THE CONTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRATION TO POPULATION CHANGE IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

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Because of declining natural increase – the difference between the number of births and deaths – in the Atlantic Provinces, migration has become the most important component in population growth. Overall, population growth slackened during the past five decades, with particularly marked reductions in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Present rates of natural increase in the Atlantic Provinces are close to zero, with the result that population change is primarily influenced by the movement of people into or out of the provinces. During the past thirty years, there has been moderate out-migration of younger adults from rural areas and small towns. Immigrant arrivals have partially counterbalanced the net out-migration of Canada-born residents in the Atlantic Provinces because immigrant arrivals exceed losses from net interprovincial migration. Currently, there is net in-migration for Prince Edward Island and smaller but still positive net in-migration for the other three Atlantic Provinces.

En raison de la diminution de l'accroissement naturel (la différence entre le nombre de naissances et de décès) dans les provinces de l'Atlantique, la migration est devenue la composante la plus importante de la croissance démographique. Dans l'ensemble, la croissance démographique s'est ralentie au cours des cinq dernières décennies, avec des réductions particulièrement marquées à Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, en Nouvelle-Écosse et au Nouveau-Brunswick. Les taux actuels d'accroissement naturel dans les provinces de l'Atlantique sont presque nuls, de sorte que l'évolution de la population est principalement influencée par les mouvements de population qui entrent ou sortent des provinces. Au cours des trente dernières années, il y a eu une émigration modérée de jeunes adultes des zones rurales et des petites villes. Les arrivées d'immigrants ont partiellement contrebalancé l'émigration nette des résidents nés au Canada dans les provinces de l'Atlantique car les arrivées d'immigrants dépassent les pertes dues à la migration interprovinciale nette. À l'heure actuelle, il y a une migration d'entrée nette pour l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard et une migration d'entrée nette plus petite mais toujours positive pour les trois autres provinces de l'Atlantique.

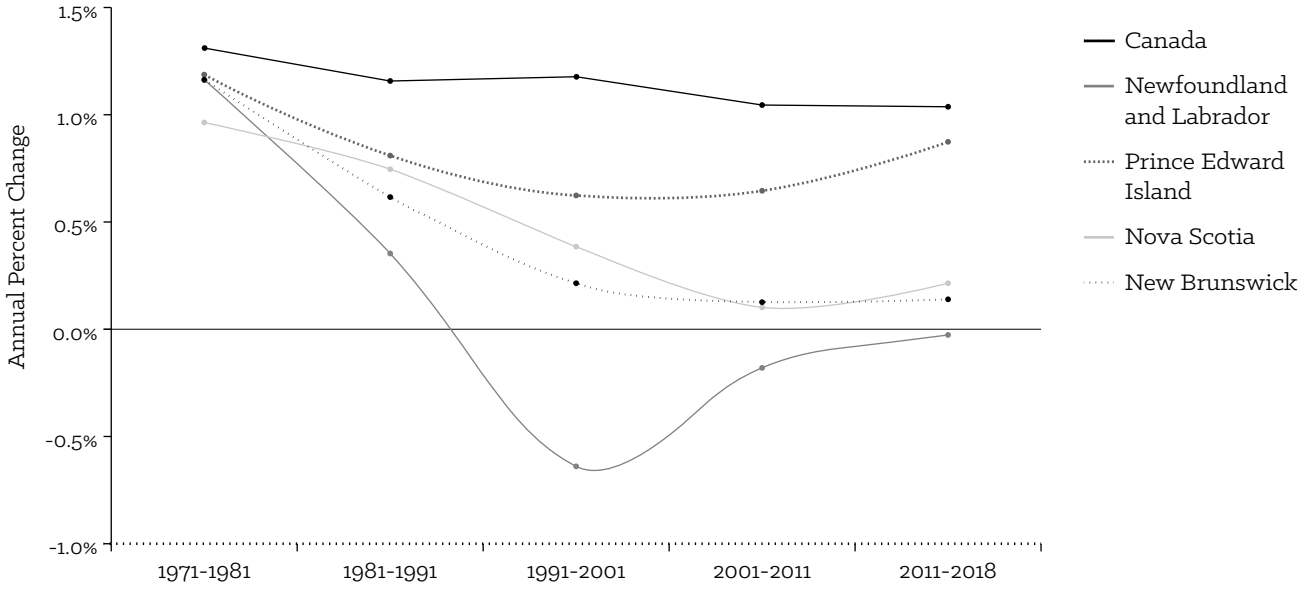
Because of declining natural increase in the Canadian population, migration has become the most important component in the population growth nationally as well as provincially. Hence, it is understandable that provincial and municipal authorities are keenly interested in factors that affect migration. For this reason, the role of immigrant settlement and resettlement needs to be placed within the broader context of migration (Edmonston 2011). Although immigrants comprise nearly one-fifth of the Canadian population, in most rural areas and small towns immigrants are a relatively small proportion and usually comprise less than ten percent of the resident population. During the past fifty years, there has been moderate out-migration of younger adults from rural areas and small towns. This is true throughout Canada and is not a pattern limited to the Atlantic Provinces. The four Atlantic Provinces, however, are distinctive because their populations are more likely to live in smaller towns and rural areas, and because the region lacks larger metropolitan centers of employment growth.

