

Community Profile Series: Squamish, British Columbia

Spring 2020

This series looks at communities across Canada and highlights key labour market statistics and the role that immigration has played or could play to help these communities flourish. It is important to note that predicting future labour market demand can be challenging, as economies are always evolving. This profile uses current population and labour market trends to give a profile of how immigration might play a role in this community.

Squamish: immigration and British Columbia's fastest growing urban centre

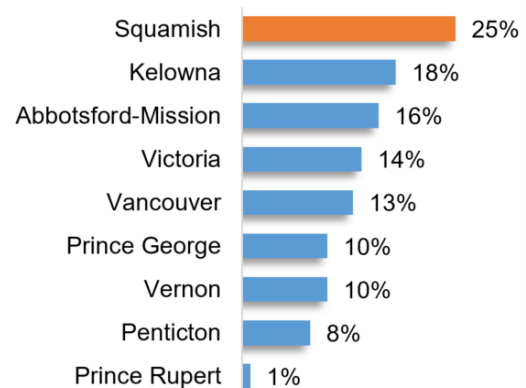
Between 2011 and 2019 the population of Squamish increased by 25%, making it the fastest growing among British Columbia's 26 urban centres (Figure 1). In fact, Squamish was the second-fastest-growing urban centre in Canada over that same period (among more than 150 urban centres).

The community has one of the youngest populations in Canada, as measured by median age and by the share of the population under the age of 20. Squamish is attracting young families because of its lower cost of living (relative to the region), excellent highway system, easy commute into Vancouver and other factors.

The Squamish urban centre (population 22,400)¹ is located 45 minutes by car from North Vancouver. There are some 13,000 workforce participants living in the community and 35% of them commute into the Greater Vancouver region each day for work².

There are nearly 1,000 businesses (with employees) in Squamish, including 33 manufacturing firms focused on food and beverage production, wood and furniture products (10 firms) and fabricated metal products (3 firms). Benefiting from the area's reputation as a tourism destination, Squamish has an above-average number of firms in accommodation and food services. To support population growth in recent years, dozens of businesses in professional services, personal services and retail have started up, and the public sector (health care, education and public administration) is growing.

Figure 1: Population growth rate between 2011 and 2019, selected British Columbia urban centres



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0135-01.

¹ The Squamish census agglomeration area includes the District municipality of Squamish along with several First Nations communities.

² Based on commuting data from the 2016 Census.

The sources of population growth in Squamish

The sources of the community's fast-growing population have been diverse. Squamish has one of the top natural population-growth rates among urban centres across Canada (births minus deaths). In 2019 there were 279 births and only 121 deaths in the community, or a natural population growth of +158.

Adjusted for population size, that equates to a rate of natural population growth of 71 per 10,000 population. As shown in Figure 2, this was well above other urban centres across the province.

Squamish also attracts a relatively large number of people each year from elsewhere in the province, mostly from the Vancouver area. As shown in Figure 3, the net interprovincial migration rate in 2019 (the difference between those moving in from elsewhere in the province and moving out, adjusted for population size) was well above many of its peers in British Columbia including Vancouver.

Immigration into Squamish has been strong in recent years as well. In 2019, the community attracted 156 immigrants, which equates to an immigration rate of 70 per 10,000 population. Among the 26 urban centres across the province, only Vancouver and Fort. St. John had a higher immigration rate in 2019 (Figure 4).

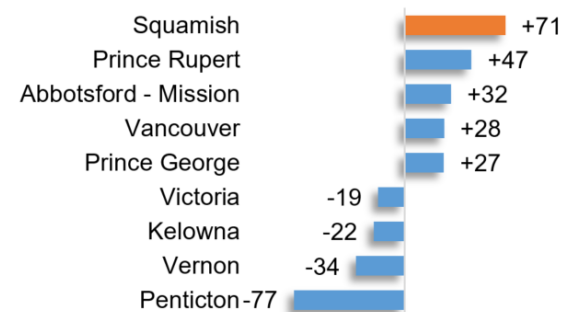
Much of this inward migration is to help meet the growing demand for labour in Squamish. There has been a 15% increase in the number of businesses in the community between 2016 and 2019, including 5 new manufacturing firms, 6 more finance and insurance firms, 16 new personal services firms and 6 more health-care providers³.

The importance of ensuring there are enough workers to meet labour demand

Table 1 reveals some of the industries for which Squamish has a much higher concentration of employment compared to the rest of the country.

