	Professional sports

All youth segments say they work to live.

Values summary
All youth segments say they work to live.

Table 19 provides a colour coded rank order of personal values by segment. All segments score the value of "work to live, not live to work" as the leading value. However, after that there are differences in the rank order. For example, Vancouver and Toronto Movers, Second Generation Movers and Career Movers rank as second "love where they live," but this sits lower for both Alberta-only segments. Similarly, "live where they live because of their job" is the lowest ranked factor for all segments, except those in rural Alberta.

Interestingly, only the YVR/YYZ movers ranked "place says a lot about you" higher than "job says a lot about you." Place matters to these respondents.

Table 19

Personal value drivers by segment

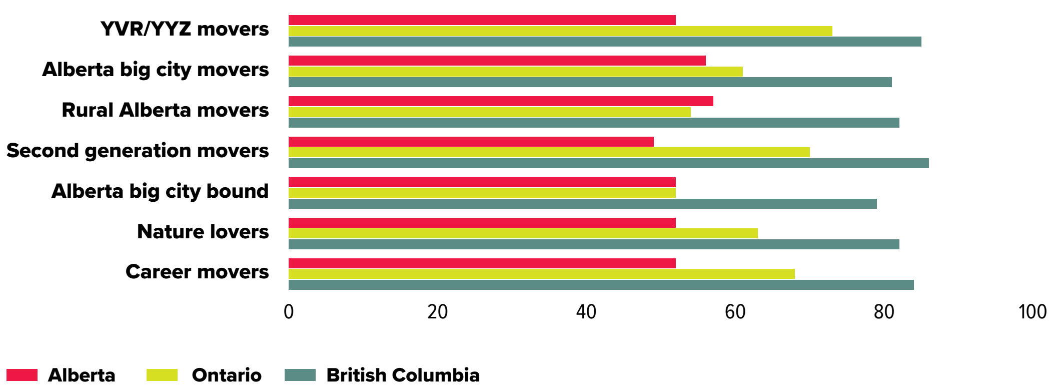
YVR/YYZ movers	Alberta big city movers	Rural Alberta movers	Second generation movers	Career movers	Nature lovers	Alberta big city bound
Work to live	Work to live	Work to live	Work to live	Work to live	Work to live	Work to live
Love where they live	Homebody	Homebody	Love where they live	Love where they live	Homebody	Homebody
Adapt to environment	Job says a lot about you	Job says a lot about you	Homebody	Homebody	Job says a lot about you	Job says a lot about you
Place says a lot about you	Love where they live	Live where they live because of their job	Job says a lot about you	Job says a lot about you	Love where they live	Live where they live because of their job
Homebody	Place says a lot about you	Adapt to environment	Adapt to environment	Adapt to environment	Adapt to environment	Love where they live
Job says a lot about you	Adapt to environment	Love where they live	Place says a lot about you	Place says a lot about you	Place says a lot about you	Adapt to environment
Live where they live because of their job	Live where they live because of their job	Place says a lot about you	Live where they live because of their job	Live where they live because of their job	Live where they live because of their job	Place says a lot about you

Provincial favourability: Based on what they have read and heard, all youth segments have favorable views of British Columbia. Alberta youth outside Edmonton and Calgary are more likely to see Alberta as favorable compared to Ontario.

Figure 14 scores the favorability of provinces among the segments. B.C. leads all segments, however, the favorability of Ontario and Alberta fluctuates between second and third depending on the segment. Alberta is selected over Ontario by Alberta Big City Bound, Alberta Rural Movers and Alberta Big City Movers. Though consistently lower than B.C., Ontario's favourability among Career Movers, Second Generation Movers, and Vancouver and Toronto Movers stands out.

Figure 14

Provincial favorability (scored 0-100)



Alberta's reputation: Those living within Alberta were more likely to express the view of Alberta as intolerant and living within the province did not increase positive sentiment about the province.

Additional factors related uniquely to Alberta's reputation are shown in Figure 15, which compares the Alberta reputation index and favourability score by segment. Figure 16 provides a summary of unprompted attributes used to describe Alberta. The surprise here is the consistency across segments anchored inside and outside of Alberta.

