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# Aboriginal Mobility and Migration: Trends, Recent Patterns, and Implications: 1971–2001

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## **Aboriginal Mobility and Migration: Trends, Recent Patterns, and Implications: 1971–2001**

Stewart Clatworthy and Mary Jane Norris

### **Introduction**

Many aspects of the mobility and migration of Aboriginal populations differ significantly from those of mainstream populations. Population movement between reserves, rural communities, and urban areas can play an important role in shaping the demand for a wide range of goods and services. This paper explores various aspects of Aboriginal population movement, including reserve and rural-urban migration, the role of migration in the growth of urban Aboriginal populations, residential mobility and population turnover, and related policy implications. Discussions will address and clarify some of the misinterpretations surrounding migration phenomena, including the impression that the demographic explosion of urban Aboriginal populations observed in the recent censuses of countries is the result of an exodus from Aboriginal communities.

Using data from the 2001 Census of Canada, this study examines several dimensions of the migration patterns between 1996 and 2001 of four Aboriginal subgroups: Registered Indians, non-Registered Indians, Métis, and Inuit. Migration patterns for this time period are compared to long-term migration trends for the 1981–1996 period. The study also examines the 2000–2001 patterns of residential mobility for Canada's Aboriginal populations living in major urban areas.

Several dimensions of the recent mobility and migration patterns of Aboriginal Peoples are explored using data from the 2001 and earlier censuses and the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS). Specific issues examined in this regard include five key areas:

1. An overview of the measures and patterns of Aboriginal migration, comprising migration flows by origin and destination and net migration flows and rates by location
2. The contribution of migration to population change, especially in relation to growth of the Aboriginal population in urban areas
3. Measures, patterns, and effects of residential mobility, particularly within urban areas
4. Reasons for moving, in relation to migration to and from reserves, and

reasons for residential moves

#### 5. Implications of migration and residential mobility

In their analysis of the contribution of net migration to population change, especially in relation to growth of the Aboriginal population in urban areas, the authors ask a key question: *To what extent has migration contributed to the rapid increase in the Aboriginal population living off-reserve, especially that part living in large urban areas?* The ramifications of this question are explored not only for urban areas in general, but are examined in an analysis of the role of migration in growth for ten cities, selected on the basis of the largest Aboriginal populations from the 2001 Census.

In their examination of residential mobility, the authors address another key question that is extremely relevant to urban Aboriginal conditions: *To what extent do residential moves among the Aboriginal population result in acceptable housing situations?*

In looking at the broader picture of the repercussions of migration and residential mobility for Aboriginal people, the authors explore the policy implications and responses surrounding mobility and migration patterns of Aboriginal populations in Canada. They consider reasons for migration and residential churning of the population as a prelude to examining some of the consequences for policy and program development, and effective service delivery. The concept of "churn," or "turbulence," is borrowed from analyses of mobility in the context of the developing world, in which the pattern often involves movement between rural and urban areas. The implications and considerations address a number of areas, including the compositional effects on urban populations, their demographic and socio-economic characteristics; education program delivery and high mobility and student performance; housing on- and off-reserve; and social isolation and social cohesion.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the research findings, the authors provide a brief background on census migration data and definitions that underlie the analyses in this study.

## Census Migration Data and Definitions

The Census of Canada collects mobility and migration data using two questions:

1. Where did you live five years ago?
2. Where did you live one year ago?

Data from either question can be configured to distinguish among three subgroups, including:

- **Non-movers**, who lived at the same residence at the outset of the reference period (i.e., either five years ago or one year ago)
- **Migrants**, who lived in a different community at the outset of the reference period

- **Residential movers**, who lived at a different residence in the same community at the outset of the reference period

Combined, these latter two groups comprise the total population of movers during the reference period.

The migration components of the analyses presented in this chapter use data from the five-year mobility question. Two population subgroups are excluded from the analysis, individuals who migrated to Canada from abroad and individuals who migrated from an Indian reserve that was not enumerated by the census.<sup>1</sup> Migration rates are presented as average annual rates computed for the five-year period.

The analysis of residential moves uses data from the one-year mobility question. Residential mobility rates presented in this study are calculated for the non-migrant population, and reflect annual rates for the 12-month period preceding Census Day.

While the census provides the most complete and consistent set of data concerning the mobility and migration patterns of Aboriginal peoples, census data are limited in several respects. First, the census is administered to a sample of the population and excludes individuals living in various institutions, including prisons, chronic care facilities, and rooming houses. Second, a significant portion of the population living on-reserve is not captured by the census due to under-coverage (i.e., individuals missed by the census) and incomplete or non-enumeration. Although under-coverage occurs both on and off-reserve, levels of under-coverage (including non-enumeration) are known to be substantially higher on-reserve. As a consequence, the geographic distribution of the Aboriginal population captured by the census is biased. The proportion of the population residing on-reserves is underestimated, while that off-reserve is overestimated. As Registered Indians form the vast majority of the population residing on-reserve, this population is most underrepresented in the census data. Third, the census migration and mobility data also present some conceptual limitations. For example, many characteristics of migrants (e.g., education, marital and family status, and socio-economic attributes) are known only at the end of migration reference period (i.e., at the time of the census). Migrant characteristics at the time of migration may differ. The census also does not capture multiple moves, migrants who leave and return to the same location, or those who die during the time interval.

## Aboriginal Population Definitions

Recent censuses allow for the Aboriginal population to be defined according to several criteria, including ethnic origin (ethnicity), identity (self-reported affiliation with an Aboriginal group), Registered Indian status, and band membership.<sup>2</sup> The analyses presented in this chapter are based on the population that reported an Aboriginal identity (North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit) and/or reported registration under the Indian Act. According to the 2001 Census, this

population numbered about 976,310 individuals, including 608,850 North American Indians (62.4%), 292,305 Métis (29.9%), 45,075 Inuit (4.6%) and 30,080 others who gave either multiple Aboriginal responses or did not report identity but did report Indian registration or band membership. The population reporting Indian registration numbered 558,175, representing about 57.2% of the total population reporting Aboriginal identity.

For purposes of this study, the Aboriginal identity population has been configured into four subgroups: Registered Indians, non-Registered Indians, Métis, and Inuit. Distinguishing the population on the basis of Indian registration status is important to any analysis of Aboriginal mobility or migration. Unlike other Aboriginal groups, those registered under the Indian Act have certain rights and benefits, especially if they live on-reserve. Among other things, these include taxation exemptions, access to funding for housing and post-secondary education, and land and treaty rights. Aboriginal populations living off-reserve, including those in Métis and Inuit communities, do not have legal access to the same rights and benefits as Registered Indians living on-reserve. The varying landscape of rights and benefits which exists between on- and off-reserve communities and between those registered and non-registered is important to gaining an understanding of the migration patterns of the four Aboriginal subgroups.

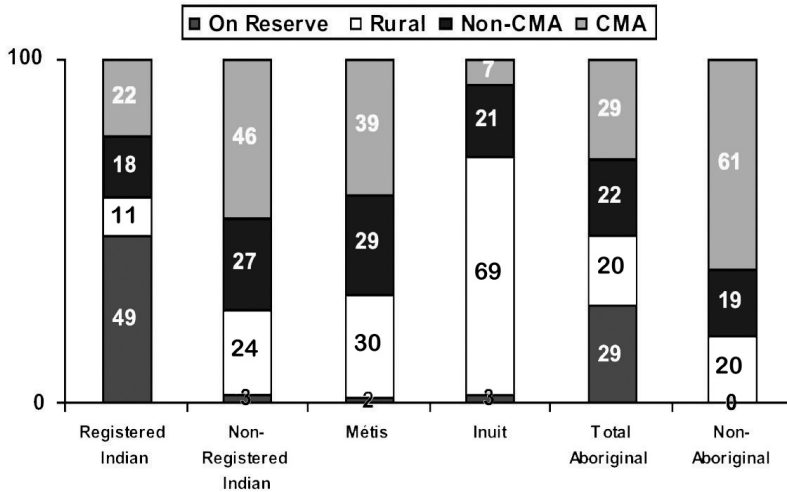
## Geographic Distribution of the Population

