

Centre for Urban Research

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Bleeding of Resident Population from City of Toronto and Peel Region Accelerated Again in 2020

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February 24, 2021

News headlines earlier this month were dominated by the latest sub-provincial population estimates released by Statistics Canada as of July 1, 2020 and the changes between mid-2019 and mid-2020. Much was made of the net population losses from one component of population change – net intraprovincial migration - and the reported net loss from the Toronto census metropolitan area and/or the city of Toronto. (Net intraprovincial migration measures the net flow of the resident population between Ontario municipalities. Municipalities are approximated by census divisions.¹)

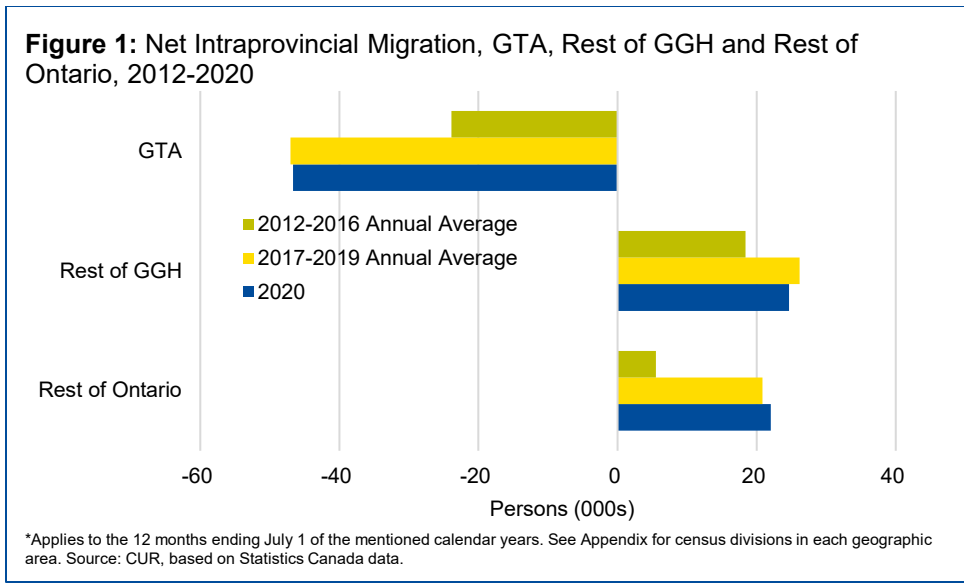
In this blog we examine the Statistics Canada net intraprovincial migration data for municipalities in Ontario to identify areas losing and gaining population from this source. We also provide our opinion on the reasons for the net outflow patterns and whether it appears COVID-19 influenced the intraprovincial migration flows in the Statistics Canada 2000 estimates.

Statistic Canada estimates the population as of July 1st, 2020. Therefore, the latest intraprovincial migration data measure the number of people moving in and out of municipalities between July 1st, 2019 and July 1st, 2020 – referred to as 2020. Four months of the pandemic are included in the latest data release (March to June 2020).

It should be kept in mind that all the population estimates released by Statistics Canada since the 2016 Census was conducted are preliminary estimates and thus these numbers are estimates and subject to revision after the 2021 Census of Canada results are available.