This is supported by previous young adult research in Alberta. Though Calgary is the third-most racially diverse city in Canada, young Calgarians remain skeptical whether the city has embraced inclusivity. In a 2020 study, 47 per cent of young adults (18-24) "strongly" agreed that "Calgary needs to address racism and discrimination," compared to 23 per cent of Calgarians aged 25 and older.[30] Moreover, a 2017 study by Tourism Calgary found that diversity is weakly linked to Calgary's identity (being ranked 13 out of 23, while Indigenous people and culture ranked 20).[31]

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[30] City of Calgary. (2020, October). Attitudes and Outlook Survey. https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/cfod/csc/documents/fall2020-cssr/2020-Calgary-Attitudes-and-Outlook-Survey-FINAL-Report.pdf

[31] Calgary DNA Analysis. 2017. Available at: https://www.visitcalgary.com/industry-partners/programs-resources/brand-evolution

Figure 15

Alberta reputation and favorability (score 0 to 100)

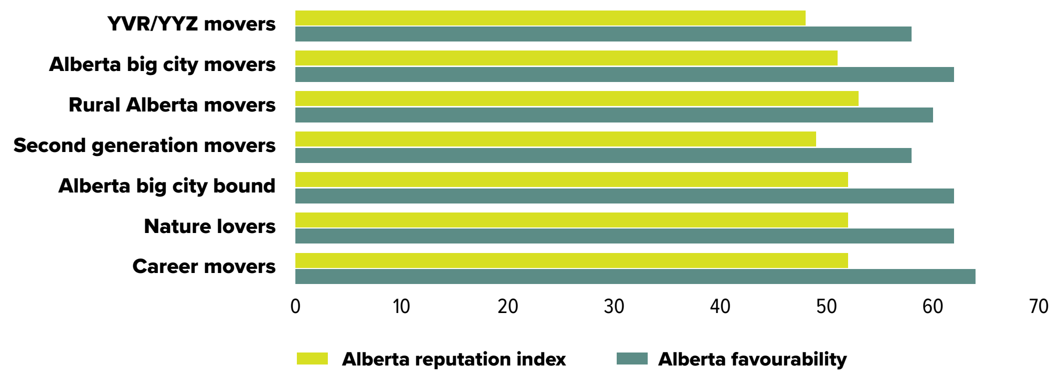
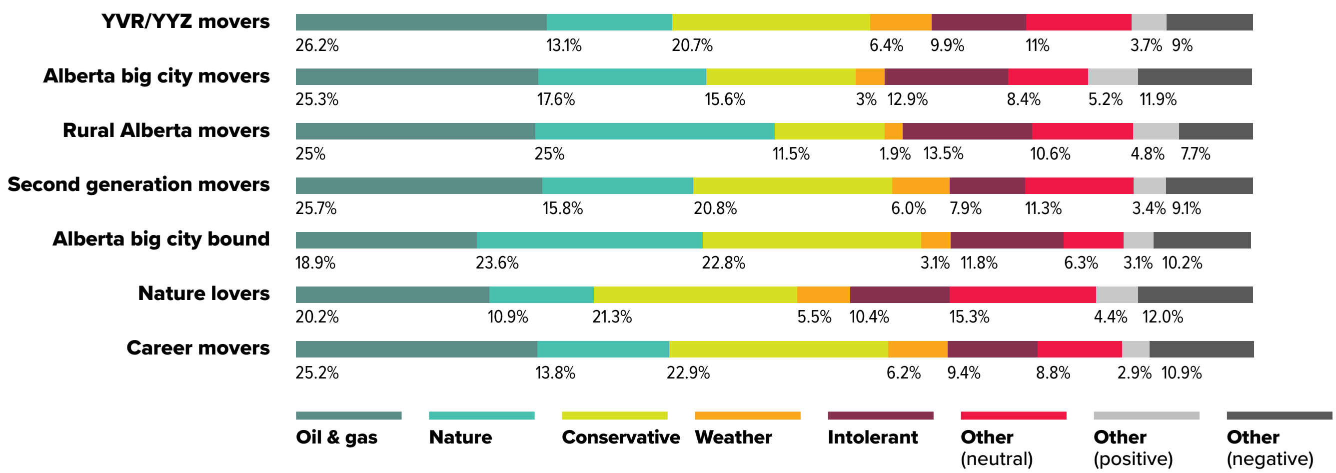


Figure 16

Categorized unprompted words describing Alberta by segment (%)



Conclusion

While all segments have different motivations for why they move, there are also some interesting commonalities:

- Youth work to live
- They place emphasis on career opportunities and safe and clean communities
- Affordability and inclusion are important value drivers
- Recreation and professional sports are less important drivers
- They view British Columbia more favorably than Ontario and Alberta
- Alberta is perceived as associated with nature, oil and gas and being conservative and intolerant

These commonalities highlight broad areas where solutions could be used to attract and retain talent across all segments. Specific solutions to target specific segments could also be applied where appropriate. More research into why B.C. is so attractive to youth not just in Alberta but in other parts of the country could also be beneficial.