As noted previously, the study's scope is restricted to internal migration. In this regard, mobility and migration are examined within the context of four mutually exclusive geographic areas: Indian reserves and settlements, rural areas, urban non-census metropolitan areas (urban non-CMAs), and census metropolitan areas (CMAs). CMAs are defined as urban areas with a minimum core population of 100,000. Urban non-CMAs include all other urban areas with a core population of at least 10,000. As defined for this study, both of these urban geographies exclude Indian reserves and rural fringe areas located within the broader boundaries of the urban areas. Rural areas comprise all remaining areas, including the undeveloped fringes of urban areas but excluding lands defined as Indian reserves and settlements.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 13.1** illustrates the geographic distribution of the four Aboriginal groups as captured by the 2001 Census. Comparative data are also presented for the total Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. According to census data for 2001, about 29% of the total Aboriginal population resided on Indian reserves or settlements, 20% in rural areas, 22% in small urban centres (urban non-CMAs), and 29% in urban areas. The geographic distribution of the Aboriginal population contrasted sharply with that of the non-Aboriginal population, which was heavily concentrated in urban areas (80%), and especially in large urban areas (61%).<sup>4</sup>

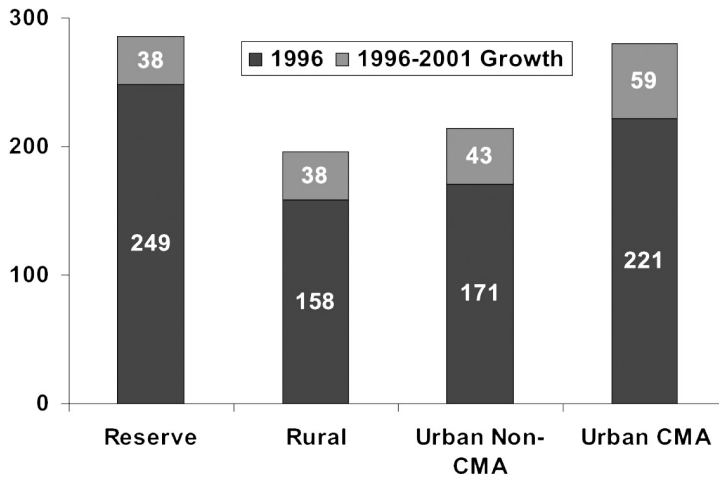
The figure also illustrates that there were quite pronounced differences in the geographic distributions of the four Aboriginal groups. The non-Registered Indian

**Figure 13.1: Distribution of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population by Geographic Location, Canada 2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Figure 13.2: Growth in the Population Reporting Aboriginal Identity by Location of Residence, Canada 1996-2001**



Source: 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Canada

and Métis populations were most heavily concentrated in urban areas, at 73% and 67% respectively, while a substantial majority of the Inuit population lived in rural areas (69%). The Registered Indian population differed from other Aboriginal groups in that close to one-half of the population identified by the census lived on-reserve (understated). In comparison to both the non-Registered Indian

and Métis populations, Registered Indians were considerably less urbanized (40% [overstated]).

## Recent Patterns of Population Growth

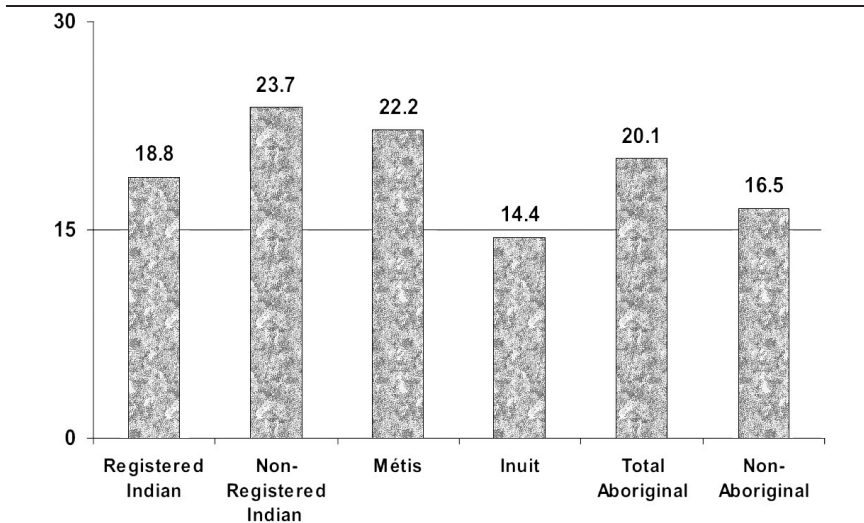
Many observers, including both researchers and those writing in the general media, have commented on the rapid growth of the Aboriginal urban population, especially in major urban areas. Measuring the extent of Aboriginal population change using census data is a highly problematic exercise, as census estimates are confounded by changes over time in concepts used to define the population, the wording of questions used for this purpose, levels of non-enumeration and survey under-coverage, and the population's propensity to identify their Aboriginal heritage and affiliation. These difficulties notwithstanding, census estimates can provide a rough measure of the scale of recent population changes.

Unadjusted census estimates of growth for the total Aboriginal identity population during the 1996–2001 time period are presented in **Figure 13.2** (page 211). The total population increase for the period numbered 177,300 individuals (about 22%). This figure reveals that substantial increases to the Aboriginal identity population occurred both on-reserve and in off-reserve rural and urban areas. The population on-reserve increased by about 38,000 individuals: an annual growth rate of about 2.8% during the period. Some portion of the reported growth on-reserve is associated with the lower number of reserves incompletely (or non-) enumerated by the 2001 Census. Most of the growth during the period, or about 77%, occurred off-reserve. The population in rural areas increased by about 38,000 individuals, representing an annual growth rate of about 4.3%. Growth in the urban Aboriginal population totalled about 101,800 individuals. Most urban growth occurred in large cities, where the average annual rate of growth approached 4.7% for the period.

The pattern and scale of population growth reported for 1996 to 2001 is similar to that identified for the 1986–1996 time period. The very high rates of growth for the urban Aboriginal population, which characterize the 1986–2001 time period, cannot be explained by natural increase (i.e., the excess of births over deaths). This situation raises a key question: *To what extent has migration contributed to the rapid increase in the Aboriginal population living off-reserve, especially that living in large urban areas?*

## Gross Migration Rates

Between 1996 and 2001, 174,550 Aboriginal people, or about 20% of the population, changed their community of residence. As illustrated in **Figure 13.3**, the proportion of the population that reported migration during this period varied widely among Aboriginal subgroups, the highest proportion being among non-Registered Indians (23.7%) and Métis (22.2%), and the lowest among Inuit

**Figure 13.3: Proportion of Population Aged 5+ Years Reporting Migration by Aboriginal Identity Group, Canada 1996-2001**

Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Table 13.1: Average Annual Gross Migration Rate (per 1,000 Population) by Aboriginal Identity Group and Location of Residence, Canada 1996-2001**

Location	Population Group						Aboriginal/ Non-Aboriginal
	Registered Indian	Non-Registered Indian	Métis	Inuit	Total Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	
Reserve	34.1	na	na	na	35.9	na	na
Rural	116.1	83.5	77.2	38.1	84.7	63.1	1.34
Non-CMA	125.6	116.8	107.7	91.5	116.5	77.9	1.50
CMA	100.9	89.0	84.7	134.1	93.1	63.1	1.48

na – not available due to small population counts

Source: 2001 Census of Canada

(14.4%). About 18.8% of Registered Indians also migrated during the period. With the exception of the Inuit, migrants formed a larger segment of the Aboriginal, as opposed to non-Aboriginal, population.