POPULATION CHANGE

Statistics Canada makes annual population estimates for all provinces, including estimates for the components of annual population change (see Statistics Canada 2018 and earlier years). These data are useful for analyzing the sources of provincial population change because they provide estimates of population changes due to natural increase (births minus deaths) and migration (including net interprovincial migration, immigration, and emigration).

As shown in Figure 1, average annual population growth rates for the Atlantic Provinces were between 1.0 and 1.2 percent in the 1970s, only slightly below Canada's average annual rate of 1.3 percent. During 2011 to 2018, however, annual population growth rates for the Atlantic Provinces had diminished from earlier levels, ranging from negligible growth in Newfoundland and Labrador to 0.9 percent in Prince Edward Island. Average annual population growth rates since 2011 have been modest in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, at 0.2 and 0.1 percent respectively.

FIGURE 1: AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF POPULATION CHANGE, 1971 TO 2018



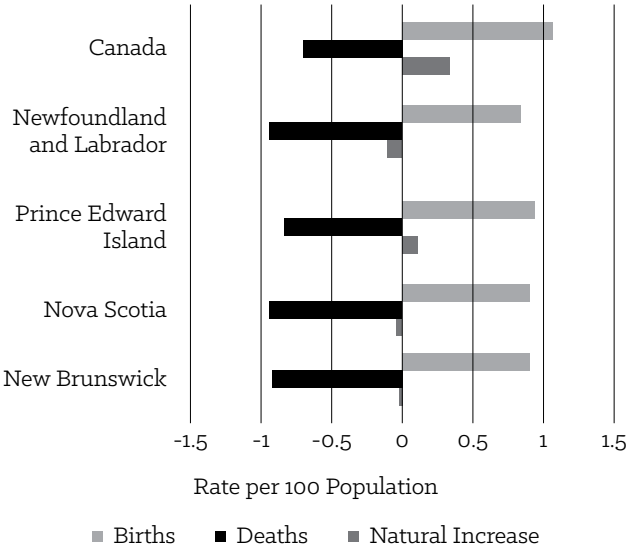
Overall, population growth slackened in the Atlantic Provinces during the past five decades, with particularly marked reductions in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Growth rates decreased slightly in Prince Edward Island, and current rates are only slightly lower than national rates. What accounts for these changes in population growth?

NATURAL INCREASE

There are two major components of population change: natural increase and migration. Natural increase is the difference between births and deaths. If there are more births than deaths, then there is a positive contribution to population changes. And, when deaths exceed births, there is a negative

contribution. Currently, in the 2010s, the average birth rate in Canada is 1.1 per 100 and the death rate is 0.7 per 100, which produces an annual rate of natural increase of 0.4 percent, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE ANNUAL RATES OF NATURAL INCREASE AND BIRTH AND DEATH COMPONENTS (PER 100 POPULATION), 2011 TO 2018



