Rural roots

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For some time, concerns have been raised about the movement of young people away from rural communities. There is a sense that most rural areas offer few employment opportunities for young people, requiring them to leave for urban centres to find work. Until recently, however, relatively little was known about migration patterns in rural and urban areas in Canada.[1] This article fills this gap by providing information on the extent to which young people stay, leave or return to rural communities (see *Data sources and definitions*).

Labour market tougher in rural areas

Many factors, such as the desire to gain independence, the wish to fulfill one's aspirations or to "discover the world" and the need to pursue postsecondary education, may underlie the decision to migrate from a rural area to an urban one. The notion that labour market conditions are less favourable in rural areas is also cited as a factor. Some who are unemployed move to cities to find employment, while some who already have a job may leave to find one offering better wages, job stability or opportunities.

Labour market conditions are indeed less favourable in rural areas. The unemployment rate of people aged 15 to 29 who were not full-time students was 16.8% in 1996 in rural areas, compared with only 11.9% in urban areas (Table 1). Rural unemployment rates also differ considerably by province. The unemployment rate of young rural people who were not

Table 1: Labour market indicators in rural and urban areas, persons aged 15 to 29*

	Unemployment rate, 1996**	Full-year full-time employment, 1995†
	%	
Canada		
Rural	**16.8**	**39.0**
Urban	**11.9**	**48.8**
Newfoundland		
Rural	40.0	21.7
Urban	18.5	41.8
Prince Edward Island		
Rural	18.2	25.5
Urban	13.7	42.2
Nova Scotia		
Rural	21.7	32.9
Urban	14.4	44.3
New Brunswick		
Rural	24.3	30.7
Urban	13.9	43.7
Quebec		
Rural	17.4	40.8
Urban	13.6	48.7
Ontario		
Rural	13.6	44.6
Urban	11.6	51.6
Manitoba		
Rural	13.6	42.5
Urban	10.0	49.6
Saskatchewan		
Rural	12.3	40.8
Urban	10.6	45.7
Alberta		
Rural	10.5	41.6
Urban	9.1	47.9
British Columbia		
Rural	16.2	33.2
Urban	11.7	45.1
Yukon		
Rural	18.2	28.5
Urban	11.8	42.8
Northwest Territories		
Rural	24.1	34.7
Urban	8.9	54.4

Source: Census of Canada, 1996
* *Those who were not full-time students.*
** *As of May 1996.*
† *Percentage of workers who were employed full year full time in 1995.*

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Data sources and definitions

The data used in this article come from the 1996 Census, T1 tax records and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. The census asks the following question: "Where did [you] live five years ago?" This makes it possible to determine the location of persons in both 1991 and 1996 and, as a result, to separate those who had moved from those who had not.

Because they cover the 1980s as well as the 1990s, longitudinal data sets based on T1 tax records allow examination of five-year migration patterns as well as return migration. Five-year migration patterns are used to compare results from tax data with those from the census. Eleven-year migration patterns are used to analyze return migration. Longitudinal data from T1 tax records provide information on annual earnings before and after migration, allowing a comparison of earnings growth of leavers with that of stayers. Census data do not have information on annual earnings before migration.

The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) is the only Canadian data set that allows an examination of workers' education level, occupation and industry of employment both before and after a move from one area to another. As well, SLID—as do T1 tax records—allows an analysis of the earnings growth of leavers and stayers.

An **urban** area is a geographical unit belonging to either a census metropolitan area (CMA) or a census agglomeration (CA). A CMA consists of an urbanized core having a population of at least 100,000 people, while a CA consists of an urbanized core of 10,000 to 100,000 persons. **Rural** areas and small towns are defined residually as geographical units that are in neither a CMA nor a CA. A "rural area" is a rural community or small town.

Migration patterns in this study are analyzed at the subprovincial level. More precisely, migration flows are analyzed using geographical units defined jointly in terms of economic region and rural/urban status. In 1996, the Labour Force Survey defined 74 economic regions in Canada, 62 of which had both a rural and an urban component. For instance, Cape Breton rural and Cape Breton urban are two distinct geographical units belonging to the economic region of Cape Breton. In total, 136 geographical units ($62 * 2 = 124$, plus $74 - 62 = 12$) can be considered.