Gross migration rates, which measure the combined in and out migrant flows in relation to the size of the population, can be used to provide a measure of the overall extent of population movement into and out of a geographic area. Average annual gross migration rates for the 1996–2001 period are presented in **Table 13.1** for each Aboriginal subgroup by geographic location. The data in the



**Table 13.2: Distribution of Aboriginal Migrant Flows by Origin and Destination and Aboriginal Identity Group, Canada 1996-2001**

Origin/Destination Flow	Registered Indian		Non-Registered Indian		Métis		Inuit	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Urban to Urban	31,885	34.3	13,365	59.7	28,515	53.0	1,500	26.7
Urban to Rural	8,490	9.1	3,385	15.1	10,340	19.2	995	17.7
Urban to Reserve	16,940	18.2	515	2.3	630	1.2	100	1.8
Rural to Rural	3,080	3.3	1,240	5.5	4,105	7.6	1,385	24.6
Rural to Urban	12,365	13.3	3,255	14.6	8,920	16.6	1,200	21.4
Rural to Reserve	5,355	5.8	155	0.7	240	0.4	110	2.0
Reserve to Urban	9,960	10.7	345	1.5	660	1.2	150	2.7
Reserve to Rural	1,565	1.7	40	0.2	280	0.5	80	1.4
Reserve to Reserve	3,240	3.5	70	0.3	125	0.2	100	1.8

Source: 2001 Census of Canada

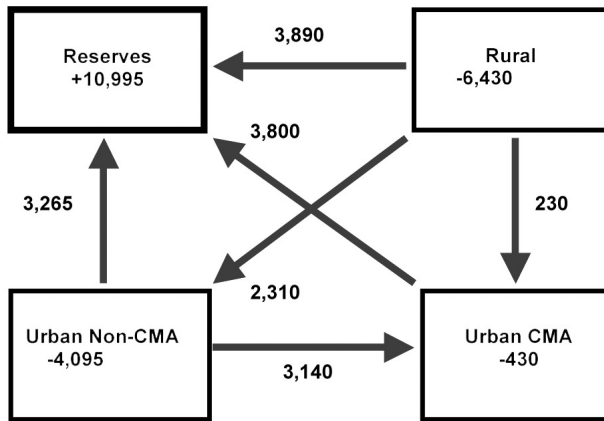
table reveal several additional features of the migration patterns of specific Aboriginal subgroups. For example, while the overall rate of migration among Registered Indians (18.8%) is lower than that of non-Registered Indians and Métis, this situation is the result of low rates of migration to and from reserves (34.1 migrants per 1,000 population). In fact, gross migration rates among Registered Indians living in off-reserve locations are significantly higher than those reported for the non-Registered Indian and Métis populations. Similarly, the low rate of migration recorded for the total Inuit population reflects quite low levels of migration to and from rural areas.<sup>5</sup> In major urban areas, the rate of gross migration among the Inuit population exceeds that of all other Aboriginal subgroups and the non-Aboriginal population.

While Aboriginal residents of reserves display much lower levels of migration than the non-Aboriginal population, rates of Aboriginal migration off-reserve are considerably higher than those of the non-Aboriginal population in both rural areas (about 34% higher) and urban areas (nearly 50% higher).

## Migrant Origin and Destination Flows

**Table 13.2** provides a summary of the migration flows during the 1996–2001 period between reserves and off-reserve locations for each of the four Aboriginal subgroups. Flows between urban areas (i.e., urban to urban) formed the largest component of migration among each of the four groups, and accounted for the majority of moves amongst non-Registered Indian and Métis migrants. Several other dimensions of the migration flows of the four groups, however, differ. These differences relate, in part, to variations among subgroups with respect to geographic distribution and degree of urbanization. For example, moves to and from Indian reserves and settlements are common only among the Registered

**Figure 13.4: Net Migration Flows of Aboriginal Identity Population Aged 5+ Years, Canada 1996-2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Table 13.3: Volume of Net Migrants by Aboriginal Identity Group and Location, Canada 1996-2001**

Location	Registered Indian	Non-Registered Indian	Métis	Inuit
Reserves	10,770	285	-70	-20
Rural Areas	-7,665	15	1,460	-235
Urban Non-CMAs	-2,185	-360	-1,700	250
CMAs	-920	60	310	5
<b>Net Migrants</b>	<b>16,100</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>2,580</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>% of Population</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>

Source: 2001 Census of Canada

Indian population. Migrants originating from or relocating to reserves formed nearly 40% of all Registered Indian migrants during the period. Nearly two-thirds of Registered Indian moves between on- and off-reserve locations involved moves to reserves. More than three-quarters of the moves by Registered Indians to reserves involved migrants from urban areas. Reciprocal moves between reserves and urban areas constitute an important dimension of the migration patterns of Registered Indians.

For both the non-Registered Indian and Métis populations, three migration streams—urban to urban, urban to rural, and rural to urban—account for nearly nine out every ten migrants. These three migration streams are also common among Inuit migrants. Migration among the Inuit, however, is also characterized by significant flows between rural areas, a dimension that constitutes a minor component of migration for all other Aboriginal populations.

## Net Migration Flows and Rates

Although nearly 20% of the Aboriginal population changed their community of residence between 1996 and 2001, the net effects of the relocations on the geographic distribution of the population was not large. Net changes among the four geographic areas during the period numbered only 21,950 individuals, or about 2.5% of the population aged five years and over. As revealed in **Figure 13.4** (page 215), the Aboriginal population living on reserves gained about 10,995 migrants as a consequence of net inflows from both rural and urban areas. All off-reserve geographic areas reported net outflows of migrants for the period. Rural areas lost 6,430 individuals through net outflows to all other areas. Although small urban centres (urban non-CMAs) experienced a net inflow of migrants from rural areas, this was offset by larger net outflows to both large cities (CMAs) and to reserves. For the period, Aboriginal population losses through migration for smaller cities totalled 4,095 individuals. Large urban centres recorded net inflows of Aboriginal migrants from both rural areas and smaller urban centres. Larger net outflows of Aboriginal migrants to reserves, however, resulted in a net migration loss in large urban centres of 430 individuals.

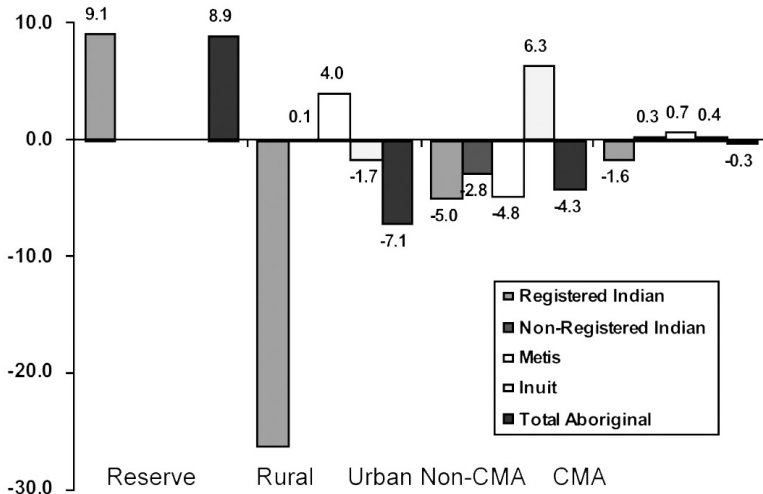
Aggregate data for the total Aboriginal identity population mask some important differences in the net migration patterns of the various subgroups. The volume of net migrants by geographic area is presented in **Table 13.3** (page 215) for each of the four Aboriginal groups.

The geographic pattern of net migration changes for Registered Indians is similar to that presented previously for the total Aboriginal population. Reserves gained about 10,770 Registered Indians through migration during the period, while all off-reserve geographic areas recorded net migration losses. Net migration losses of Registered Indians were significant only for rural areas (7,765) and smaller urban areas (2,185). Overall, net changes to the Registered Indian populations of the four geographic areas resulting from migration totalled only 16,100 individuals and represented only 3.3% of the Registered Indian population aged five years and over. The contribution of migration to changes in the geographic distribution of other Aboriginal groups during the 1996–2001 period was much smaller (about 1% of the population aged five years and over). Migration among the Métis population resulted in net gains in rural areas (1,460) and large cities (360), and losses in smaller urban areas (1,700) and reserves (70). For both the non-Registered Indian and Inuit populations, net migration flows for the period were quite small for all geographic areas.

