

Recession not stopping migration

Statistics show over 31,000 moved to Alberta, outpacing last five years

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A recession in Alberta hasn't stopped thousands of Canadians from moving to the province in recent months, says ATB Financial chief economist Todd Hirsch.

Between April and June, more than 31,000 people came to Alberta from other provinces, said Hirsch, citing Statistics Canada numbers released Tuesday. About 23,000 packed up and left for greener pastures elsewhere in Canada during the same period, leaving a net gain of 8,264 new Albertans. That number outpaced the average quarterly gain of 7,000 over the past five years, said Hirsch.

"The fact that Alberta is still gaining thousands of net interprovincial migrants presents a bit of a puzzle," Hirsch wrote in a commentary.

"The mystery could be partially explained by the fact that while economic conditions in Alberta are weak, they aren't much better in most other parts of the country. The economy was tepid across Canada in the first half of the year, to the point that Statistics Canada claimed it met the technical definition of a recession."

Hirsch said while the oil and gas sector is shedding jobs, hiring is still happening in other areas, including education, health care, transportation, forestry and accommodation and food services.

Statistics Canada reported Alberta's estimated population as of July 1 was 4.2 million, up 1.8 per cent from the year before. However, the growth rate was down from 2.8 per cent the previous year.

Canada's estimated population was 35.9 million, up 0.9 per cent from a year ago. The population growth rate was one per cent the previous year.

"The slowdown in Alberta's population growth was primarily attributable to a decrease in net international migration, which was 13,100 in 2014/2015 compared with 44,900 in 2013/2014. Smaller gains from interprovincial migration in 2014/2015 (+28,900) than in 2013/2014 (+35,400) also contributed to the slowdown in province's population growth," said the federal agency.

Ann-Marie Lurie, chief economist with the Calgary Real Estate Board, said net migration is one of the drivers of the housing market in the city. Compared to a year ago, she said there has been a significant drop in net migration to the province.

"On the positive side, we're not negative," she said. "There still is positive inflow into the province ... We knew migration was going to be lower this year than it was last year but there is still people moving here. It is along the lines of what we expected."

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