



A report by the British Columbia Real Estate Association says immigration is the greatest driver of population growth among the 18 to 34-year-old group in Vancouver. A net 1,300 people in the 25-to-24 demographic left Metro Vancouver in 2015. JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Are millennials fleeing pricey Metro Vancouver?

Reports about an exodus have been somewhat misleading, report says

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Population statistics don't support the argument that Metro Vancouver's skyrocketing property prices are pushing young people out of the market, or that there has been an exodus of them from the city, according to a report by the British Columbia Real Estate Association.

The idea that millennials are abandoning the city is a myth perpetuated by anecdotes and media stories, the report says.

The population of those between ages 18 and 34 has grown 18 per cent over the last decade and continues to grow, particularly the under-24 group, BCREA chief economist Cameron Muir said in the report released Friday.

And while Metro Vancouver has long seen a net loss of older, family-age adults — from 25 to 44 — who move from the city to other parts of the province, Muir said that number was lower in 2015 than it was a decade ago.

"That data points to millennials preferring the city and choosing to stay here," Muir said in an in-

terview.

Muir did an analysis in response to media reports over the impact high property prices are having on Metro Vancouver's working-age millennials, including a now famous op-ed by Hootsuite CEO Ryan Holmes in the Financial Post in which he argued the city "risks becoming an economic ghost town" because people can't afford to live here.

Home prices, particularly those of detached homes, have soared in the past year. The benchmark price for a detached home on Vancouver's east side, for instance, hit \$1.3 million in March, up 27 per cent, according to the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver. For the region as a whole, it was \$1.1 million.

However, Muir said, "the narrative that there is an exodus of millennials from Vancouver is not based in fact, but rather supposition."

Immigration remains the biggest driver in Metro Vancouver's population growth, even for millennials, Muir said. In total, Metro Vancouver's population of millennials hit

569,000 in 2015, an increase of 86,000 from 2005.

Muir said a net 1,300 people from the 25-to-44 demographic moved away from Metro Vancouver last year; however, that is down substantially from the 2,200 who left in 2004/05.

"I'm sure there are lots of examples of people leaving Vancouver for any number of reasons," Muir said. "But millennials typically live in cities."

However, there are "a lot of different layers to the story," said Ryan Berlin, director at the research firm Urban Futures, which has him wondering whether the growth trend will continue to hold up.

Berlin looked at two slightly different demographic groups for The Sun, the 16-to-35 age group that includes most millennials, and the 36-to-45 age group, which corresponded with much of the BCREA report.

Berlin said the outflow of 36-to-45 year olds from Metro Vancouver has slowed in recent years to the point where he wonders if it might reverse.

And while the number of millennials moving to Metro Vancouver from other parts of the province has been a net gain for more than

a decade, the rate they're moving here has slowed.

"It's almost break even," Berlin said.

While the population leaving might be short of an exodus, Daniel O'Connell and his wife Andrea are among the millennials who have moved out of Metro Vancouver because of the region's high property prices.

The couple left Metro Vancouver for Calgary last August. He's 34 and a public school teacher and she is 32 and a personal trainer. O'Connell said they rented a house near downtown Calgary for slightly less than they were paying to rent a two-bedroom condo in Port Coquitlam. He said they had been looking at property in Metro Vancouver, but realized all that was within reach of their budget within the next couple of years would be a suburban condo.

"Our perception (was that) value for money was extremely poor (in Metro Vancouver)," O'Connell said.

O'Connell said teachers' salaries are higher in Alberta, he expects his wife will be able to earn more as well, and with house prices averaging \$468,000 in March, home ownership is more attainable.

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