## Contribution of Migration to Population Change

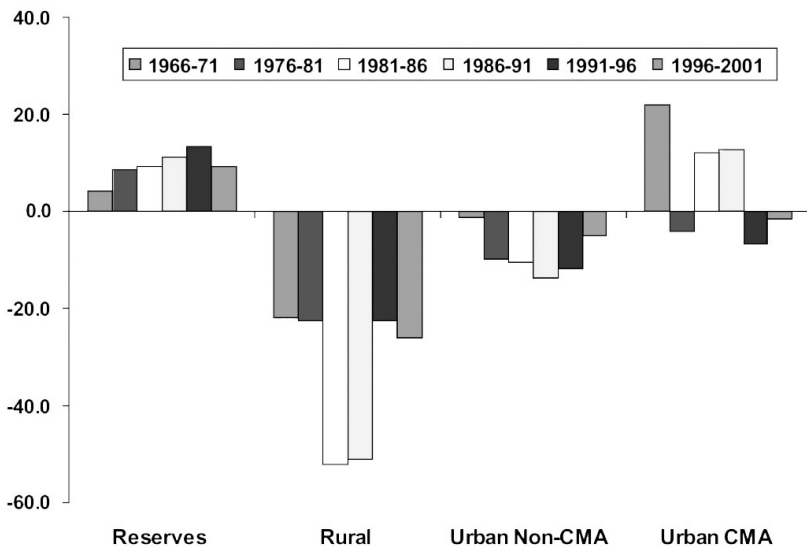
Net migration rates can be used to measure of the impact of migration on changes in the size of the population in each geographic area. As illustrated in **Figure 13.5**, for most Aboriginal subgroups, net migration rates tend to be quite small for most geographic areas. Population size impacts were most significant for the

**Figure 13.5: Average Annual Rate of Net Migration (per 1,000 Population) by Aboriginal Identity Group and Location, Canada 1996-2001**



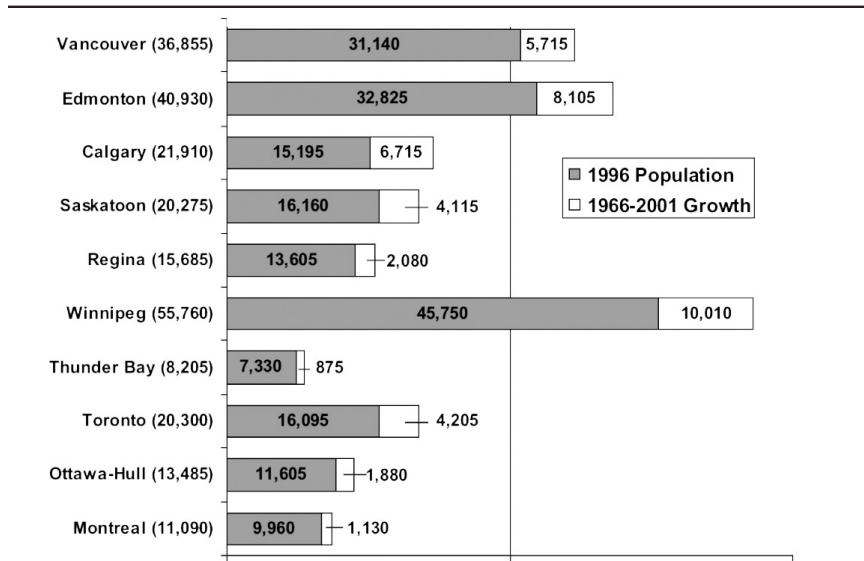
Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Figure 13.6: Average Annual Rate of Registered Indian Net Migration by Location and 5-Year Period, Canada 1966-2001**



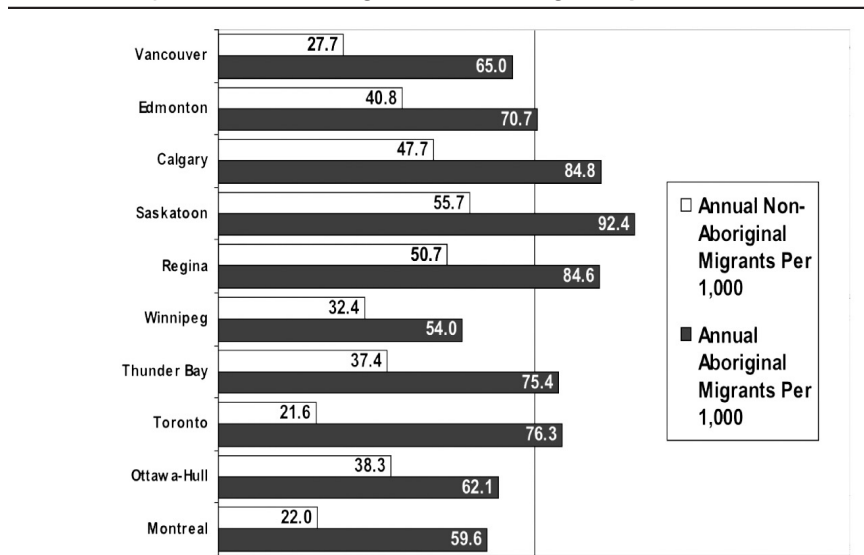
Source: Census of Canada, Siggner (1977) and Norris et al. (2004)

**Figure 13.7: Aboriginal Population Growth in Select Major Urban Centres, Canada 1996–2001**



Source: 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Canada

**Figure 13.8: Average Annual Rate of Gross Migration per 1,000 Population for Select Major Urban Areas, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population, 1996–2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

Registered Indian populations residing in rural areas and on-reserve. In rural areas, the net outflow of Registered Indian migrants averaged 26.2 per 1,000 population (or about 2.6%) annually. Net inflows of Registered Indians to reserves averaged 9.1 per 1,000 population (or 0.9%) annually. For all remaining Aboriginal groups and locations, average annual rates of net migration ranged between 6.3 and -5.0 per 1,000 population, implying that *migration did not contribute to significant changes in the distribution of the Aboriginal population during the 1996–2001 period.*

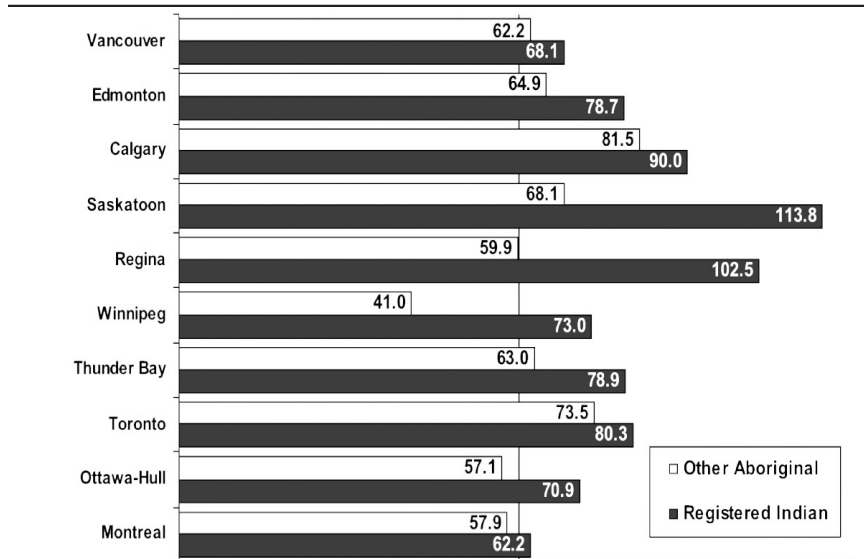
In many respects, the patterns of Aboriginal migration identified for the 1996–2001 period are similar to those reported for the previous five-year period (Clatworthy and Cooke 2001; Norris et al. 2004). Reserves continued to experience relatively small net inflows of migrants, who were almost exclusively Registered Indians. Rural areas experienced small net inflows of Métis and non-Registered Indian migrants, but much larger outflows of Registered Indian migrants. Urban areas also continued to record net outflows of migrants, most notably Registered Indians, although the impacts of migration on the size of the urban Aboriginal population remained quite small.

