

B.C.'s Inter-Provincial Migrants: A Changing Age Distribution

British Columbia's population, along with the rest of Canada, is growing older. In 1977 the median age of British Columbians was 29. As of 2007 this median age has risen to 40. At the same time, the median age of inter-provincial migrants to and from British Columbia has increased. This article examines what impact the aging of the population has had on inter-provincial migration, and what implications recent trends may hold for the future.

Age Structure of the Population

Over the past three decades, B.C. has experienced significant changes in the relative size of certain age groups. Figure 1 displays the population level of four age groups. Clearly, since the mid-1990's population growth in the province has been due to an increasing number of individuals in the 45-64 and 65+ age groups. Figure 2 shows that B.C.'s experience has been shared throughout Canada.

Most of the recent lack of growth among the lower two age groups is a result of declines in birthrates, while increased life expectancies and the aging of the "baby-boom" cohort (individuals born between 1946 and 1964) account for much of the growth in the older age groups.

This aging has many important implications, ranging from the relative size of the labour force to delivery of health services. This article focuses only on the impact of an older population on inter-provincial migration.

Table 1: Median Age

		1977	2007
Population	B.C.	29.3	40.0
	Canada	28.1	39.0
Inter-Provincial In-Migrants	B.C.	24.4	30.2
	Canada	23.6	28.2
Inter-Provincial Out-Migrants	B.C.	23.7	28.6
	Canada	23.6	28.2

Figure 1: B.C. Population by Age Group

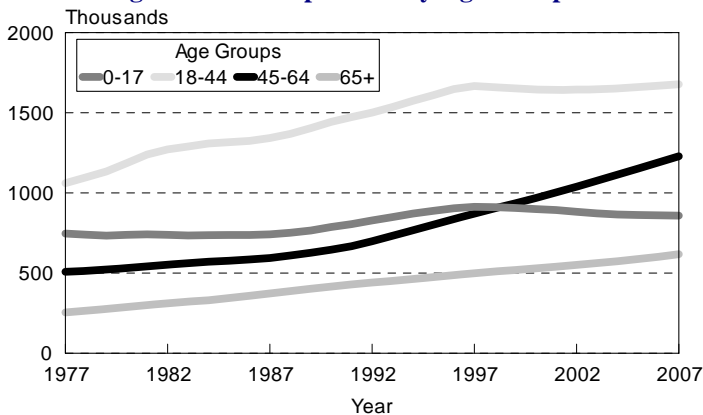
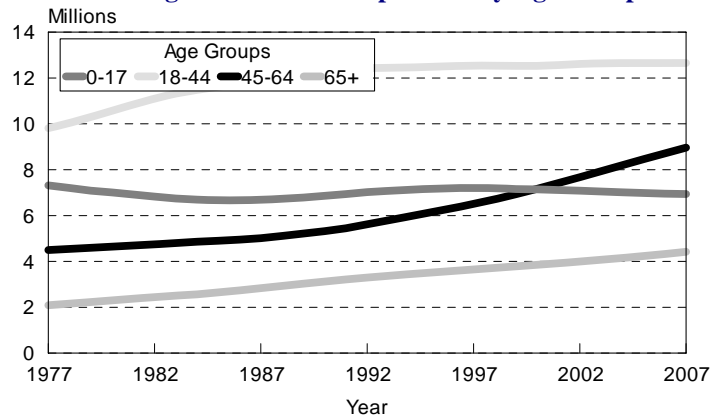


Figure 2: Canada Population by Age Group



Age Structure of Inter-Provincial Migrants

Similar to the aging of the population at large, the average age of migrants is increasing, as seen in Table 1. Figures 4 and 5 show how the levels of migration have varied over the past three decades. While the level of 18-44 year olds migrating has fluctuated significantly with cycles of the economy, there does appear to be a trend of fewer migrants aged 0-17, and more 45-64 and 65+.

