



#201A - 2435 Mansfield Drive  
 Courtenay, British Columbia,  
 Canada  
 V9N 2M2

[info@islandcoastaltrust.ca](mailto:info@islandcoastaltrust.ca)

250-871-7797

## Youth Retention and Attraction in the ICET Region

One of the key economic development challenges facing communities in the ICET region, and in much of rural Canada, is the retention and attraction of youth.

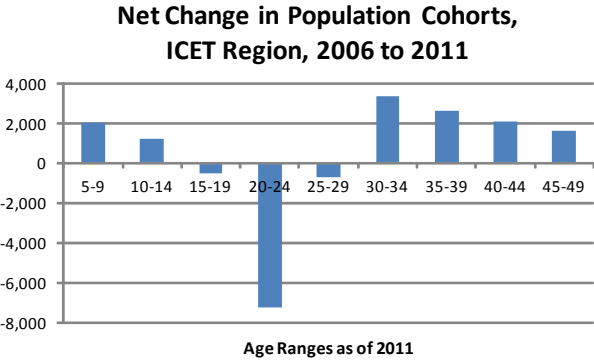
Young people are critical for long-term community sustainability because they provide the next generation of workers and consumers, they contribute immeasurably to community spirit and vitality, and they eventually raise families and bring up the next generation after them.

It is common for many young people to leave their hometowns after completing high school, often to pursue post-secondary education or job opportunities, or simply to "spread their wings," but at least some will eventually return after gaining education and experience elsewhere. They may decide that raising their own families is more desirable in a smaller community, or housing is more affordable, or they simply miss the lifestyle and the family and friends they left behind. The ICET region is also blessed with the climate, natural beauty, and recreational opportunities that pull in additional residents of all ages from across Canada and around the world.

### Net Migration by Age

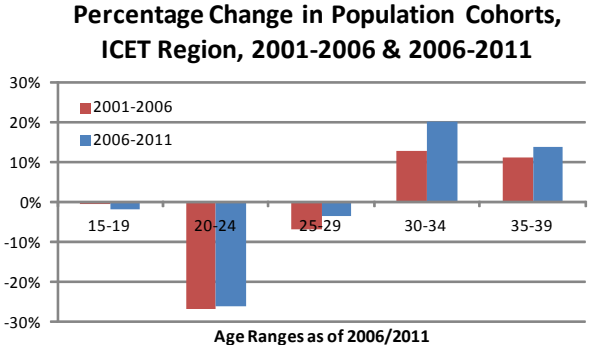
These patterns can be observed with Census data by comparing the size of population cohorts over time. For example, the 15 to 19-year-olds in the 2006 Census are 20 to 24-year-olds in the 2011 Census. Mortality rates are very low at that age, so the change in the size of this cohort shows how many people moved in or out of the region on a net basis.

The ICET region had a net loss of more than 7,000 young adults in the 20-24 age range between 2006 and 2011 (these are the people who were in the 15-19 age range 5 years earlier). There was also a small outflow in the 15-19 range (likely due to 18 and 19-year-olds leaving immediately after high school) and in the 25-29 range. But the trend reverses once people reach their 30s, with about 3,400 extra residents in the 30-34 range moving into the region. There is no way to know if these are former residents who moved back, or entirely new residents, but likely a mixture of both.



For purposes of comparison, the rest of this commentary will focus on the late teens through late-30s and compare these changes on a percentage basis over time and to other regions.

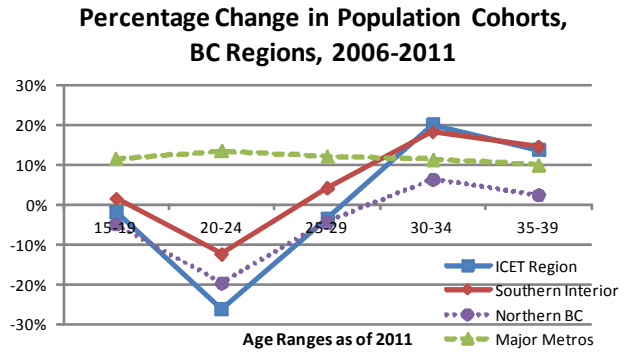
Looking back to the previous Census interval from 2001 to 2006, the patterns are very similar. The ICET region had a net loss of 27% of its 20-24-year-olds between 2001 and



2006 and a 26% loss from 2006 to 2011. There was a smaller loss of residents in their late 20s and then a net influx of residents in their 30s in both time periods, suggesting that these are long-standing trends in the region.

