



Highlights

- B.C.'s population grew by 1.1 per cent in 2021 led by growth in Thompson-Okanagan and Vancouver Island areas
- Within the Vancouver Metro area, Vancouver City's population slipped but surged ahead in communities like Surrey, Langley, and Coquitlam

Regional Population

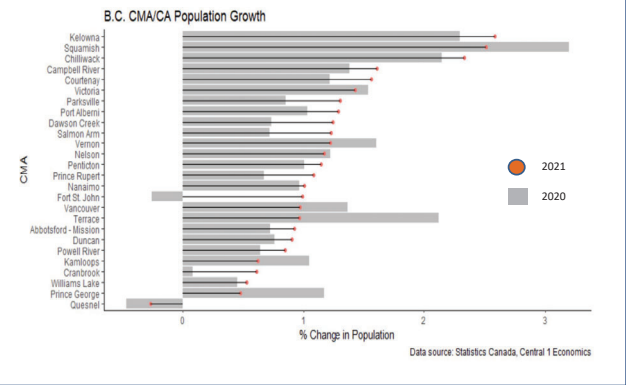
Bryan Yu, Chief Economist

While normally a sanguine data release, Statistics Canada's estimates of sub-provincial population for 2021 takes on greater importance in the pandemic era and amidst anecdotes of urban-area exodus, work-from-anywhere and soaring home prices across provinces. The latest data provides estimates for the Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), Census Agglomerations (CAs), and Economic Region (ERs). While further disaggregation is available, we focus on these higher-level groups.

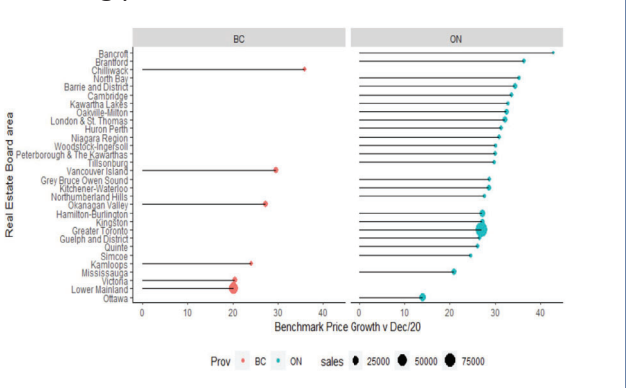
Annual sub-provincial population numbers for 2021 are based on a July 1 figure. Province-level data was published last year, with B.C. recording growth of 1.1 per cent or 56,077 persons from a year prior. The former was second only to Prince Edward Island. Provincial annual growth slipped from 1.3 per cent in 2020.

A key theme observed in 2021 was relatively stronger population growth in areas outside Metro Vancouver and acceleration in population growth in the Thompson-Okanagan and Vancouver Island areas. While some of these patterns were already in play prior to the pandemic, they only intensified as remote work opportunities, accelerated retirement and demand for space by households fueled moves from other provinces and from larger Metro areas. The strongest population growth among urban areas occurred in Kelowna (2.6 per cent), Chilliwack (2.3 per cent), and Squamish (2.5 per cent). The latter two CAs have increasingly emerged as desirable locations close to the larger Metro Vancouver area. Other areas that recorded accelerated growth included Campbell River, Port Alberni, and Salmon Arm. In contrast, Metro Vancouver, which typically relies heavily on international inflows, slowed slipped below 1.0 per cent compared to 1.4 per cent in 2020.

B.C. population growth led by Thompson-Okanagan and Vancouver Island regions



Population growth patterns contribute to housing price momentum



Northern B.C. recorded relatively weaker population trends with Prince George posting growth of 0.5 per cent compared to 1.2 per cent in 2020, while Quesnel contracted 0.3 per cent.

Aggregating to the economic region level, population growth was fastest in the Thompson-Okanagan (1.6 per cent), and Vancouver Island (1.3 per cent), both of which outpaced 2020. Northern B.C. lagged with growth of less than 0.5 per cent.

While there has been plenty of chatter of urban exodus to small markets, it looks to have been driven by an exodus from other provinces as net intraprovincial migration held steady in many communities. Regions across the province, including Metro Vancouver, experienced sharp increases in net interprovincial migration in 2021. Specifically, net interprovincial migration surged 60 per cent in Kelowna, Vernon and Courtenay, while it more than doubled in Duncan, Port Alberni, Cranbrook, Salmon Arm and other communi-

ties. In some cases, low base comparisons contributed to the increase, but these mark near record-high inflows in most areas as B.C. remained a coveted destination for Canadians.