The migration of 0-17 year olds is generally children moving with their parents, who are usually in the 18-44 age group. A reduction in the number of children relative to parents is to be expected, as birthrates have been declining steadily in the past three decades. In other words, adults have fewer children to bring with them when migrating to another province. Increases in the 45-64 and 65+ age groups are also not surprising. Longer life expectancies as well as the aging baby-boom cohort have increased the number of individuals in these age groups, so there is a larger pool from which to draw migrants.

Figures 6 and 7 show that relative to the size of the age groups, the rate of migration has declined since 1977. However, the decline among 45-64 and 65+ year olds is much smaller

than among the younger two age groups. A non-increasing proportion of older individuals migrating means that the number of migrants 45-64 and 65+ is increasing simply because there are more of these individuals in the population. Thus, in the near future it is unlikely that the numbers of older migrants will increase at a rate faster than the growth of these age groups.

The large decline in the rate of migration among 0-17 and 18-44 year olds, and the growth of the size of the older two age groups, have together begun to change the age distribution of migrants. Figures 8 and 9 show how the percentage of migrants aged 45-64 and 65+ has increased, while the percentage aged 0-17 has fallen, all while the percentage aged 18-44 has remained relatively steady. So long as the baby-boom cohort continues to age, and birthrates show no signs of increasing, this trend can be expected to carry on.

Nonetheless, because these changes are occurring in both in- and out-migration, the effect on net-migration to B.C. is relatively smaller. Figure 3 shows that in recent years the upper age groups have constituted a larger proportion of the net inflow of migrants to the province, but whether this is a trend that will continue is unclear.