Resident population leaving the GTA in sizeable numbers

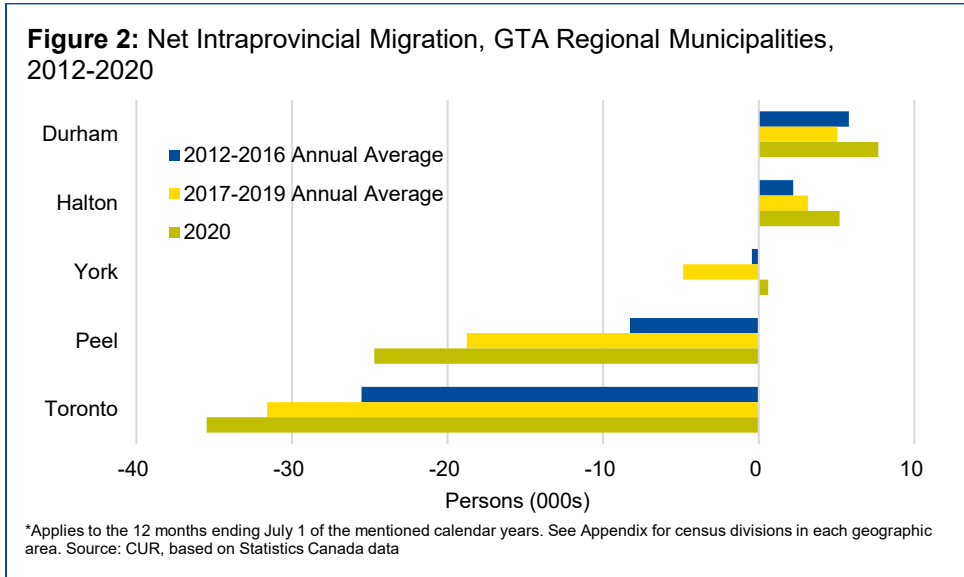
Figure 1 shows the net flow of intraprovincial migrants for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the rest of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) and the rest of Ontario. There was over a doubling in the average annual net outflow of resident population from the GTA between 2017-2019 and the prior 5 years from 23,885 to 47,014. The pace of net outflow continued at 46,680 in 2020.



The data do not tell us where these GTA residents moved to, but the rest of the GGH is the most obvious destination for most of those leaving the GTA. This is reflected in the net intraprovincial migration inflows into the rest of the GGH. The fact that the net inflows for the rest of the GGH were about half the size of the net outflows from the GTA suggests that many GTA residents moved to parts of Ontario beyond the GGH or, more likely, residents of the rest of the GGH on net moved outside the GGH.

The net migrant outflow from the GTA being driven by the city of Toronto and Peel region increased in 2020 – Durham was the largest net gainer

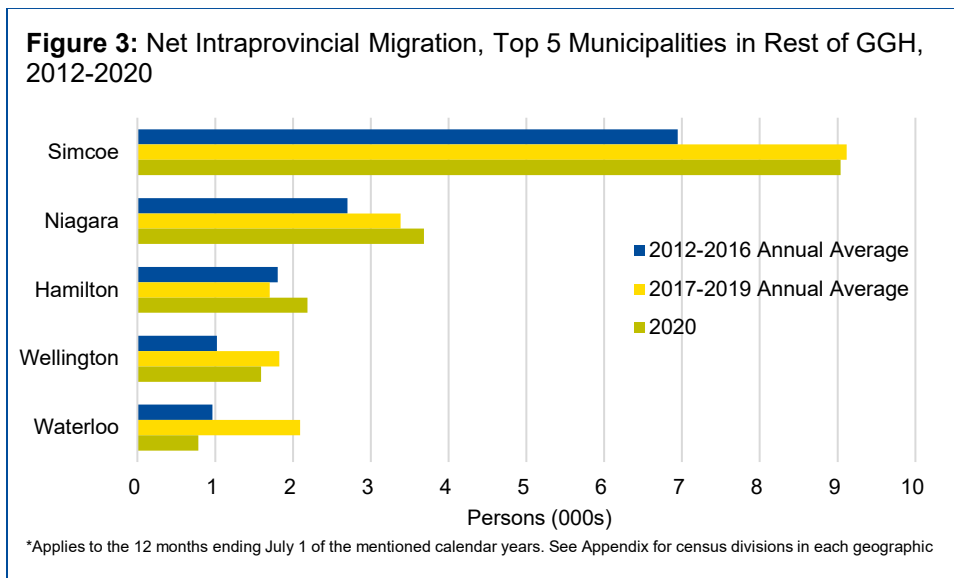
Figure 2 presents the net loss of intraprovincial migrants for the city of Toronto and the four regions making up the GTA. The city of Toronto has been losing resident population to other municipalities in Ontario for a long time and the net outflow has been accelerating since 2012. Some 35,000 people left the city of Toronto in 2020, the highest rate of net outflows in the eight years shown in Figure 2. The same is true for Peel region.



York went from a net loser of population to a small net gainer of population in 2020. Durham has been the largest net gainer of GTA intraprovincial migrants in all three of the time periods examined.