In this study, a **leaver** is defined as a person who was in a given geographical unit in 1991 but not in 1996. Otherwise, a person is defined as a **stayer**. For instance, someone living in Prince Albert rural in 1991 and outside Prince Albert rural in 1996 is a leaver, whether the destination area is Prince Albert urban or any other geographical unit. However, a person moving to a different location within Prince Albert rural between 1991 and 1996 is a stayer.

For the 1987-to-1997 period, T1 tax records define a **permanent stayer** as a person who was in the same geographical unit for all 11 years. A **return migrant** is someone who changed geographical units at some point during the period but whose geographical unit in 1997 was the same as that in 1987. A **permanent leaver** is a person who changed geographical units at some point during the period and whose geographical unit in 1997 was different from that in 1987.

full-time students reached a maximum of 40.0% in Newfoundland and a minimum of 10.5% in Alberta. Undoubtedly, these differences in unemployment have an effect on the migration flows in and out of these provinces.

Not only is the percentage of persons having a job lower in rural areas, the percentage of workers employed full year full time is also lower. For instance, in 1995 the full-year full-time employment rate of youths was 39.0% in rural areas, compared with 48.8% in urban areas. This rural rate was lowest in Newfoundland (21.7%) and highest in Ontario (44.6%).

Roughly 30% of teenagers leave rural communities

During the 1991-to-1996 period, roughly 30% of teenagers (aged 15 to 19) left their rural communities, compared with at most 18% of their urban counterparts (Table 2). One reason for the difference is the absence of postsecondary institutions in rural areas; teenagers there must move if they want to pursue further education.

In both rural and urban areas, the percentage of leavers generally declines with age. For instance, at most 14% of people aged 30 to 44 left rural communities during the 1991-to-1996 period, compared with less than 10% of those 55 or older. The degree of mobility falls with age partly because the incentives for leaving are greater the younger one is. For youths, the costs of moving (pecuniary as well as non-pecuniary) will probably be lower and the expected benefits higher (since these benefits can be reaped over a longer period).

Table 2: Leavers by age, 1991 to 1996

Age in 1991	Census	Tax data
	%	
15 to 19		
Rural	28.0	31.8
Urban	15.3	17.8
20 to 24		
Rural	24.5	31.8
Urban	21.7	23.3
25 to 29		
Rural	17.5	21.7
Urban	16.9	19.0
30 to 44		
Rural	11.2	13.8
Urban	10.0	11.3
45 to 54		
Rural	7.3	9.5
Urban	6.8	8.0
55 to 64		
Rural	6.3	8.9
Urban	6.2	7.6
65 and over		
Rural	5.8	10.0
Urban	4.0	6.5

Sources: Census of Canada, 1996; T1 tax records

Between 18% and 22% of persons aged 25 to 29 moved out of their rural areas in the first half of the 1990s. Outflow rates of their urban counterparts were similar (17% to 19%), showing that leaving home is a phenomenon not limited to rural communities.

While teenagers left rural areas more often than urban ones in virtually all provinces, the same was not true for persons in their late twenties (Table 3). Contrary to expectation, in all of the Atlantic provinces, as well as in Quebec and Saskatchewan, those aged 25 to 29 left rural areas less often than urban areas.

