

**Amanda Gutzke USRI Output**  
**Supervisor: Professor Martin Horak**

**The Project:**

This past summer, I had the pleasure of working with Professor Martin Horak at the Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance on the LoGov-RISE project. The LoGov-Rise is a multi-national project on [Local Government and the Changing Urban-Rural Interplay](#). Each country's research team is studying the responsibilities of different levels of government, financial arrangements, and public participation in relation to the growing gap between urban and rural settlements, and will identify innovative practices to respond to these challenges. Prof. [Martin Horak](#) is leading this project. Housed at the [Institute for Comparative Federalism](#) at [Eurac Research](#), Bolzano, Italy, the LoGov project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (MSCA-RISE) programme.

**My Experience:**

My role within the LoGov-RISE project was to investigate the outmigration of people from cities to rural areas during the Covid-19 pandemic. More specifically, the impact of people leaving the cities for our four case studies: Wasaga Beach, the Town of Blue Mountains, North Perth, and Tillsonburg. For the first part of my research, I collected municipal documents and news articles related to growth, housing affordability, broadband, and municipal resources for our four case studies. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with local politicians, local administrative staff, and community leaders from the four case studies. The general themes that the semi-structured interview questions touched upon include growth, housing affordability, broadband, municipal resources, political and cultural tensions, relationship with county and province, and migration causes. After conducting the semi-structured interviews, I then transcribed the interviews so that they could be coded using NVivo. The transcripts were coded to our previously mentioned themes. I was also given the transcripts for the Italian cases, so I was able to begin the cross-national comparison.

**Overview of Output:**

The following includes two draft articles I intend to publish in online newspapers this fall. The first article is an op-ed on whether rural municipalities are ready for the new population growth that will come with urban outmigration. The intended audience for this op-ed is the general public. The second article tackles a similar question but goes more in-depth. The second article is intended for an academic audience.

## **Article #1: HOW URBAN OUTMIGRATION FROM TORONTO IS GOING TO IMPACT RURAL ONTARIO**

COVID-19 has compromised intraprovincial migration trends.

My parents both grew up in rural Ontario, and they moved to urban Ontario in the 1980s because there were more opportunities for jobs and social interaction. This story is not unique. In fact, it has been the historical trend in Ontario. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of people left urban Ontario for rural Ontario. As such, the historical trend is no longer the reality.

This past summer, I studied this trend with Professor Martin Horak through the Undergraduate Student Research Internship, funded by Western University. Professor Horak and I analyzed census data from 2001-2021. Our analysis shows a shift in population growth in southern Ontario away from Toronto. For example, when grouping census divisions by metro, partially non-metro, and non-metro, we found that the growth rate for metro census divisions has slowed. In comparison, over the same period, the growth rate for partially non-metro and non-metro census divisions has increased. In addition, our analysis also shows a shift towards higher rates of rural growth due to intraprovincial migration. For example, from 2011-2015, migration had a net negative contribution to population change in rural settlements of less than 10,000. In comparison, from 2016 until now, migration has had a net positive impact on population change in rural areas. Moreover, this net positive for intraprovincial migration in rural areas has become even more profound since the pandemic. Therefore, this population shift is not just supported by anecdotes; the trend is systematic.

In addition to analyzing census data, Professor Horak and I also interviewed local officials, municipal staff, and community leaders about migration demographics and the impact of urban outmigration. To begin, our research suggests that Covid-19 has impacted who is moving to these rural areas. Historically, retirees outmigrated to rural Ontario. Now, due to high real-estate prices and the flexibility provided by remote work, young professionals, families, and pre-retirees are moving.

A local administrative official from one of our case studies identified the impact of real-estate prices in the GTA as a contributor to outmigration: “With those prices rising so dramatically in the GTA, into York region, and even in the city of Barrie, people are driving that little further distance to where prices are a little bit more affordable.”

A local elected official from one of our case studies noted the rapid migration of families to the area: “I live in a relatively new subdivision in the town, [it] was originally designed to be like a second home predominantly development...And so you would not normally expect to see a school bus stop and drop off 30 kids, which it did the other day. I was shocked.”

However, this outmigration has not occurred without consequences. While we have documented many, housing affordability and municipal resources appear to be the most salient issues.