Simcoe County is by far the largest recipient of net intraprovincial migrants

Figure 3 presents net intraprovincial migration data for municipalities within the GGH but outside the GTA. Note that Simcoe and Wellington counties are defined to include the incorporated municipalities within their borders.



Simcoe County has been the top destination for people moving across municipalities in the rest of the GGH. However, the net inflow remained high, but did not increase in 2020 from the average of the preceding three years. In contrast, Niagara region and Hamilton experienced an acceleration in net inflows in 2020.

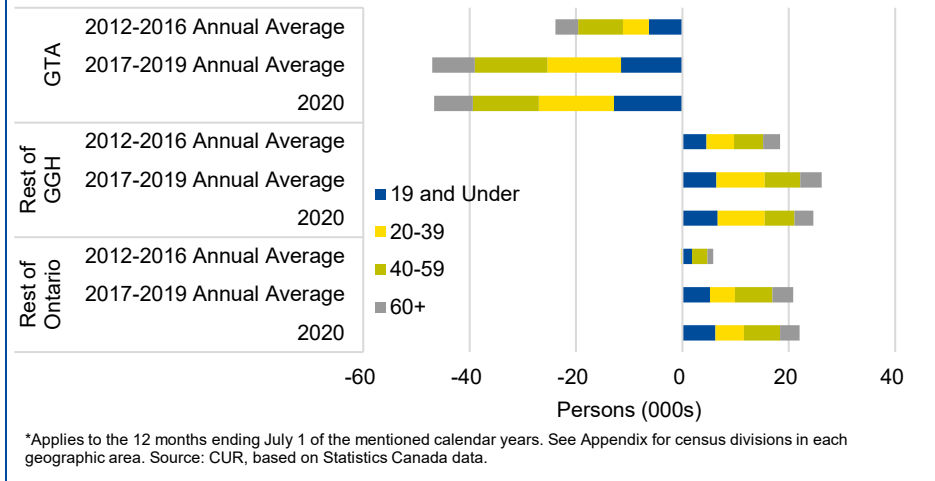
The decline in net inflows to Waterloo region in 2020 is a surprise given the strength of the local high-tech economy. It may be due to post-secondary students leaving the region when in-class learning ceased in response to the pandemic.

Age of net intraprovincial migrants remain unchanged in 2020

Figure 4 presents the age distribution of net intraprovincial migrants for GTA, the rest of the GGH, and the rest of Ontario. In both the GTA and rest of the GGH the size of the 20-29 and 30-39-year age groups net outflow increased dramatically between 2017-2019, relative to the prior five years. Since a number of these net migrants are parents, the influence of the net outflow of 20-39 age population is larger than at first glance.

Other age groups saw only minor shifts over this period. The age distribution of net intraprovincial migrants in 2020 did not change from the average of the prior 3 years.

Figure 4: Net Intraprovincial Migration by Age, GTA, Rest of GGH and Rest of Ontario, 2012-2020



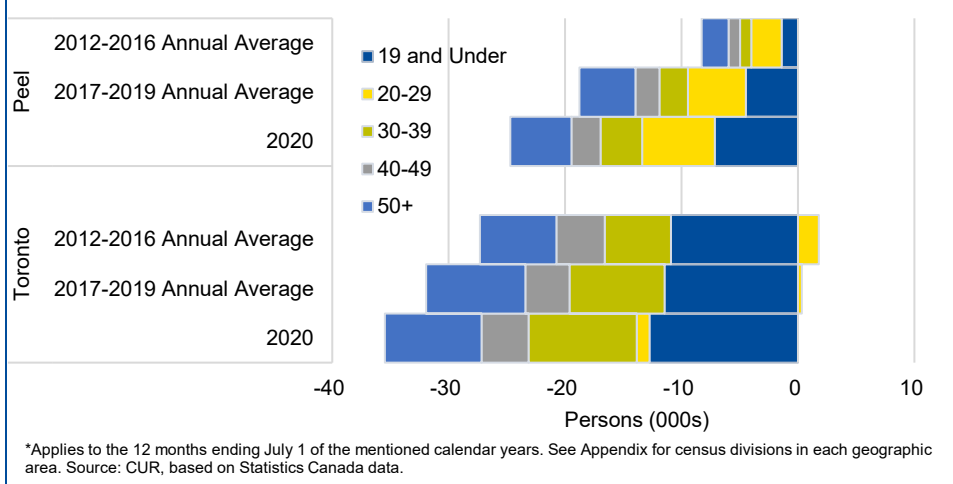
The net flow of older households (aged 60 and over), which includes many baby boomers, is not as large as we often think.