Destination of leavers

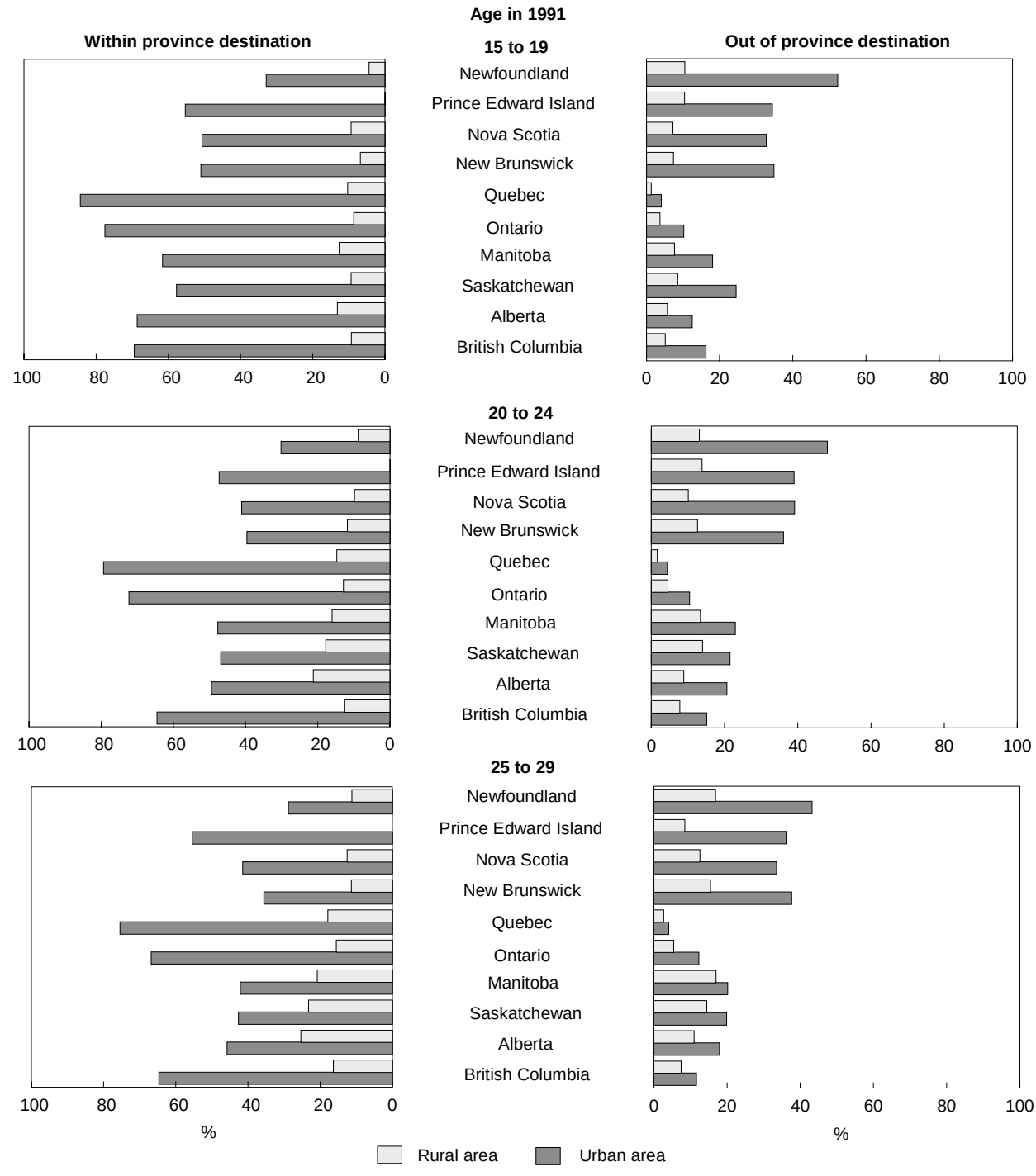
Where do leavers of rural communities go? In all provinces except Newfoundland, their main destination is an urban area within the province of origin (Chart).[2] In contrast, young people who leave rural communities in Newfoundland tend to go mainly to an urban area outside the province.