Conclusions

Technology, reduced investment and shifting values contribute to structural change in employment in Alberta. While oil and gas prices will continue to rise and fall, jobs associated with the sector will not come back in the same numbers as before. Consequently, Alberta cannot expect youth to come here or to stay for jobs in the oil and gas sector at historic rates.

The numbers show that net youth migration is down – from an average of 8,000 net positive per year over the previous 50 years, to an average of 250 net negative per year over the last six years. The 25-29-year-old sub-group has seen the largest net outflow. Not only are fewer individual youth coming to Alberta, but more are also migrating out of it. Alberta was already facing an aging population, the number of people over the age of 65 will rise substantially in the next decade. The net out-migration of youth contributes to this demographic shift.

This study found that it is not just the reduced number of oil and gas jobs that has caused the change in the flow of youth into and out of Alberta, other economic and quality of life concerns play a part. It also found that youth in Alberta, Vancouver and Toronto perceive that Alberta does not offer a breadth of career choices, that the province lacks vibrancy and that there is a lack of inclusion of diversity.

While youth migrate for economic reasons, their quality of life is very important to them and they will move to a place that they perceive will meet both sides of their life. Youth in all surveyed locations say they work to live – not the other way around. In their consideration of place, they weigh factors such as the cleanliness and safety of communities, public transportation, proximity to experiences, diversity and inclusion, and the reputation of a region along with economic factors such as diverse career and learning opportunities and the cost of living. For many youth identity is linked to where they live and they want to feel good about their choice of place. The province is seen by many Albertan and non-Albertan youth as associated with nature, oil and gas (perceived negatively) conservative (not a positive for many youth who have a more progressive world-view), and intolerant.

On the other hand, many of the surveyed youth who live outside of Alberta admit that they are not very familiar with the province. Youth inside and outside of Alberta also have perceptions of the province which are not indicative of the province's current reality. They make decisions based on these perceptions. Decision and policy makers must understand that today's younger generations have different goals and values than the youth of the past and these affect their choice of place to live.

The net out-migration of youth does not have to be accepted as inevitable. Some solutions which reflect youth goals and values as well as the current reality of Alberta are available.

Youth talent and attraction recommendations for Alberta

Ultimately, the key to the attraction and retention of young talent for Alberta comes down to telling better stories and telling them in better ways. There are practical solutions that will help to overcome the perceptions that youth have of the province. Alberta has a lot to offer youth – quality education and training pathways; diverse career opportunities; world-class outdoor adventures; parks and nature trails in abundance; fabulous arts and entertainment; vibrant cities; a responsive non-profit sector; affordable housing; competitive sports teams; and some the best healthcare in the country. The problem is that many young adults, both Albertans and non-Albertans, do not see the province this way. There is a big gap between perception and reality. Consequently, some doubt they have a future here.

Solutions to retain youth already living in Alberta and to attract more youth to the province are needed. The following recommendations will help to achieve both. These recommendations fall into two major theme areas: careers and communities.

In the spirit of 'nothing about us, without us', these recommendations have been informed directly by input from youth. As Canada's First State of Youth report makes clear, when youth see themselves reflected in service offerings it fosters a sense of belonging.[32] It is strongly advised that implementation of any of these recommendations continue to be informed by youth.

Careers

The Alberta economy is strong, has diversified over time and will continue to do so. More than 150,000 job vacancies exist. Jobs change constantly, new competencies are demanded and higher levels of competence are required as old, routinized jobs in traditional sectors are replaced by technology. New jobs in new sectors are being created and existing sectors are in transition. All of this is well understood – but help for youth to choose and adequately prepare for these jobs has not kept pace.

[32] *Canada's First State of Youth Report* https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html

Recommendations

Strategies to improve youth engagement in the diversity of available career choices:

- Ensure students understand their aptitudes and interests, have a broad understanding of the diverse career opportunities available and on the horizon, and the education and training required to enter these fields.
- Provide safe and inclusive spaces where youth feel valued for their diversity of lived experience, thought and capabilities.

These strategies are geared to youth retention. The following strategies are recommended to help to retain youth in Alberta and attract youth from other provinces.

- Develop competency-based post-secondary education designed to develop the competencies required to move into new careers in diverse sectors in the Alberta economy.
- Create post-graduation education and training opportunities that provide engaging, on-demand micro-learning that supports youth to adapt to changing jobs.
- Offer quality, competency assessed, experiential learning opportunities for all students that allows them to build competencies while gaining work experience.