Due to changes in census population definitions, long-term migration trends are available only for the Registered Indian population. As revealed in **Figure 13.6** (page 217), net inflows of Registered Indian migrants to reserves, first reported for the 1966–1971 time period by Siggner (1977), have continued throughout the past 35-year period.

Net out-migration of Registered Indians from rural areas and smaller urban areas has also occurred consistently throughout this period. A more complex pattern of net migration exists for large urban areas. Large urban centres recorded net inflows of the Registered Indian migrants throughout most of the 1966–1991 time period. The net outflows of the Registered Indian migrants from major urban centres reported for both the 1991–1996 and 1996–2001 time periods reflect a reversal of the longer-term migration trend. Although migration has contributed to growth in the Aboriginal populations of large cities in the past, this no longer appears to be the case. In fact, recent evidence suggests that migration has tended to retard Aboriginal population growth in both small and large urban centres, as well as in off-reserve rural areas.

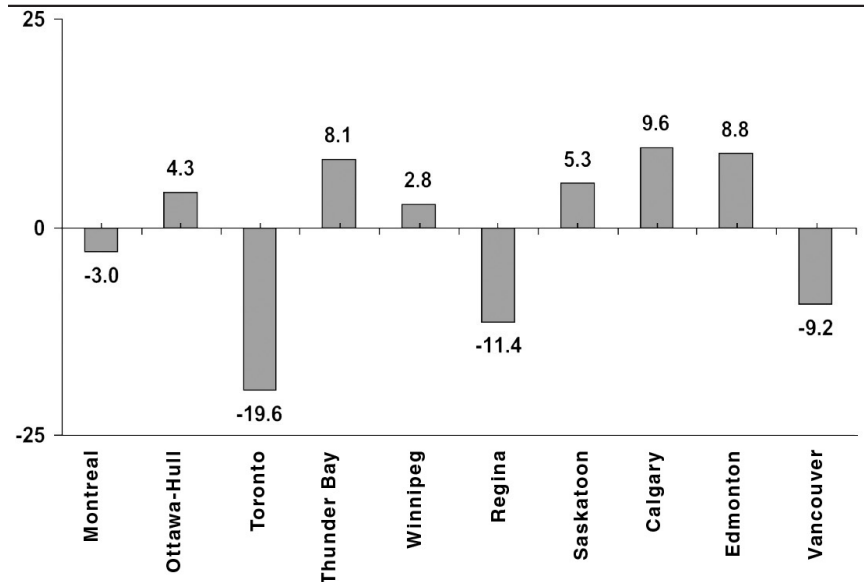
Although high rates of migration characterize all Aboriginal populations, especially those off-reserve, data for the 1991–2001 time period clearly suggest that migration has not played a major role in altering the geographic distribution of the Aboriginal population, nor has it served as a significant component of recent population growth in any of the geographic areas considered in this study. These findings clearly imply that the recent high rates of Aboriginal population growth must result from other factors. As noted by Clatworthy et al. (1997) and Guimond (1999), these other factors are both numerous and complex and include natural increase (i.e., the excess of births over deaths), changes in levels of census

**Figure 13.9: Average Annual Gross Migration per 1,000 Population, Registered Indian and Other Aboriginal Populations, Select Major Urban Areas, 1996-2001**



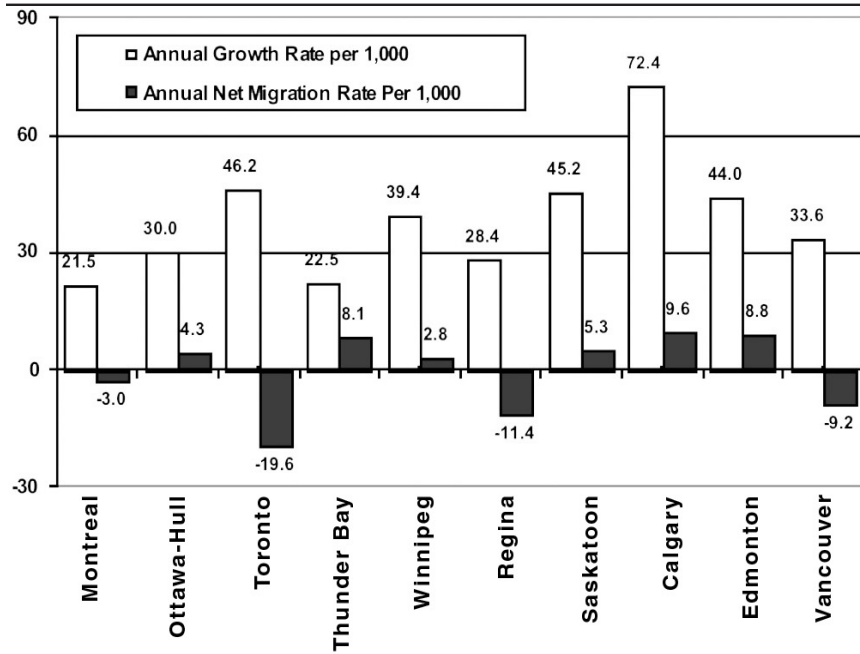
Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Figure 13.10: Average Annual Net Migration Rate per 1,000 Aboriginal Population, Select Major Urban Areas, 1996-2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

**Figure 13.11: Average Annual Growth and Net Migration Rates per 1,000 Aboriginal Population, Select Major Urban Areas, 1996-2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

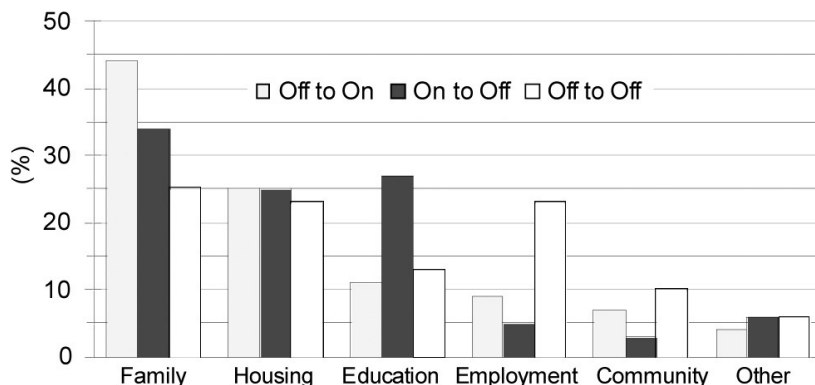
coverage, legislative changes (e.g., the 1985 amendments to the Indian Act), and changes in self-reporting of Aboriginal identity (ethnic mobility or ethnic drift). These latter two factors appear to account for much of the reported recent population growth reported for the Registered Indian, non-Registered Indian, and Métis populations, especially in off-reserve areas.

## Aboriginal Migration and Major Urban Areas

As noted previously, movement to and from urban areas, especially large cities, forms a significant component of the recent migration patterns of all Aboriginal subgroups. Based on the 2001 Census, about 244,500 Aboriginal peoples (or about 25% of the total recorded by the census) lived in one of 10 CMA that reported the largest Aboriginal populations. Estimates of recent Aboriginal population growth for these cities are presented in **Figure 13.7** (page 218). As revealed in the figure, each of these 10 cities recorded significant levels of Aboriginal population growth (in excess of 10%) between 1996 and 2001. Four of these cities—Toronto, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary—recorded Aboriginal population increases exceeding 20%.



**Figure 13.12: Reasons for Migration to and from Reserves and Between Non-Reserve Areas, Registered Indians, Canada 1991 APS**



Source: Clatworthy (1995) based on data from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey

Average annual gross migration rates for the Aboriginal populations of these cities (**Figure 13.8** – page 218) ranged from 54.0 per 1,000 population (5.4%) in Montreal to 92.4 per 1,000 population (9.2%) in Saskatoon. In addition to Saskatoon, gross migration rates were also quite high among the Aboriginal populations of Calgary and Regina. In all of the highlighted urban areas, Aboriginal migration rates exceeded those of the non-Aboriginal population by a wide margin.