Figure 3: Inter-Provincial Net-Migration

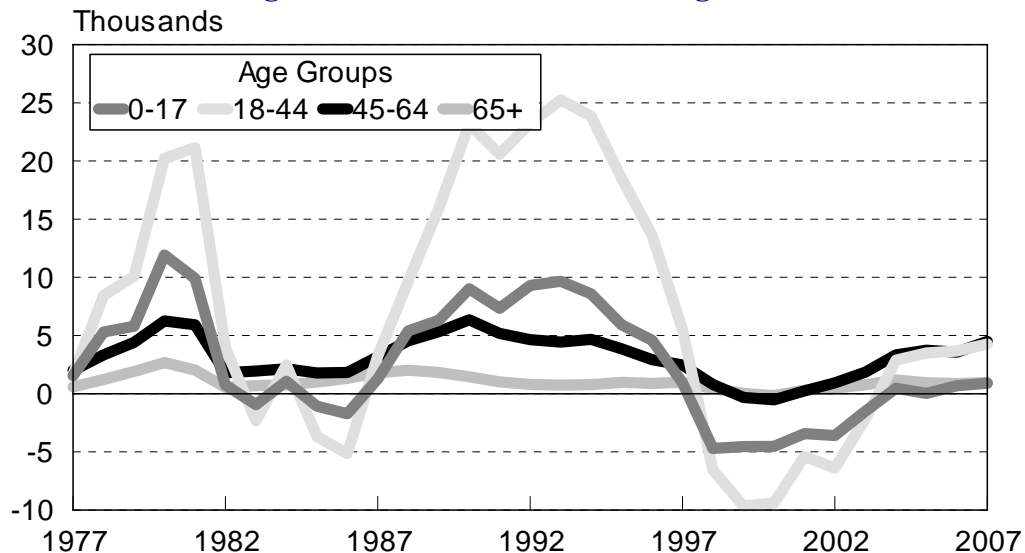


Figure 4: Inter-Provincial In-Migration by Age Group

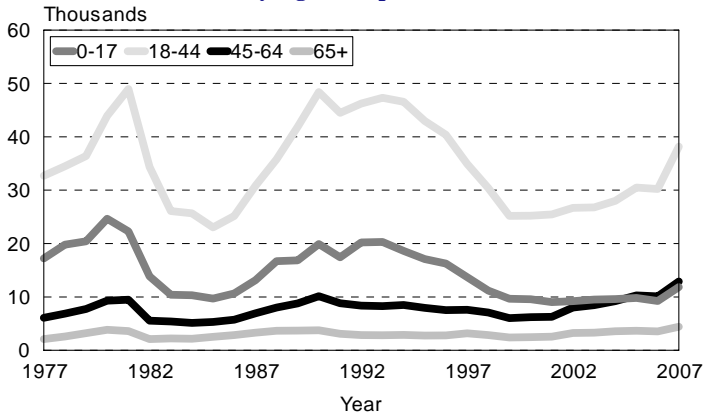


Figure 5: Inter-Provincial Out-Migration by Age Group

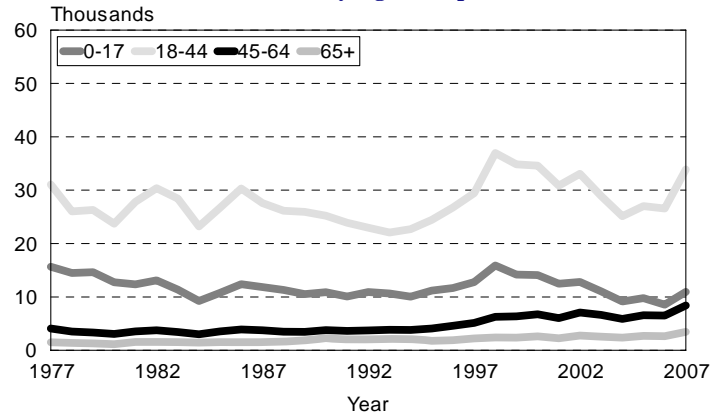


Figure 6: Inter-Provincial In-Migration As Percentage of Age Group in B.C. Population

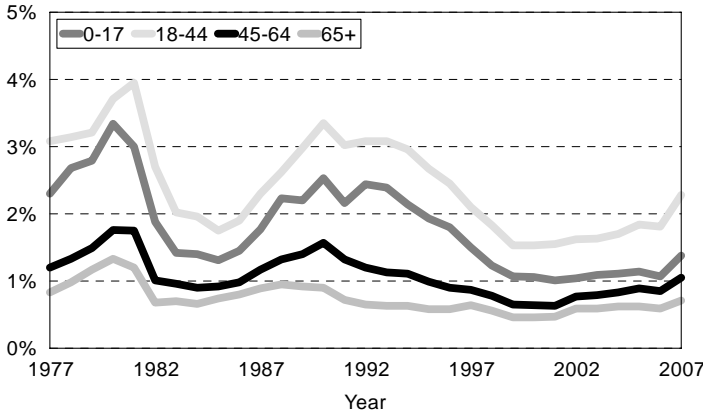


Figure 7: Inter-Provincial Out-Migration As Percentage of Age Group in B.C. Population