In all four of our case studies, our interviewees expressed how migration has negatively impacted housing affordability for locals and those in the service sector. For example, a local administrative official from one of our case studies noted, “Locals are being priced out more because, like I said, those families are coming from the GTA with all that cash. So, they can bring their asset values, whereas someone who's lived in the area... doesn't have an asset.” Moreover, with this increased growth comes an increased demand for municipal services. A local elected official identified this correlation: “Growth just generates more volume of work. So, when you have to plough roads, if there's more roads, you need more trucks, you need more people.... The same in a planning department, or a building department. If the workload goes up, [the municipality] just does not have the capacity.”

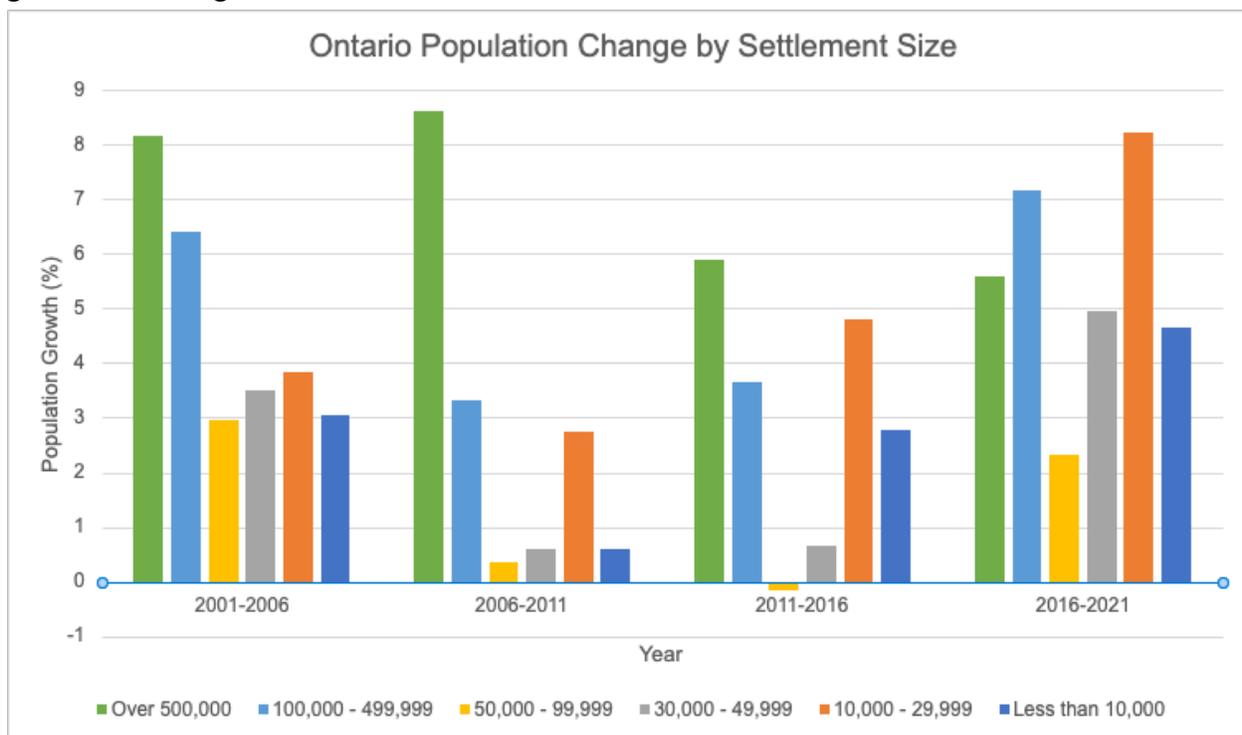
Overall, our research findings strongly suggest that the provincial government should pay more attention to how rural areas within the vicinity of Toronto are changing due to urban outmigration. Rural municipalities will need additional support to tackle this growth, and it is the province's job to help.

## **Article #2: WHO IS MOVING TO SMALL TOWN ONTARIO AND WHY? HOW COVID-19 IS IMPACTING SMALL TOWN ONTARIO**

Ten years ago, small-town Ontario was in danger of being left in the dust of the Greater Toronto Area's (GTA) growth. Young people were leaving small towns for the professional and social opportunities of urban areas. However, covid's impact on house prices and the ability to work remotely has changed this trend. Now, young professionals, families and pre-retirees are choosing to leave Ontario's urban core for rural areas.