Net outflow in 2020: more families with children from Toronto, more young adults from Peel Region

Figure 5 presents the age distribution of net intraprovincial migrants moving from the city of Toronto and Peel region. Peel region and the city of Toronto have different age profiles for net intraprovincial out-migrants:

The largest net outflow from Toronto is in the 30-39 and under 19 age groups, which suggests families with children. Peel Region, in contrast, is losing more people in their 20s on a net basis.

Figure 5: Net Intraprovincial Migration by Age, City of Toronto and Peel Region, 2012-2020



The dominance of the 30-39 age group, along with that of the under 19 age group, suggests that young families are leaving the city of Toronto to find more affordable low-density housing. The net outflow of population aged 20-29 from Peel region suggests that post-secondary young adults are moving out of the region to find job opportunities.

Impact of Covid-19 on the 2020 net intraprovincial migrant flows not significant

It is reasonable to conclude the pandemic did not have a significant impact on the latest Statistics Canada estimates of net intraprovincial migrant flows, given that the July 1, 2020 population estimates include only the first four months of the pandemic and the comparison of 2020 net intraprovincial migrant flows within a longer time span. The possible exception could be Waterloo region with its larger postsecondary student population.

Implications for municipal planners

In a democratic society, residents can move from one municipality to another according to their preferences. People move out of large built-up cities like the cities of Toronto and Mississauga (the largest city in Peel region) for one of a few reasons – affordable housing and jobs are at the top of the list. It comes as no surprise that as lower density housing gets too expensive in the cities of Toronto and Mississauga, households are moving out. Similarly, as home prices jump widely across the GGH, people are having to move further and further from where the jobs are located and where they have been growing, particularly in central Toronto.

On the one hand, high home prices are making it challenging for cities like Toronto to keep residents – and cities need people to thrive. The city of Toronto has been fortunate to more than counter its loss of residents with immigrants, many of which face a severe shortage of affordable housing. Any desire to slow down the growing exodus of residents from Toronto, can only be met **by greatly increasing the supply of housing** that these migrants would regard as substitutes to housing elsewhere – that is, townhouses and other types of “missing middle” housing.

On the other hand, pushing people further away from jobs will only increase commutes and congestion. However, this impact is being countered by more employees working from home and they likely will be making fewer commutes in a post-pandemic world. What is needed is for more jobs to be created in the GTA regions and beyond, such as satellite offices, so workers need not commute to jobs in central Toronto to the same extent.

Municipal planners in the city of Toronto and Peel region need to understand the motivations of intraprovincial migrants and employment growth to accommodate these factors in their projections and land use policy documents.

There is also the need for municipal planners in jurisdictions outside these two municipalities to recognize the outmigration and the types of housing that is being desired by these households. This will enable them to take this outmigration and demand into account in the projections and land use policies.

Sources:

¹ See the appendix for a list of the municipalities included in census divisions mentioned in this blog.

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Appendix: Census Divisions in the GTA and Rest of the GGH

Appendix: Census Divisions in GTA and Rest of the GGH	
GTA	Rest of GGH
Durham	Brant
Halton	Dufferin
Peel	Haldimand-Norfolk
Toronto	Hamilton
York	Kawartha Lakes
	Niagara
	Northumberland
	Peterborough
	Simcoe
	Waterloo
	Wellington

*GTA = Greater Toronto Areas and GGH = Greater Golden Horseshoe. For the GTA and GGH the Census Division coincide with upper tier and single-tier municipalities. The counties include all separated municipalities within their boundaries – for example the Census Division of Simcoe includes the city of Barrie and the town of Innisfil which are sperate municipalities from Simcoe county.
Source: CUR, based on Statistics Canada and Government of Ontario.