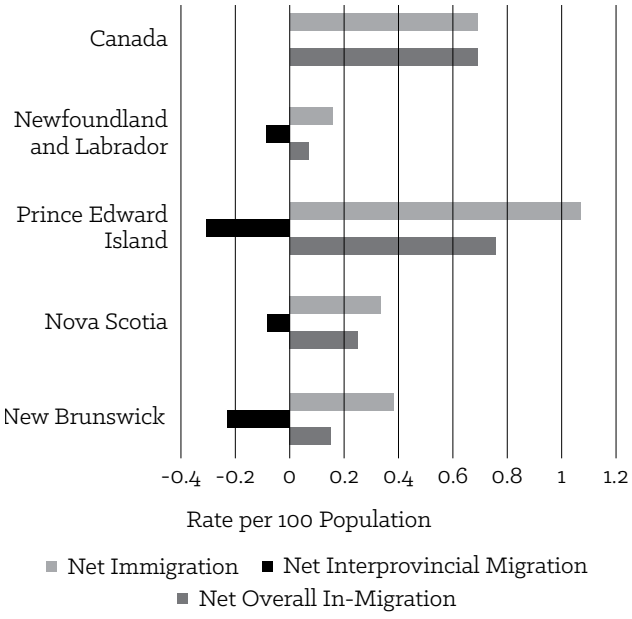
For the four Atlantic Provinces, however, the annual rate of natural increase is either negative (-0.3 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador) or close to zero (+0.1 percent in Prince Edward Island and -0.1 percent in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick).

Natural increase in the Atlantic Provinces was strongly positive in the 1970s; however, two powerful demographic changes led to the diminution of natural increase rates in recent years. First, Canadian fertility rates have fallen significantly over the past fifty years. Canada's total fertility rate (a measure of how many children a woman would have over her lifetime) dropped from 1.8 in the 1970s to 1.5 in 2017, a decrease of 0.3 children. Declines in the total fertility rate have been even larger for the Atlantic Provinces, with decreases of 1.1 children for Newfoundland (from total fertility rates of 2.4 in the 1970s to 1.3 at present), 0.7 children for Prince Edward Island (from 2.2 to 1.5 children), and 0.6 children for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (from 2.0 to 1.4 and from 2.1 to 1.5, respectively). Current fertility rates in the Atlantic Provinces are among the lowest in Canada. The second important demographic change is the aging of national and provincial populations. Relative to the 1970s, current populations have fewer younger adults and a greater proportion of elderly. These shifts in the population age distribution reduce the number of births and increase the number of deaths, contributing in declines in the rate of natural increase. Present rates of natural increase in the Atlantic Provinces are close to zero, with the result that population change is primarily influenced by the movement of people into or out of the provinces.

MIGRATION

Net provincial migration is the second major component of population change. Provincial migration comprises the movement of people within Canada – called interprovincial or internal migration – as well as the arrival and departure of people who are originally from outside Canada, or international migration. As Figure 3 shows, internal and international movements vary greatly for Canadian province.

FIGURE 3: AVERAGE ANNUAL RATES OF NET IN-MIGRATION AND ITS COMPONENTS (PER 100 POPULATION), 2011 TO 2018



Since 2011, all provinces and territories have gained population from international arrivals. Although Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta received the largest number of immigrants, the relative contribution of immigrant arrivals to population growth in recent years has been the greatest in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Net interprovincial migration, however, has offset gains from international migrants in most provinces and territories. Residents have been departing most provinces in the 2010s, with net out-flows of about 25,000 annually to Alberta and British Columbia – the only two provinces to gain from interprovincial migration during this decade. In the Atlantic Provinces, international immigrant arrivals exceed losses from net interprovincial migration, which results in net in-migration for Prince Edward Island and smaller but still positive net in-migration, on per capita basis, for the other three Atlantic Provinces.

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Despite the above trends, there are reasons for optimism. First, local people have been engaged in attempts to deal with the changing economic and social conditions for some time. Indeed, the current situation may have been worse if recognition had not been made years ago, and programs were not developed to improve conditions. As it is, many communities have engaged in sustainable community development, as can be seen in Canada's Community Futures program, which has existed since the mid-1980s and offers a useful history. Second, federal and provincial governments have given increased attention and more funding to local and regional development programs and greater support for public services in outlying areas. Although significant challenges exist to create and maintain adequate public services and employment opportunities in rural areas and remote communities, immigrant settlement and resettlement can help address these challenges.

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