For all of the highlighted cities, high rates of gross migration are most typical of the Registered Indian populations (**Figure 13.9** – page 220). Average annual gross migration rates for Registered Indians ranged from 62.2 per 1,000 (6.2%) in Montreal to 113.3 per 1,000 (11.3%) in Saskatoon during the period. For other Aboriginal groups, average annual rates over the same period ranged between 41.0 per 1,000 (4.1%) in Winnipeg and 81.5 per 1,000 (8.2%) in Calgary. Differences between Registered Indians and other Aboriginal groups were most pronounced in Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon. For these cities, Registered Indian migration rates rose sharply over those of other Aboriginal groups.

## Net Migration and Urban Growth

As illustrated in **Figure 13.10** (page 220), Aboriginal net migration rates varied widely among the highlighted cities. Six cities reported net inflows of Aboriginal migrants for the period, although these were of significant scale only in Thunder Bay, Calgary, and Edmonton. Four cities reported net outflows of Aboriginal migrants. Net outflows of Aboriginal migrants were significant for Regina, Vancouver, and Toronto, in particular. Although several of the highlighted cities recorded significant net migration flows for the period, migration did not play

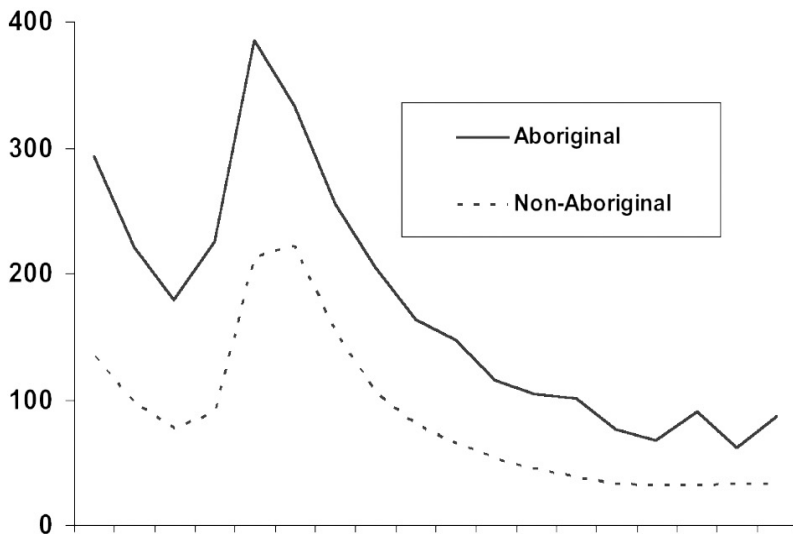
a major role in Aboriginal population growth in any of these cities. The relationship between net migration and Aboriginal population growth is displayed in **Figure 13.11** (page 221) which presents the average annual population growth rate and net migration rate for each of the cities. As revealed in **Figure 13.11**, annual net migration rates account for only a small component of the total growth rates of cities recording net inflows of migrants. In addition, each of the four cities that recorded net outflows of migrants during the period also reported high rates of Aboriginal population growth. The situation of Toronto is most striking in this regard. During the period, Toronto recorded an annual net outflow of 19.6 migrants per 1,000 population, but an overall annual growth rate of 46.2 per 1,000 population, one of the highest rates of Aboriginal population growth among the cities highlighted.

## Reasons for Migration

Migration factors differ among Aboriginal groups, communities, and reserves. As discussed earlier, variations in migration patterns reflect group differences, such as location, urbanization, and legal status (rights and benefits). For example, compared to other Aboriginal communities, reserves tend to have higher rates of in and out migration, and to experience net inflows of migrants, rather than net losses or no gain or loss, through migration flows (Norris et al. 2000). Reserves contribute to a unique set of push-pull factors that affect migration patterns related to the rights and benefits associated with Registered Indian status and residence on-reserve, as noted earlier (e.g., housing, post-secondary schooling, tax exemption, land/treaty rights). Still, it should be remembered that migration flows between individual communities and cities are the outcomes of particular sets of circumstances; reserve communities in Canada do differ widely in their economic, socio-cultural, and geographic characteristics.

The decision to move is the outcome of competing push-pull factors that influence migration, with “pushes” being the reasons to leave one’s current place of residence, and the “pulls” being the benefits to be gained by moving to a potential destination. The pushes of reserves and cities as places of current residence can be many and varied, including socio-economic factors such as education, employment, and housing (availability, adequacy); institutional completeness; health facilities; and the political situation. In addition to any housing considerations, with respect to the pulls of reserves, Aboriginal communities and reserves can also serve as potential destinations for city dwellers with goals of preserving ties with the home community and maintaining cultural traditions and language. As destinations, they can provide a home base with a critical mass of friends and extended family support, and serve as a “cultural hearth” with culturally appropriate activities and services. In some cases, these communities have been cited by some migrants as their place of choice to raise children and for retirement (Cooke 1999).

**Figure 13.13: Rate of Residential Mobility per 1,000 Population Aged 1+ Years by Age Group, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations Living in Urban Areas, Canada, 2000-2001**

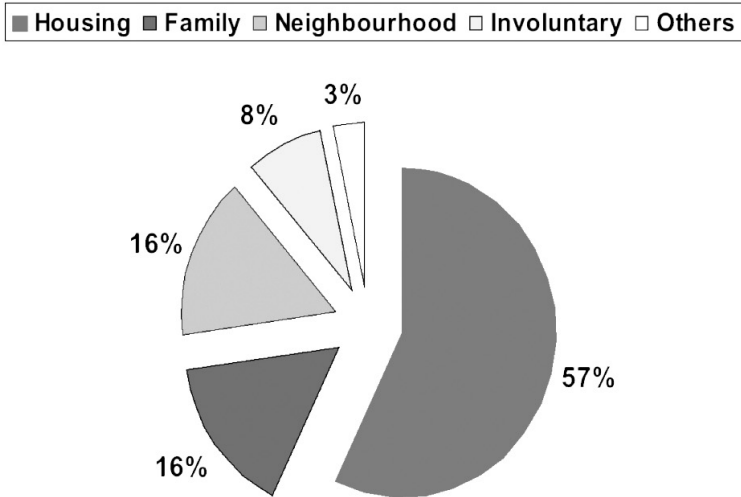


Source: 2001 Census of Canada

In an analysis of 1991 APS migration data, looking at the reasons for migration among Registered Indians, family and housing were cited as the major reasons for moving, regardless of destination, while education was a major reason for leaving reserves (**Figure 13.12**). Employment was also a major reason for moves between urban communities (Clatworthy and Cooke 2001).

It should be remembered that migration reflects the interplay among personal characteristics of potential movers, and the characteristics of communities of residence and those of potential destinations. The propensity to move is influenced by stages in the life cycle and personal attributes (e.g., education level, attachment to traditional culture). For example, differences associated with personal characteristics can include age-gender variation in migration rates by origin; destination (e.g., women have a higher rate of out-migration from reserves, while men have a higher in-migration rate to reserves); the fact that women are more likely to move for family or community-related reasons; and that female lone parents are more common amongst the urban in-migrant population. Community characteristics, such as location, are also known to affect migration. In the case of communities that are located either “near to” (within 60 km) or “distant from” (more than 300 km) urban centres, people are more likely to leave and less likely to return, as compared to communities at more moderate distances (Clatworthy and Cooke 2001).

**Figure 13.14: Reasons Cited by Aboriginal Residential Movers for Last Move Off Reserve, Canada 1996-2001**



Source: Clatworthy (1995) based on data from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey.