Table 3: Young leavers by province, 1991 to 1996

	Age in 1991					
	15 to 19		20 to 24		25 to 29	
	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data
	%					
Canada						
Rural	**28.0**	**31.8**	**24.5**	**31.8**	**17.5**	**21.7**
Urban	**15.3**	**17.8**	**21.7**	**23.3**	**16.9**	**19.0**
Newfoundland						
Rural	29.5	32.2	23.5	28.5	14.3	16.8
Urban	20.6	25.8	29.5	29.2	19.5	19.1
Prince Edward Island						
Rural	20.1	23.1	17.9	23.9	11.2	12.6
Urban	15.8	20.6	26.0	27.3	17.4	18.4
Nova Scotia						
Rural	21.9	26.9	22.6	26.0	12.8	17.4
Urban	17.7	21.7	27.3	27.3	20.3	19.9
New Brunswick						
Rural	19.9	22.8	19.9	23.8	13.8	16.5
Urban	19.7	23.2	27.2	27.8	16.4	18.4
Quebec						
Rural	24.4	28.3	20.8	28.8	14.3	18.7
Urban	17.0	20.8	24.6	27.9	19.3	22.7
Ontario						
Rural	27.2	31.7	27.2	35.6	19.6	24.3
Urban	12.2	13.7	18.4	19.2	13.9	15.9
Manitoba						
Rural	30.7	34.3	22.2	32.1	18.3	22.0
Urban	16.1	21.7	22.9	26.0	19.8	21.6
Saskatchewan						
Rural	39.6	42.1	26.7	37.9	18.6	23.7
Urban	27.2	31.2	34.0	34.7	24.5	25.4
Alberta						
Rural	34.7	37.9	31.0	36.7	22.4	27.4
Urban	19.6	22.1	25.8	26.4	21.0	22.0
British Columbia						
Rural	33.2	40.0	28.3	38.0	22.8	28.4
Urban	13.7	15.5	17.8	18.9	15.4	16.5
Yukon						
Rural	35.1	36.0	43.8	43.2	36.9	39.5
Urban	29.6	31.3	32.8	35.8	33.8	29.2
Northwest Territories						
Rural	8.0	15.8	14.2	16.5	20.5	22.2
Urban	34.8	39.0	42.3	43.6	40.2	40.3

Sources: Census of Canada, 1996; T1 tax records

Chart: In all provinces except Newfoundland, rural leavers are more likely to go to an urban area within their province.



Source: Census of Canada, 1996

In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, urban areas outside the province represent an important second destination: they accounted for at least one-third of flows out of rural communities between 1991 and 1996. Conversely, very few rural residents leave the two largest provinces, Ontario and Quebec. This reflects at least two factors. First, linguistic differences present disincentives to move out of Quebec. Second, in both of these provinces the labour market is relatively large, providing more job opportunities for rural leavers, thus limiting the need to move outside the province.

In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, at least 20% of people aged 25 to 29 who left rural areas in the early 1990s went to another rural community inside the province. At least in Saskatchewan, this pattern may be related to the importance of agriculture in the provincial economy.

Flows of in-migrants vary

Among teenagers, the percentage of in-migrants is smaller in rural areas than it is in urban areas for most provinces (Table 4). Since the percentage of leavers is generally higher in rural areas among this group, net flows of teenagers are also smaller in rural areas in most provinces.

Sometimes, however, flows of newcomers are greater in rural areas. This is the case in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia for those aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29. The percentage of rural in-migrants was particularly high in British Columbia between 1991 and 1996, ranging from 44% to 57%, depending on the age group and data set considered. For each of the two age groups, the opposite pattern was found in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. Thus, while it is not always true to say that proportionally more people leave rural than urban areas, neither is it always true to conclude that proportionally fewer people enter rural communities.

Table 4: Newcomers by province, 1991 to 1996

	Age in 1991					
	15 to 19		20 to 24		25 to 29	
	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data
	%					
Canada						
Rural	**15.4**	**20.0**	**30.9**	**29.4**	**24.6**	**26.6**
Urban	**19.0**	**21.2**	**20.3**	**23.9**	**15.2**	**17.7**
Newfoundland						
Rural	5.4	7.0	14.6	12.4	10.1	10.9
Urban	18.7	16.8	17.5	22.1	14.7	15.9
Prince Edward Island						
Rural	11.3	11.2	18.1	16.3	13.0	15.8
Urban	21.4	22.2	22.1	26.3	16.9	19.8
Nova Scotia						
Rural	9.2	10.7	20.8	19.3	17.6	19.7
Urban	21.2	25.2	20.3	23.8	15.6	17.6
New Brunswick						
Rural	9.5	11.4	17.9	17.7	14.3	16.1
Urban	20.4	21.9	23.5	25.7	17.3	18.8
Quebec						
Rural	13.6	18.3	26.9	25.5	19.9	21.8
Urban	19.6	22.7	21.9	27.3	17.2	21.3
Ontario						
Rural	14.9	19.4	33.7	34.1	28.8	32.3
Urban	13.7	15.4	16.3	18.4	11.3	13.2
Manitoba						
Rural	14.8	19.9	27.5	29.0	23.9	26.3
Urban	19.5	20.9	14.2	19.1	13.5	15.0
Saskatchewan						
Rural	16.0	20.9	33.8	27.5	23.4	22.5
Urban	32.1	27.9	24.9	28.6	18.0	20.3
Alberta						
Rural	24.8	33.3	43.4	41.9	32.1	34.9
Urban	27.6	31.2	23.9	28.5	17.7	20.2
British Columbia						
Rural	30.1	37.9	57.3	55.6	44.1	49.4
Urban	24.5	29.7	27.9	32.1	22.0	23.4
Yukon						
Rural	48.8	58.1	42.1	61.1	40.3	45.2
Urban	33.6	35.6	56.0	57.7	33.8	42.2
Northwest Territories						
Rural	15.9	29.6	22.7	28.7	19.3	24.4
Urban	56.0	58.2	63.9	80.0	40.7	46.5