The following strategies should also be considered:

- Create opportunities to build professional networks and mentorships which provide ongoing support to youth as they start their careers.
- Develop apprenticeships in a larger range of careers beyond the skilled trades that provide employers with the incentives and means to build their own workforce and youth the opportunity earn while they learn.
- Offer improved Labour Market Information based on real time data about developments in the Alberta labour market and coming trends.

Communities

When choosing a community in which to live, youth look for a vibrancy that fits their personal mixture of arts and culture, active living and diverse, inclusive, clean and safe communities. Like Austin in Texas, communities in Alberta must take the opportunity to remake themselves in ways that appeal to youth – making Alberta a place to move and stay.

The following are recommended strategies that will help to modernize Alberta communities:

- Take advantage of progressive municipal government policies that can be complemented by business-friendly higher-level-of-government policies designed to attract more investment and new employers. In Austin, Texas, the conservative state government provides tax incentives and infrastructure for investors, with a focus on "economic competitiveness and allocative efficiency in land use." The progressive municipal government focuses on "social equity and increased opportunity for residents of older neighborhoods."[33]

[33] Lewis, P.G. Moral intuitions and smart growth: why do liberals and conservatives view compact development so differently? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 37(no. 2), 2015. P. 88. Doi: 10.1111/juaf.12172

- Accelerate ongoing community revitalization efforts to develop more walkable and cyclable living, working and entertainment spaces that are attractive to youth.
- Expand safe public transit both within and between communities.
- Encourage small and medium sized employers to hire and retain more diverse youth through the provision of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training kits. Larger companies already understand the economic and productivity benefits of diversity in the workplace; smaller employers may need support to build safe and inclusive workplaces.

The following strategies should also be considered:

- Create, with youth involvement and from the grassroots rather than from government, a new Alberta brand that emphasizes the diversity of people and opportunities in the province.
- Target talented and entrepreneurial youth in immigration programs. For example, Digital Nomad Visas could bring digital talent to live in specific areas of the province with the view that once here they will want to transition into Alberta-based jobs. This type of visa allows those who can work from anywhere to base themselves in another country for a specified length of time while paying income tax in their country of employment. The Alberta economy would benefit from the dollars spent on rent, essentials, and tourism dollars by digital nomads based in the province.[34]
- Target supports designed to improve success of immigrant youth. The global competition for talent means that youth have choices. Supports that assist immigrant youth to gain work experience, learn language and build community for themselves and their families will help them to want to stay.
- Build on the ongoing "smart cities" approaches that advance communities and the lives of people through the use of data and connected technologies. A report by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes, "Smart cities are an endeavor to make cities more efficient, sustainable, and livable. With rapid urbanization leading to more people living in cities than ever before, ensuring they are equipped to monitor a city's critical infrastructure and beyond is vital."[35] The OECD roundtable on smart cities emphasized the roles of citizens in enacting smart city policies.[36] Austin has developed a Smart Cities Alliance which is comprised of "organizations, companies, and individuals [who are] dedicated to advancing communities and the lives of people in Austin through smart city technologies and solutions."[37]

Youth are leaving and are also not coming to Alberta in numbers not seen for years. To avoid the problems that arise when a population ages rapidly, Alberta will need to turn the flow of youth migration positive. A turn-around in the oil and gas sector is not the answer this time. Alberta will need to increase efforts to ensure that young people are aware of and engaged in building the diversified economy and communities of the future.

The recommendations above have come from the research that was informed by youth, both in Alberta and in other major Canadian centres. Implementation of these recommendations will help to stem the flow of young people out of the province and return Alberta to its position as the "it' place for youth in Canada.

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[34] European Travel Information and Authorization System. Digital nomad visas in EU countries. Online, https://www.etiasvisa.com/etias-news/digital-nomad-visas-eu-countries

[35] Khan, J. & and Labonté, O. 2021. The Need for Smart City FRAMEWORKS. *Economic Development Journal 20*, 3(33), Summer 2021. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=153913413&site=eds-live.

[36] OECD. Five key takeaways from the 1st OECD Roundtable on Smart Cities and Inclusive Growth. *Smart Cities and Inclusive Growth*, p. 7, 2020. https://www.oecd.org/cfe/cities/OECD_Policy_Paper_Smart_Cities_and_Inclusive_Growth.pdf

[37] Austin Smart City Alliance. "ASCA: Austin Smart City Alliance." Online, 2020. https://www.austinsmartcity.org/

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