In Metro Vancouver, population growth decelerated, but like other B.C. regions reported a strong gain in net interprovincial migration of 12,765 persons, which more than doubled 2020 levels, providing a cushion against lower international migration. Within the Vancouver Metro area, Vancouver City's population slipped but surged ahead in communities like Surrey, Langley, and Coquitlam – in part driven by pandemic demand for housing and relative affordability.

Population growth patterns align and explain [key housing market trends](#) and outperformance of smaller markets home price appreciation during the pandemic. These markets have been unable to cope with the strong inflow of residents and their higher big city incomes that come with remote work and higher net worth retirees. New housing activity has been slower to adapt given labour and supply constraints, which are likely more acute in these markets given their limited population base and lack of construction capacity.

For more information, contact economics@central1.com.

British Columbia Population

	Population	Annual % change		Annual Change		Net Intraprovincial		Net Interprovincial		Net International	
		2021	2020	2021	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
Economic Region											
British Columbia	5,214,805	1.3	1.1	56,077							
Vancouver Island and Coast	893,582	1.2	1.3	11,407	5,489	5,693	6,187	9,214	1,841	25	
Lower Mainland-Southwest	3,193,783	1.3	1.0	31,645	-8,949	-9,438	5,665	14,763		20,364	
Thompson-Okanagan	619,894	1.5	1.6	9,837	4,096	4,424	3,818	6,791	2,597	851	
Kootenay	164,808	0.7	1.0	1,643	331	369	1,147	2,056	68	-181	
Cariboo	169,887	0.6	0.2	408	111	42	-12	536	789	-111	
North Coast	59,920	1.0	1.0	565	-105	-212	237	441	322	238	
Nechako	40,522	-0.1	0.7	280	-320	-215	107	221	61	210	
Northeast	72,409	-0.1	0.4	292	-653	-663	-150	255	177	211	
Census Metropolitan Area											
Kelowna	229,400	2.3	2.6	5,778	1,704	1,756	2,185	3,535	1,418	957	
Abbotsford - Mission	205,847	0.7	0.9	1,888	-89	230	194	869	907	499	
Vancouver	2,773,148	1.4	1.0	26,657	-11,148	-12,245	5,013	12,765		20,442	
Victoria	415,573	1.5	1.4	5,876	1,793	1,664	3,736	5,235	1,535	161	

British Columbia Population

	Population		Annual % change		Annual Change Persons		Net Intraprovincial		Net Interprovincial		Net International	
	2021	2020	2021	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
	Census Agglomeration											
Cranbrook	28,094	0.1	0.6	171	137	156	80	223	-121	-117		
Nelson	20,119	1.2	1.2	233	11	-75	196	289	65	65		
Penticton	47,506	1.0	1.1	537	485	406	205	482	128	58		
Vernon	67,800	1.6	1.2	817	480	491	443	705	396	-59		
Salmon Arm	19,728	0.7	1.2	239	198	244	68	165	50	30		
Kamloops	117,620	1.0	0.6	725	669	568	341	692	298	-340		
Chilliwack	119,725	2.1	2.3	2,727	2,173	2,286	85	422	96	17		
Squamish	24,161	3.2	2.5	592	226	175	241	324	107	-46		
Duncan	48,951	0.8	0.9	438	396	380	164	329	23	-4		
Nanaimo	117,972	1.0	1.0	1,177	676	769	770	1,116	25	-247		
Parksville	31,537	0.9	1.3	409	534	569	214	346	-42	-19		
Port Alberni	27,455	1.0	1.3	351	345	354	41	135	38	39		
Courtenay	60,973	1.2	1.6	943	535	615	395	636	39	-4		
Campbell River	42,870	1.4	1.6	681	375	427	222	347	55	19		
Powell River	17,819	0.6	0.8	150	148	156	65	115	26	22		
Williams Lake	19,503	0.5	0.5	103	13	-12	5	80	54	36		
Quesnel	24,234	-0.5	-0.3	-65	-95	-117	9	88	19	32		
Prince Rupert	13,740	0.7	1.1	147	-72	-94	70	120	86	128		
Terrace	17,472	2.1	1.0	167	42	-81	62	124	181	60		
Prince George	96,553	1.2	0.5	459	230	169	38	350	673	-160		
Dawson Creek	13,715	0.7	1.2	168	-19	-66	-11	42	50	119		
Fort St. John	30,139	-0.3	1.0	295	-378	-240	-63	177	82	92		