Sources: Census of Canada, 1996; T1 tax records

Rural areas not always net losers of young people

Considering only those persons identified in both years, rural communities lost 12% to 13% of their teenage population between 1991 and 1996 (Table 5). Rural communities were not net losers of all young age groups, however. Over the same period, in the absence of deaths and international migration, they would have enjoyed a net gain of 5% to 7% in their population aged 25 to 29.

Table 5: Net migration flows by age, 1991 to 1996

Age in 1991	Census	Tax data
	%	
15 and over		
Rural	**2.0**	**1.6**
Urban	**-0.6**	**-0.4**
15 to 29		
Rural	0.2	-0.9
Urban	-0.04	0.2
15 to 19		
Rural	-12.6	-11.8
Urban	3.7	3.5
20 to 24		
Rural	6.4	-2.4
Urban	-1.4	0.6
25 to 29		
Rural	7.0	4.9
Urban	-1.7	-1.3
30 to 44		
Rural	2.8	2.4
Urban	-0.7	-0.7
45 to 54		
Rural	4.6	5.1
Urban	-1.3	-1.4
55 to 64		
Rural	4.0	4.8
Urban	-1.2	-1.3
65 and over		
Rural	-1.0	-1.8
Urban	0.3	0.6

Sources: Census of Canada, 1996; T1 tax records

Rural communities also experienced net gains among 30-to-64 year-olds, while urban communities experienced corresponding net losses. Had there been no deaths or international migration, rural communities would have experienced a net gain of about 2% in their population aged 15 and over. Urban communities would have experienced a net loss of about 0.5%.

All provinces saw a net loss of teenagers from their rural communities in the early 1990s, particularly Saskatchewan and Newfoundland (21% to 25%) (Table 6). Net gains of those aged 25 to 29 were observed in most provinces, with British Columbia experiencing the greatest growth in the number of those in their late twenties (21%).

Net gains of rural 30-to-64 year-olds occurred in all provinces except Newfoundland and Saskatchewan. These were more moderate in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta than in Ontario or British Columbia. Had there been no deaths or international migration, rural areas would have experienced net growth of their population aged 15 and over in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Because rural areas of several provinces experience net losses of their youngest residents (aged 15 to 19) and net gains of older persons, the aging of the population will be faster there than in many urban communities.

Return migration is limited

Migration is not always a one-step process. People who leave rural communities to pursue post-secondary education may return to work in their area of origin. Others may choose to stay in urban areas and not return.

Over the 1987-to-1997 period, 44% of teenagers stayed in their rural community (Table 7). Another 12% left at some point during the period and returned by 1997. The remaining 44% left and did not return. This implies that 56% of teenagers were in their original rural community 10 years later. The corresponding percentages for persons aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 were 64% and 74%.

To what extent do those who leave their rural community return to it? For all three age groups, only 20% to 22% of leavers were back in their rural community by 1997. The implication of this is clear: return migration will probably have a fairly limited effect on the size of a given cohort. Rather, it appears that rural areas must rely on inflows from other (primarily urban) areas to maintain a given population.

Earnings growth of stayers, leavers and return migrants

One reason people change location is to improve their earnings prospects. By moving to a new area, they may find a better match between their skills and job requirements, earn higher wages and enjoy faster earnings growth than their counterparts who stayed. Is earnings growth really greater for rural leavers than for rural stayers?