### **Urban Flight and Rural Population Boom**

We found quantitative evidence that shows rapid population growth in rural Ontario due to intraprovincial migration. First, to find the population growth rate of rural Ontario, we categorized census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs) by population size. Statistics Canada explains that CMAs and CAs are "formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core. A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000."<sup>1</sup> Then, we found each category's aggregate population growth rate using census data from Statistics Canada.

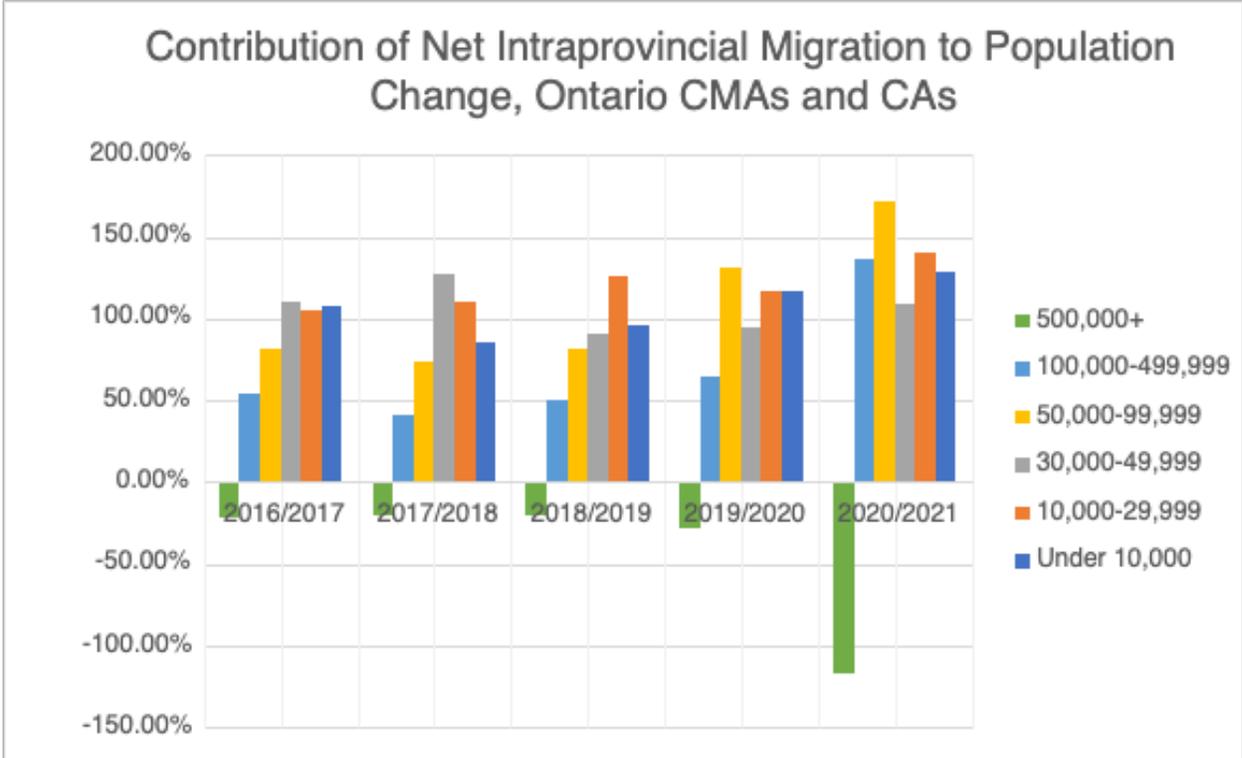


This graph was created by categorizing CMAs and CAs by population size and then aggregating population change for five-year periods. The data was derived from census data from Statistics Canada. Note, the CAs in the 50,000-99,999 category are predominately in northern Ontario. This explains the divergence in trend.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, "CMA and CA: Detailed Definition," Statistics Canada: Canada's national statistical agency / Statistique Canada: Organisme statistique national du Canada (Statistics Canada, September 17, 2018), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-195-x/2011001/geo/cma-rmr/def-eng.htm>.