**Comparison to BC Regions**

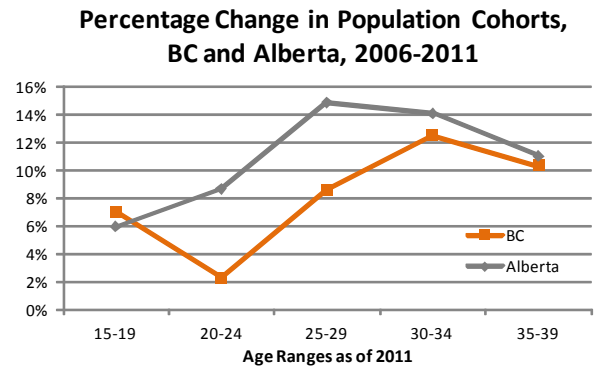
The Southern Interior and Northern BC regions have a similar pattern of migration as the ICET region, with a loss of residents in their early 20s that is reversed by the early 30s. The Major Metros (Greater Victoria, Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley) have a consistent inflow of residents of all age groups, including the early 20s.



It is notable that the ICET region had the greatest net outflow of young adults in the most recent Census interval, losing 26% of the age 20-24 cohort compared to a decline of 20% in Northern BC and only 12% in the Southern Interior. The same pattern was observed in the 2001-2006 period when the ICET region also lost the highest percentage of 20-24-year-olds, although it might be partly explained by the region's close proximity to the metro areas. It's easy for a new high school graduate from the Cowichan Valley, for example, to leave the ICET region by moving to nearby Victoria, or someone from the Sunshine Coast to move to Vancouver, without getting too far from home. It's often a much bigger move for someone in the interior or north to leave their region.

**BC and Alberta**

Not all young adults leaving home throughout rural BC are heading to Vancouver or Victoria, though. The entire province of BC had a net inflow of only 2% in the age 20-24 cohort from 2006 to 2011, including international immigration, compared to an inflow of 9% in Alberta. Similarly BC added 9% to the late 20s cohort whereas



Alberta added 15%. The plentiful job opportunities and high wages in Alberta's oil and gas sector, even for relatively unskilled workers, is a likely explanation for at least part of Alberta's superior performance in attracting young adults. Average weekly wages are 20% higher in Alberta than in BC, although total job creation was only slightly higher in Alberta between 2006 and 2011 (143,000 new jobs in Alberta compared to 136,000 in BC).

### Within the ICET Region

The final comparison is between the eight regional districts (RDs) that make up the ICET Region. In this case the migration is in and out of the RD, which may include moving to a different part of the ICET region.

### Percentage Change in Population Cohorts within the ICET Region, 2006-2011

	Age Range as of 2011				
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39
<b>Cowichan Valley</b>	-1%	-33%	-5%	23%	18%
<b>Nanaimo</b>	2%	-12%	-7%	15%	14%
<b>Alberni-Clayoquot</b>	-5%	-25%	1%	17%	6%
<b>Comox Valley</b>	1%	-28%	8%	29%	21%
<b>Strathcona</b>	-9%	-36%	-7%	15%	4%
<b>Powell River</b>	-6%	-39%	-1%	31%	17%
<b>Sunshine Coast</b>	-4%	-36%	-7%	37%	17%
<b>Mount Waddington</b>	-12%	-33%	4%	17%	6%

The overall pattern is largely the same in each regional district, although the RD of Nanaimo has a significantly lower outflow in the 20-24 age range, likely related to its larger size and the retention and attraction of students to the main campus of Vancouver Island University. The Comox Valley RD is faster to reverse the outflow of young adults as it added 8% to the 25-29 cohort. It is also notable that the Alberni-Clayoquot, Strathcona and Mount Waddington RDs added fewer residents in their 30s, perhaps due to more challenging economic conditions in those regions.

### Implications

The trends outlined in this commentary are a confirmation of migration trends that have been informally observed throughout the region. They emphasize that a segment of the young adult population is always going to leave, but that can be a positive if they gain experience and broaden their horizons elsewhere before eventually finding their way back.

The data also strongly underlines the ability of the region to attract significant new residents as young as their early 30s (and in some cases their late 20s), despite Vancouver Island's reputation for attracting primarily retirees and pre-retirees. The more economically-challenged parts of the region that are struggling to sustain their existing population can take comfort that by continuing to focus on expanding economic opportunities and enhancing quality of life that people in their prime working and family-raising years can be retained and attracted, helping to support community sustainability over the long term.

- Prepared by:

Jamie Vann Struth  
Consulting Economist to ICET

## **Appendix: Geographic Areas**

The four BC regions shown in this report are based on amalgamations of regional districts. Note that the ICET Region boundaries are an exact match for the area covered by the Trust, but the Southern Interior and Northern BC regions do not exactly match the boundaries of the other two regional trusts in BC (the Southern Interior Development Initiative Trust and the Northern Development Initiative Trust).

### ICET Region

Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, Alberni-Clayoquot, Comox Valley, Strathcona, Mount Waddington, Powell River, Sunshine Coast

### Southern Interior

East Kootenay, Central Kootenay, Kootenay-Boundary, Okanagan-Similkameen, Central Okanagan, North Okanagan, Columbia-Shuswap, Thompson-Nicola, Squamish-Lillooet

### Northern BC

Cariboo, Fraser-Fort George, Peace River, Northern Rockies, Bulkley-Nechako, Stikine, Kitimat-Stikine, Skeena-Queen Charlotte, Central Coast

### Major Metros

Capital, Greater Vancouver, Fraser Valley