The answer is a qualified yes. Whether one measures earnings growth by examining the median change in earnings or the median percentage change in earnings, persons who leave rural areas experience greater earnings growth than those who stay. For example, tax

Table 6: Net migration flows by age and province, 1991 to 1996

Age in 1991		Newfoundland		Prince Edward Island		Nova Scotia		New Brunswick		Quebec		Ontario	
		Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data
							%						
15+	**Rural**	**-5.4**	**-5.7**	**1.0**	**-0.1**	**0.5**	**-0.5**	**-0.8**	**-0.9**	**1.4**	**0.7**	**3.2**	**3.0**
	Urban	**-3.4**	**-2.8**	**1.4**	**1.9**	**-1.5**	**-0.6**	**-0.1**	**-0.3**	**-1.1**	**-0.9**	**-1.2**	**-1.2**
15-29	Rural	-13.2	-13.7	-2.2	-4.0	-3.2	-4.6	-3.9	-4.6	0.5	-1.4	1.1	0.4
	Urban	-6.3	-5.8	0.3	0.5	-3.1	-1.8	-0.7	-0.9	-1.0	-0.6	-1.3	-1.2
15-19	Rural	-24.1	-25.1	-8.8	-11.9	-12.7	-16.2	-10.4	-11.4	-10.8	-10.0	-12.3	-12.3
	Urban	-1.9	-9.0	5.6	1.5	3.5	3.5	0.7	-1.2	2.5	1.9	1.6	1.7
20-24	Rural	-8.9	-16.1	0.2	-7.6	-1.9	-6.8	-2.0	-6.0	6.1	-3.3	6.4	-1.6
	Urban	-12.0	-7.1	-3.9	-1.0	-7.0	-3.5	-3.8	-2.2	-2.7	-0.6	-2.1	-0.8
25-29	Rural	-4.2	-5.8	1.9	3.2	4.8	2.3	0.4	-0.4	5.6	3.1	9.2	8.0
	Urban	-4.8	-3.2	-0.5	1.4	-4.7	-2.3	0.9	0.4	-2.2	-1.4	-2.6	-2.7
30-44	Rural	-2.7	-3.1	3.7	2.1	1.9	0.6	0.3	0.2	1.7	1.3	3.6	3.4
	Urban	-1.8	-1.7	1.9	1.8	-1.9	-0.5	0.6	0.2	-1.1	-0.9	-1.2	-1.3
45-54	Rural	-0.2	-0.3	3.2	3.7	3.8	3.2	1.9	2.2	3.7	4.3	6.6	7.2
	Urban	-2.9	-2.2	2.4	3.3	-0.1	-	-1.0	-0.7	-1.5	-1.6	-1.8	-1.8
55-64	Rural	1.6	1.2	3.8	2.4	2.5	2.9	1.7	2.4	2.5	3.1	6.8	7.5
	Urban	-2.6	-2.0	2.3	2.7	0.6	0.4	-	-0.8	-1.5	-1.6	-1.7	-1.7
65+	Rural	-1.4	-2.1	-2.9	-3.5	-0.1	-1.5	-0.6	-0.9	-1.7	-3.2	-1.1	-1.3
	Urban	0.7	2.1	1.2	3.6	0.7	1.0	0.6	0.6	-0.3	-0.1	0.2	0.3