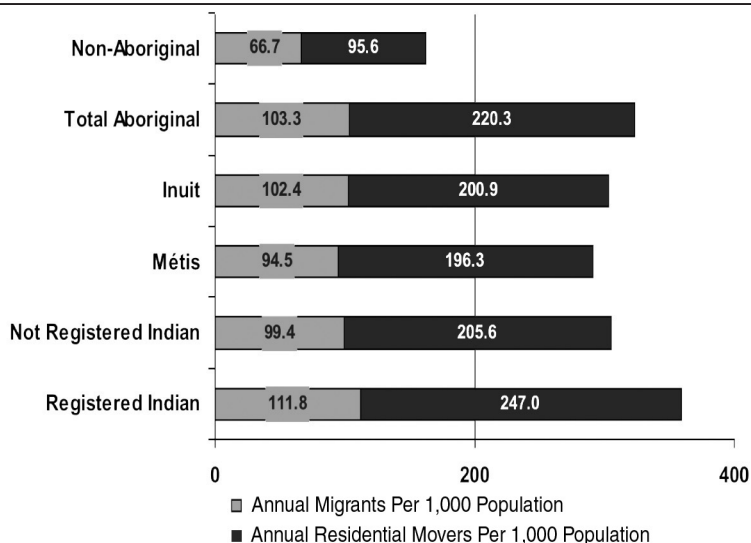
## Residential Mobility

Changing residence within the same community represents a specific dimension of mobility that has not been explored to any great extent for Canada's Aboriginal population. This aspect of mobility is important, as residential mobility represents the major process through which households and individuals adjust their housing consumption to reflect changes in needs and resources. Changes in housing needs may result from a variety of events such as marriage, the birth of a child, or a new place of work. Many events may also affect the resources available for housing, such as a rise in income, finding stable employment, or losing a job. This section provides some general indicators of recent residential mobility rates and reasons for residential moves among the Aboriginal population, especially the population residing in urban areas.

Residential mobility rates, as presented in this study, are defined as the proportion of the non-migrant population that changed residence in the previous 12-month period. The rates reflect moves made during the year preceding the 2001 Census, and are presented as the number of residential movers per 1,000 population aged one or more years.

For the 2000–2001 period, the overall rate of residential mobility among the non-migrant Aboriginal population was 152.1 per 1,000 population, a rate roughly 1.8 times higher than that reported for the non-Aboriginal population. Residential mobility rates, however, varied widely by location. Among the Aboriginal population, the rates of mobility on-reserve (85.2 per 1,000 popula-

**Figure 13.15: Annual Rate of Turnover Among Urban Population by Aboriginal Identity Group, Canada 1996-2001**



Source: 2001 Census of Canada

tion) and in rural areas (85.8 per 1,000 population) were of similar magnitude, but sharply below those reported in urban areas (220.3 per 1,000 population). In relation to the non-Aboriginal population, the rate of residential mobility of the Aboriginal population was about 2.1 times higher in rural areas, and about 2.3 times higher in urban centres.

High rates of residential mobility characterize all four Aboriginal groups in urban areas. In urban centres, annual rates among the groups ranged from about 198 per 1,000 population for the Métis population to 247 per 1,000 population for Registered Indians. By way of comparison, the annual residential mobility rate among the urban non-Aboriginal population during the period was about 96 per 1,000 population.

As many of the events that can trigger residential moves (e.g., marriage, family development, buying a new home) are associated with life cycle changes, residential mobility is strongly patterned over age groups. Additionally, most of these triggering events are associated with younger age groups, especially young adults. Given this situation, and the much younger age structure of the Aboriginal population, one would expect residential mobility to be more common among Aboriginal peoples. As illustrated in **Figure 13.13** (page 224), differences in residential mobility rates between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in urban areas cannot be explained by differences in age structure. For all age groups, including older cohorts, rates for the Aboriginal population are significantly (at least 50%) higher than those of the non-Aboriginal population. Other factors,

such as inadequate housing, low rates of home ownership, discrimination, and low incomes and poverty, are likely to be more important than age in explaining the high rates of residential mobility of the urban Aboriginal population.

**Figure 13.13** also reveals that the general pattern of residential mobility over age groups is quite similar for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. Mobility for both populations is highest among cohorts aged 20 to 34 years, and among children aged 1 to 9 years. This pattern most likely reflects the higher levels of mobility associated with younger families in the early stages of family development who are attempting to bring their housing consumption in line with the larger space needs of a growing family.

While the mainstream literature (e.g., Rossi 1955) tends to view a residential move as a voluntary response to changing household or individual circumstances, moving may also occur involuntarily as a consequence of events such as marriage dissolution, eviction, or the loss of the dwelling to fire or condemnation. The most recently available survey data concerning the reasons for residential moves among Aboriginal peoples derives from the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey. The reasons cited by APS respondents living off-reserve are summarized in **Figure 13.14** (page 225).

As expected, housing-related issues were the largest category of reasons given by APS respondents (57%) for moving. Family-related reasons were cited by 16% of respondents. Factors related to neighbourhood circumstances (e.g., crime and safety) and accessibility (e.g., to schools or employment) were also cited by 16% of respondents. Involuntary moves were noted by 8% of all respondents. Most of these involuntary moves were linked to sub-standard housing. APS data on reasons for moving among Aboriginal peoples clearly identify efforts to improve housing situations as the primary motivation for residential moves. This suggests that the high levels of residential mobility among urban Aboriginal populations flow from inadequate housing situations.

The housing difficulties experienced by Aboriginal populations both on- and off-reserve have been well documented over the past 20 years (e.g., Clatworthy and Stevens 1987; Clatworthy 1980, 1983, 1995; Spector 1996). Little of this prior research, however, has examined the housing circumstances of Aboriginal movers and non-movers. According to widely accepted theory, moving represents an opportunity for the household or individual to bring housing consumption more in line with needs and resources. This raises a key question: ***To what extent do residential moves among the Aboriginal population result in acceptable housing situations?*** In this regard, recent research conducted for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples by Clatworthy (1995) found that a substantial majority of urban Aboriginal movers did not acquire housing that met Canada's standards for affordability (cost in relation to income), quality (condition), or suitability (adequate space). This research also found that, in relation to non-movers, recent Aboriginal movers were considerably more likely to experience one or more

housing consumption deficiency (most commonly affordability and quality). For a significant segment of the urban Aboriginal population, the process of residential mobility does not appear to result in acceptable levels of housing consumption. Given this situation, the high levels of residential mobility that characterize the urban Aboriginal population are cause for concern, and may constitute an additional dimension of the housing difficulties experienced by the population.

## **Implications of Urban Population Turnover and Instability**

Based on the findings of this study, the most important aspects of recent Aboriginal mobility and migration patterns relate not to population redistribution (as migration has played only a minor role in this regard) but, rather, to the high levels of population turnover off-reserve, especially in urban areas. In urban areas, high levels of residential mobility, in conjunction with high levels of in and out migration, result in Aboriginal populations that are in a high state of flux, or churn. As illustrated in **Figure 13.15** (page 226), nearly one in every three urban Aboriginal residents either migrates in or out of the city or changes residence within the city annually, a level of population turnover roughly twice that of the non-Aboriginal population. Among urban Aboriginal residents, population turnover is most pronounced for Registered Indians, who display higher rates of both migration and residential mobility. For Registered Indians, higher levels of migration to and from cities appear to be the result of high levels of movement between cities and reserves, a dimension of migration that is unique to this population. More severe socio-economic difficulties, including a higher incidence of inadequate housing conditions among Registered Indians (Clatworthy 1980, Clatworthy and Stevens 1987), may account for the higher levels of residential mobility associated with this segment of the urban Aboriginal population.

Although little research currently exists, evidence is building to suggest that high levels of population turnover among Aboriginal peoples in urban areas can have disruptive effects on individuals, families, communities, and service providers. For example, many social programs that provide services to urban Aboriginal populations, such as health, family support and counselling, and education, are designed on a neighbourhood basis to ensure a coordinated response to multi-faceted family and individual needs. Frequent mobility among Aboriginal families can result in discontinuity or disruption of service provision, with negative consequences for the family and service provision agencies.<sup>6</sup> Discontinuity in service delivery can be especially pronounced among high-need families such as those of lone female parents, who are among the most mobile, yet often in the most need.