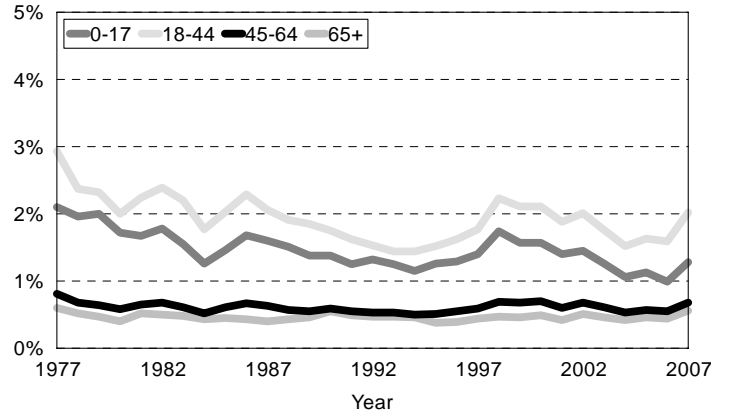


Figure 8: Inter-Provincial In-Migration As Percentage of In-Migrants

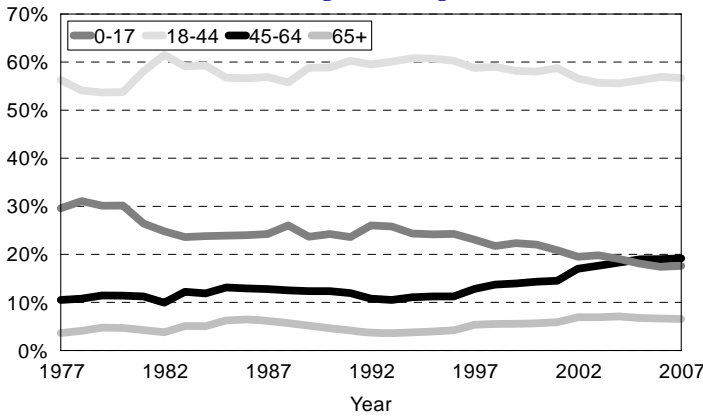
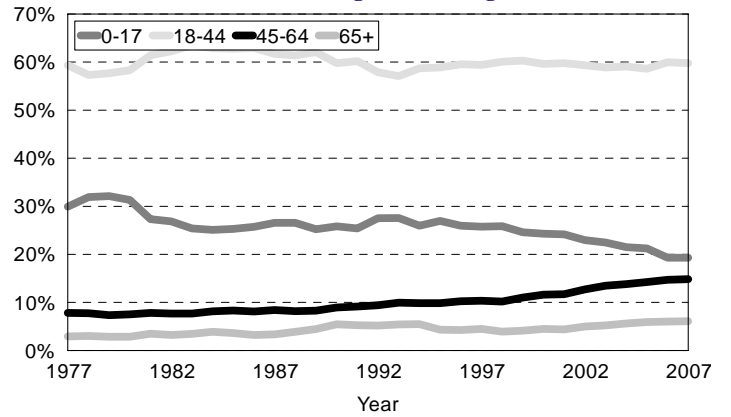


Figure 9: Inter-Provincial Out-Migration As Percentage of Out-Migrants



Motivations to Migrate

Despite the increasing proportion of older individuals, the majority of inter-provincial migrants are still members of the younger age groups. Younger people tend to be the most mobile, and there are a number of reasons for this. In the late teens and early twenties, people often move away from home for the first time to receive education or start a career. The late twenties and thirties are a time when individuals may move again to a new job or to start families, taking their children with them. In general, moving is a costly venture, but it may be less costly for the young because they are less likely to be deeply invested in a particular place and have a longer future to reap the potential economic benefits of a move.

Older individuals, on the other hand, generally have slightly different reasons to move. The search for better employment can still be a large motivator, but individuals may also choose to relocate upon retirement, taking climate and life-style of their destination into larger consideration than the young. Additionally, the availability of services, especially health care services among the elderly, can be an important motivator to move, or a significant factor in choosing where to move.

These distinctions are important because forecasting inter-provincial migration requires consideration of an individual's motivations for migration. Since the young and old may have significantly different motivations, a change in the composition of migrants to older individuals may affect the predictive power of current forecasting methods.

Implications of Older Inter-Provincial Migrants

The changing age distribution of inter-provincial migrants seems to generally mirror the changing structure of the provincial population as a whole. It does not appear that

inter-provincial migration is a significant factor in increasing the age of B.C.'s population. Still, attention must be paid to the changing composition of inter-provincial migrants.

Older people have historically migrated less frequently than the young. If the composition of inter-provincial migrants shifts to include a greater proportion of older individuals, this may reduce the flows, but not necessarily the net population impact, of inter-provincial migration.

A greater proportion of older individuals may also change the dynamics of migrants. Migration is highly correlated with economic factors such as GDP and unemployment rates, but it is also driven by non-economic factors such as climate and life-style. To an older population, the economic factors may become a less important determinant of migration.