Age in 1991		Manitoba		Saskatchewan		Alberta		British Columbia		Yukon		Northwest Territories	
		Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data	Census	Tax data
							%						
15+	**Rural**	**-**	**0.6**	**-2.0**	**-3.1**	**3.3**	**3.5**	**11.4**	**11.8**	**0.5**	**4.6**	**-0.4**	**0.6**
	Urban	**-3.0**	**-3.9**	**-2.5**	**-3.1**	**-0.8**	**-0.3**	**4.0**	**4.3**	**3.1**	**3.8**	**1.3**	**4.6**
15-29	Rural	-2.4	-2.3	-5.6	-8.2	3.8	4.4	15.2	15.3	4.3	12.3	4.7	7.8
	Urban	-4.2	-5.6	-3.9	-5.2	0.3	1.4	8.9	10.5	7.8	14.4	12.1	18.7
15-19	Rural	-15.8	-14.4	-23.5	-21.2	-9.9	-4.7	-3.1	-2.1	13.7	13.9	7.9	22.0
	Urban	3.4	-0.8	4.9	-3.2	8.0	9.1	10.7	14.2	4.0	19.2	21.2	4.3
20-24	Rural	5.3	-3.1	7.1	-10.5	12.4	5.2	29.0	17.6	-1.7	12.2	8.4	17.9
	Urban	-8.6	-6.8	-9.1	-6.1	-1.9	2.0	10.2	13.2	23.2	36.4	21.6	21.9
25-29	Rural	5.6	4.2	4.9	-1.2	9.7	7.4	21.3	21.0	3.4	2.2	-1.3	5.6
	Urban	-6.3	-6.5	-6.5	-5.2	-3.3	-1.8	6.5	6.9	-	6.2	0.4	13.0
30-44	Rural	1.4	2.4	-0.3	-1.1	3.9	3.9	11.2	11.6	0.5	-3.7	-4.4	3.4
	Urban	-2.8	-3.8	-3.2	-3.4	-1.9	-1.4	3.2	3.6	2.9	0.2	-1.3	2.4
45-54	Rural	2.4	4.2	0.6	0.5	4.0	4.3	12.4	14.6	-2.3	-2.9	-3.2	1.5
	Urban	-3.2	-4.2	-2.2	-2.8	-2.1	-2.0	1.5	1.5	-1.3	-9.3	-13.2	-5.6
55-64	Rural	1.7	3.2	-0.5	-0.8	2.0	3.3	12.4	14.4	-8.8	-10.4	-9.6	-10.2
	Urban	-2.8	-3.7	-1.1	-1.9	-1.2	-1.3	0.6	0.8	-5.9	-28.2	-29.2	-10.6
65+	Rural	-1.6	-2.7	-2.9	-4.3	-	-0.3	2.1	1.5	-1.7	-0.7	-0.9	-7.1
	Urban	0.1	-0.4	2.0	1.2	1.7	2.7	0.8	1.1	-4.7	3.6	-9.5	1.1

Sources: Census of Canada, 1996; T1 tax records

Table 7: Return migration, 1987 to 1997

	Stayers*	Leavers: Returned**	Leavers: Permanent†	Return rate
		%		
Age in 1987				
15 to 19				
Rural	43.8	12.3	43.9	21.9
Urban	62.2	9.0	28.7	23.9
20 to 24				
Rural	54.4	9.9	35.8	21.6
Urban	61.7	8.2	30.1	21.3
25 to 29				
Rural	68.0	6.4	25.6	20.0
Urban	70.2	5.5	24.4	18.3

Source: T1 tax records
* *In the same geographical unit for all 11 years.*
** *Changed geographical unit at some point during the period but 1997 location is the same as 1987 location.*
† *1997 location is different from 1987 location.*

data show that persons aged 25 to 29 in 1993 who left their rural community saw their earnings increase by 22% (or $4,400) between 1993 and 1997, compared with only 16% (or $2,900) for their counterparts who stayed in the community (Table 8).

While it seems reasonable to think that the greater earnings growth results from migration itself, this is not necessarily the case. It could occur if rural leavers have better earnings growth potential than rural stayers. Some leavers could simply be "on a fast track" (in terms of earnings progression). Disentangling these two effects is beyond the scope of this study.

Persons who return to their rural community may be those for whom migration was a mistake: perhaps they did not find the jobs they were hoping to find. In contrast, people who left and did not return may have been successful economically; that is, they may have found a good job with desirable working conditions. If so, the earnings growth of return migrants should be lower than that of leavers who did not return.