The provision of education services may serve to illustrate the challenges and implications associated with high levels of mobility. In a recent study of schools in central Winnipeg neighbourhoods, Clatworthy (2000) found a strong relationship between the Aboriginal share of the population and student turnover rates



in central city schools. A 10% increase in the Aboriginal share of the neighbourhood population resulted in a 14% increase in student turnover. Among schools serving neighbourhoods where Aboriginal peoples formed more than 25% of the population, annual student turnover rates generally exceeded 50%, and were at least twice the central city average. High rates of residential mobility appear to translate into an unstable education environment for many Aboriginal children. Although Clatworthy's research did not explore the link between mobility and student performance, a recent US study by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) identified frequent mobility as a key, contributing factor to student academic underachievement.

The GAO study ... revealed that of the nation's third graders who have changed schools frequently, 41% are below the grade level in reading, compared with 26% of third graders who have never changed schools ... Results are also similar for math ... Children who have moved often were also more likely to have behaviour problems.

Frequent moves may also serve to limit opportunities for individuals and families to establish meaningful and lasting social relationships within the Aboriginal and the broader urban community. If so, mobility may promote social isolation and act as barrier to the development of social cohesion in the urban context. As Beavon and Norris (1999) have suggested, "high mobility (or churn) could lead to a weaker social cohesion in communities and neighbourhoods and, as a consequence, people living in these areas could exhibit greater social problems (e.g., poorer educational attainment, divorce, crime, suicide), which in turn could lead to even greater levels of churn."

## **Implications for Policy Development**

Clearly the most immediate consequences for policy arise from the bi-directional movement between reserves and urban areas, which are then combined with high mobility rates off-reserve, particularly in urban areas. As the analysis above demonstrates, there are considerable implications for policy and program development in service areas and outcomes. Also, compositional effects of high turnover on the urban population imply a difficulty in adapting services to the needs of a "changing" population. It is clear that policies need to be sensitive to cultural needs. Aboriginal people are confronted with the challenge of maintaining cultural identity and developing urban institutions that reflect Aboriginal values in urban areas. Reserves remain attractive destinations as a cultural hearth for Aboriginal people who feel socially or culturally isolated, if not economically marginalized, in urban settings. Furthermore, the high population turnover among Aboriginal people in urban areas poses challenges for developing social cohesion within communities.

This study has attempted to address and clarify some of the misinterpretations surrounding First Nations migration phenomena. This clarification process is essential to informed policy making, as misunderstandings concerning Aboriginal



migration, mobility, and ethnic mobility could adversely affect policy development. For example, by exploring the myth that reserves tend to experience large net outflows of migrants to cities, this study has shown that reserves have tended to gain population due to migration instead of the other way around. This is in contrast to the predictions made by policy makers in the 1960s that there would be a gradual loss of population from reserves. From a policy perspective, this is significant because migration gains add to the already considerable need for additional employment, housing, and infrastructure due to high natural increase, and suggest other issues, such as the reintegration of return migrants to reserves.

For urban areas, the myth that the growth of urban Aboriginal populations is largely due to migration from reserves leads to the belief that the characteristics of urban Aboriginal populations are those largely associated with migrants. From a policy perspective, the findings of high population turnover due to residential moves both within and to and from cities, suggests that there is a need for identification of different requirements and services for different groups within urban areas. Non-movers, residential movers, non-migrants, and migrants represent different socio-economic, demographic, and cultural characteristics, origins, and needs.

## **Impact of Policy and Program Delivery on Migration**

While mobility and migration may affect program delivery, it is also the case that policies and program delivery may affect migration, whether or not this effect is intended. Some observers (Reeves and Frideres 1981; Bostrom 1984) have claimed that, through the 1970s, the federal government actively curtailed programs available on reserves as a way to encourage migration and reduce its fiscal obligations. It has also been suggested that the decreasing effectiveness of public service delivery to a growing urban Aboriginal population may have led to less effective Aboriginal acculturation into urban communities, resulting, in turn, in return migration to reserves (Norris et al. 2004). However, no real evidence has yet been presented that the implementation of a policy to promote out-migration from reserves, or that better service delivery in urban areas, would reduce return migration.

The impact of policy and program delivery can be explored using the example of housing as a related policy challenge in the area of migration—that is, the provision of housing on and off reserves. As demonstrated earlier, housing is one of the primary reasons for mobility on- and off-reserve. Housing responsibilities differ by government levels, so that the federal government is traditionally responsible for housing on reserves, while provinces and territories have been accountable for social housing off reserves since the late 1990s. With respect to the situation regarding Aboriginal housing policies and programs in Canada, the federal government's role in Aboriginal housing off-reserve mainly has been one of cost-sharing with provinces, and not of actual policy development or administra-

tion. Furthermore, no urban Aboriginal housing policy exists at the national level. Policy and administration tend to be decentralized at provincial and municipal levels, a reflection of the diversity of regional and local housing needs off-reserve. Policies and programs have not been developed in a consistent fashion across cities. Municipal governments often deal directly with housing using ad hoc programs and services—frequently in the absence of a policy framework.

Housing-related commitments were contained in the federal government's response to the recommendations of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, as outlined in Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's report *Gathering Strength* (Canada 1997). These various commitments included improving the conditions of all Aboriginal populations, including Registered Indians on and off-reserve, non-status, Métis, and Inuit; improving housing and social services; building economic capacity in reserve communities; and discussions with Métis and urban Aboriginal organizations to frame new models and approaches regarding funding, policy making, and self-government.

Such institutional arrangements could affect population movement, and might thereby reduce the level of population churn—whether or not this effect is intended.

## **Conclusion**

The fact that population mobility remains high is central to understanding many of the social, economic, and political development issues that face Aboriginal people in Canada. High mobility churn has significant implications for the building of institutional completeness and capacity within all communities.

Looking ahead, it seems that housing and employment situations in communities, potentially, could increase pressures to migrate from reserves, especially given the rapid growth projected in the working-age population. On the other hand, the process of an aging Aboriginal population may reduce mobility because individuals are less inclined to relocate at older ages.

As for the present, it is the frequency of population movement among reserves and cities (and within), not an exodus from the former, that has the greatest implications for the well-being of Aboriginal people and their communities.

## Endnotes

- 1 As the census collected data only for residents of Canada, it is not possible to fully examine international movement patterns of Aboriginal peoples. Data on Aboriginal migrants moving to Canada suggest that this component of Aboriginal migration is quite small and of little consequence to changes in the national Aboriginal population. For the 1996–2001 time period, Aboriginal migrants from abroad numbered 3,065 individuals, and represented less than 1.8% of all migrants aged five or more years.  
Although the census captures migrants from non-enumerated reserves, migrants into these reserves are not captured. To avoid bias in the estimation of flows and rates, all migrants originating from non-enumerated reserves have been excluded from the study.
- 2 The census also allows for the population to define themselves according to specific cultural, band affiliations (e.g., a particular Cree First Nation in Manitoba) or a particular linguistic group (e.g., Cree).
- 3 Settlements include Crown land and other communities with Aboriginal populations as defined by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. This category, which is grouped with Indian reserves in this study, includes some, but not all, Métis and Inuit communities.
- 4 The extent of differences in the geographic distribution of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations is actually greater than that depicted by the census data, due to higher levels of non-enumeration and under-coverage on-reserve.
- 5 To some extent the low rate of migration reported among Inuit in rural areas may result from the configuration of census geography in northern rural areas. The census sub-divisions (CSDs), which are used to define rural Inuit communities, may be much larger geographically than those of the communities of other Aboriginal populations. The possibility exists that some Inuit moves within the same rural CSD may, in fact, involve quite distant relocations. Such moves would not be recorded by the census as migration.
- 6 One example of this situation involves the experience of the Abinotci Mino Ayawin program in Winnipeg, a child-and-family support program aimed at Aboriginal families with children at high risk. The program was designed and initially staffed on a neighbourhood basis to coordinate and focus the resources of several agencies on the needs of families. High levels of mobility among client families resulted in frequent loss of contact with parents and children and the need to abandon the neighbourhood-based staffing approach. In order to maintain service continuity, program staff were required to serve families throughout the city, resulting in increased service costs and difficulties with arranging and coordinating other agency involvement.

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