As depicted, 2001-2006 and 2006-2011 are characterized by high population growth in CMAAs over 500,000. These CMAAs are predominantly in the GTA. In addition, CAs of less than 99,999 people had low population growth. This trend began to change in 2011-2016, population growth in CMAAs over 500,000 began to slow, and growth in CAs under 29,999 increased. This phenomenon is exacerbated even more from 2016-2021, as all categories with a population below 500,000 experienced a significant increase in growth rate, while CMAAs over 500,000 experienced a slow in growth rate.

While there could be multiple explanations as to why growth rates changed, we believe that intraprovincial migration data provides the best answer to the question, *where are these people coming from?*



This graph was created by categorizing CMAAs and CAs by population size and then aggregating the contribution of net intraprovincial migration to population change. The data was derived from migration and population estimates from Statistics Canada.

To begin, we categorized CMAAs and CAs by population. We then aggregated the contribution of net intraprovincial migration to population change for each category. As depicted, intraprovincial migration is relatively stable for the first three periods. However, this begins to change in the period from 2019-2020. A divergence in the trend is even more prevalent from 2020-2021. In both periods, it appears that people left CMAAs of over 500,000 for small towns and rural areas.

**Why Are People Moving?**

While this quantitative data does answer *where these people are coming from*, it does not answer *who is moving to rural areas* and *why they are moving to rural areas*. To answer those

questions, we interviewed local elected officials, local administrative officials, and community leaders from four rural municipalities experiencing high growth levels: Wasaga Beach, the Town of Blue Mountains, North Perth, and Tillsonburg.

Retirees were traditionally the demographic group that would migrate from urban Ontario to rural Ontario. However, our interviewees noted that this changed during covid. Now, young professionals, families and pre-retirees are moving.

For example, a local administrative official from one of our case studies noted, “more recently, the people who are moving from the GTA area are younger. Lots of young families, our school population is exploding and they're looking for more space in our elementary schools at this point.” In addition, another local administrative official from a different case study expressed, “with Covid we started to see a fairly significant influx of we'll call it pre-retirement or younger people who decided to remove themselves from the city because they no longer had to go downtown to commute, and felt that it was nicer to live in more rural areas.”

For the question, why are young professionals, families, and pre-retirees moving, we characterized the answers as covid effects, and push and pull factors. For covid effects, the most notable reason within that category was the ability to work remotely. Young professionals, families and pre-retirees now have the freedom to work wherever they please. However, covid effects alone do not explain why people moved; it merely provides people with the flexibility to move if they so choose. Push and pull factors help explain why people moved. For example, a push factor might have been the cost of housing in the GTA. A community leader from our one case study noted this push factor that people from the GTA are asking themselves, “Am I spending whatever \$2 million on a on a small house in Toronto? Or am I using much less money to get a proper housing in [a small town]?” Moreover, examples of pull factors include the desire for amenities and lifestyle attractions that are unique to small towns and rural Ontario.

### **The Impact**

Nevertheless, this migration has not occurred without consequences. As noted by our interviewees, some of the consequences of urban outmigration include access to broadband, ability to attract service workers, NIMBYism, municipal staff capacity, and increased tensions with other levels of government. However, the most salient consequence appears to be housing affordability. Ultimately, those moving from the GTA were generally able to cash out and use their equity to pay over asking for houses in small towns and rural Ontario. In doing so, pricing out locals and service workers that have not had the opportunity to gain as much equity. This phenomenon has had intense ripple effects. As expressed by a local elected official, without affordable housing, “none of the other pieces can fall into place. I can't solve the doctor recruitment problem without a housing strategy that works. I can't solve staffing problem. I don't know how to solve... the transportation issues without an affordable housing solution.”

A critical component to tackling the impacts of this urban outmigration is understanding if this trend will endure. Already, workers that had the flexibility to work from home are being called back to the office. However, we believe this outmigration will have some level of permeance due to the demographic characteristics of those who have moved. As expressed by a

local elected official from one of our case studies, the number of families relocated to rural areas during the pandemic indicates some permanence. These families are putting down roots and integrating themselves into the local community.

If this is the case, rural municipalities and the province will have to work together to meet the new demands that will inevitably arise with this mass urban outmigration.