The evidence is consistent with this view.[3] For all three age groups, the earnings growth of return migrants is much less than that of leavers who did not return (Table 9). For instance, persons aged 20 to 24 in 1987 who had migrated and returned to their rural community by 1997 saw their earnings increase by about $7,700 (in 1992 dollars) between 1987 and 1997, compared with roughly $13,400 for their counterparts

Table 8: Median real earnings* growth, stayers and leavers, 1993 to 1997

	Age in 1993: 15 to 19		20 to 24		25 to 29	
	$	%	$	%	$	%
Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics						
Rural						
Stayers**	4,600	160	5,500	53	3,200	17
Leavers†	7,000	272	8,800	108	6,600	21
Urban						
Stayers**	5,900	211	7,100	64	4,400	20
Leavers†	6,500	195	7,100	83	7,900	33
T1 tax file records						
Rural						
Stayers**	6,000	162	5,000	51	2,900	16
Leavers†	7,700	211	9,000	108	4,400	22
Urban						
Stayers**	6,000	157	6,800	66	4,200	19
Leavers†	6,300	161	8,400	93	4,800	23

Sources: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics; T1 tax records
* *1992 dollars.*
** *In the same geographical unit for all 5 years.*
† *1997 location is different from 1993 location.*

Table 9: Median real earnings* growth, 1987 to 1997

	Age in 1987: 15 to 19		20 to 24		25 to 29	
	$	%	$	%	$	%
Rural						
Stayers**	13,000	297	6,400	53	4,700	26
Leavers						
Returned†	13,000	314	7,700	74	4,200	26
Permanent††	19,200	495	13,400	124	7,000	38
Urban						
Stayers**	18,500	385	11,500	79	7,100	31
Leavers						
Returned†	15,500	337	10,700	86	6,600	33
Permanent††	18,700	412	13,300	106	7,300	34

Source: T1 tax records
* *1992 dollars*
** *In the same geographical unit for all 11 years.*
† *Changed geographical unit at some point during the period but 1997 location is the same as 1987 location.*
†† *1997 location is different from 1987 location.*

who had not returned. This pattern is observed in all provinces. It suggests that while return migration may be positive from a community's point of view (as it helps maintain the population size of a given cohort), it may have been triggered by a negative labour market experience for some who decided to come back.

Summary

During the 1991-to-1996 period, migration patterns in rural areas varied markedly across provinces. At one end of the spectrum, rural areas were booming in British Columbia, showing net gains of 15-to-29 year-olds (about 15%). On the other hand, rural areas faced serious problems in Newfoundland, experiencing net losses of almost 15% of their youth population. Such areas in other Atlantic provinces, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan had more moderate losses. In Quebec and Ontario, net flows of rural youths were close to zero. Finally, Alberta enjoyed moderate net gains in its rural population aged 15 to 29.

Even within provinces, migration patterns varied substantially across economic regions. In Quebec, for example, rural areas in Lanaudière faced much more optimistic prospects than did those in Côte Nord or Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Similarly, rural areas in Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie fared much better in the first half of the 1990s than rural areas in northeastern Ontario.

Interprovincial differences in unemployment are probably a major factor underlying net migration flows. Among persons aged 15 to 29 in 1996 who were not full-time students, the unemployment rate in rural areas averaged 27% in the Atlantic provinces, compared with only 11% and 16% in Alberta and British Columbia.

Because migration is not a one-step process, it is crucial to examine how many people return to their rural community after having left. If a substantial proportion of leavers were to do so, one could count on return migration as a means of maintaining the population of a given cohort in an area. The numbers presented in this study indicate that such thinking is not justified. Only one leaver in five will return to his or her rural community 10 years later. This suggests that rural areas must rely on inflows from other (primarily urban) areas to maintain the population size of a given cohort.

Perspectives

Notes

1 Until recently, research on urban/rural migration has been hampered by a lack of appropriate data. In Quebec, a team of researchers has recently published a collection of papers that examine migration patterns for certain rural areas in that province (Gauthier, 1997).

2 This statement applies to both census and tax data. The only exception is for persons aged 25 to 29 leaving rural areas in New Brunswick, whose main destination varied according to data source: urban areas outside the province (census data) or urban areas inside the province (tax data).

3 Alternative scenarios can be considered. A young person may move from a rural area in the Atlantic provinces to Toronto, find a highly paid job involving long hours and decide to return to the Atlantic provinces to a job with lower wages but shorter hours. In this case, the return to the rural community would not be motivated by failure to find a well-paid job.

Reference

Gauthier, M., ed. *Pourquoi partir ? La migration des jeunes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*. Sainte-Foy: PUL-IQRC, 1997.