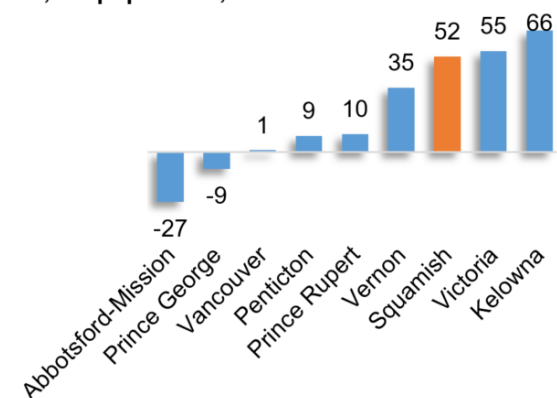
As a share of the total workforce, the community has 5 times as many people employed in accommodation services compared to the national economy. There are

Figure 2: Natural population growth rate (births minus deaths per 10,000 population), 2019



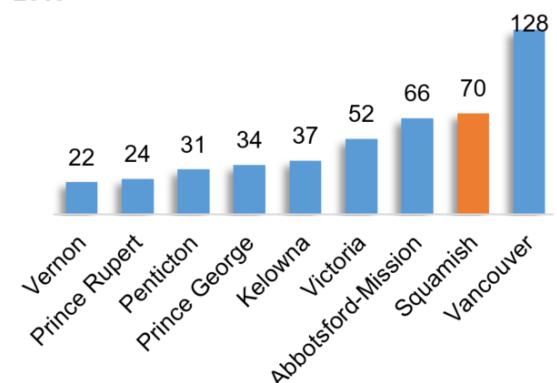
Source: Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0136-01.

Figure 3: Net interprovincial migrants per 10,000 population, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Tables 17-10-0136-01 and 17-10-0135-01.

Figure 4: Immigrants per 10,000 population, 2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Tables 17-10-0136-01 and 17-10-0135-01.

³ Business count data, Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2019.

33% more working in its food and beverage sector compared to the country overall. Squamish also has a considerably higher concentration of workers in the arts, entertainment and recreation, as well as ambulatory health-care services.

Because of the rapidly growing population, the construction sector workforce is well above average for the size of the community. There are more than twice as many employed in residential building construction and 57% more employed as specialty trade contractors.

If labour demand can't be addressed in the future, it may impede the growth of these important industries and the community overall.

Table 1: Squamish’s dominant industries – employment share compared to the national economy*

	Residential building construction—more than double		Ambulatory health-care services—36% more
	Specialty trade contractors—57% more		Accommodation services—5 times more
	Arts, entertainment and recreation—2 times as many		Food services and drinking places—33% more

*For example, adjusted for size, Squamish has 36% more people employed in ambulatory health-care services compared to the national economy. Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

Squamish’s aging workforce and small business owners

In general, Squamish has a relatively young workforce. Still, at the time of the 2016 Census there were 1,800 in the workforce over the age of 55, or about 15% of the total. In addition to needing workers to meet the growing demand for services and other industries in Squamish, these 1,800 workers will need replacements as they move into retirement.

The community’s entrepreneurs and small business owners are also getting older, which is an additional challenge for the local economy. Across all industries, 21% of persons who are self-employed are over the age of 55. In total, there are 400 business owners who will be heading into retirement in the near future.

Based on these statistics, Squamish could benefit from a new generation of entrepreneurs to replace those who retire and to help drive growth in important industries such as professional services and information technologies. The good news is that immigrants can help address this challenge, as they are nearly 50% more likely to be self-employed compared to those in the workforce who were born in Canada.

Critical to sustained economic growth: ensuring there is a talent pipeline

Squamish needs to focus on ensuring there is a strong pipeline of workers to address growing labour demand. There are a number of ways the community can expand the number of available workers in the years ahead:

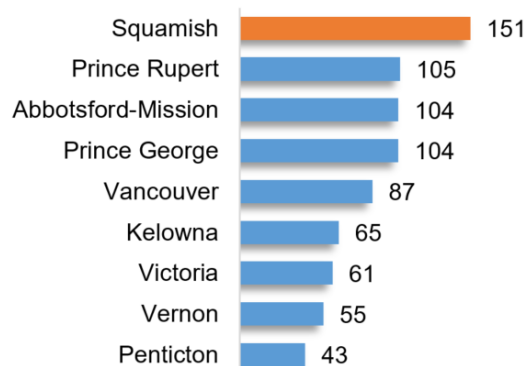
- Continue to attract young families**
 The relatively young population in Squamish points to a potentially large talent pool of young people able to join the workforce each year. In 2019 there were an estimated 5,300 people under the age of 20 living in Squamish, compared to only 3,500 over the age of 60. This means there are 151 younger people (under 20) for every 100 over 60 living in the community. Figure 5 shows how this compares to

select other urban centres across the province. This natural talent pipeline is much larger in Squamish than most other urban centres across the province and country.

- **Encourage more people to join the workforce**

The tightening labour market creates employment opportunities for people who previously struggled to participate in the labour market, such as women re-entering the workforce or those with disabilities. There is also the opportunity to attract the older population not currently participating in the workforce by employers offering flexible work options and by increasing benefits. In general, Squamish has a high labour market participation rate with 76% of adults active in the workforce in 2016 compared to 64% across British Columbia.

Figure 5: Under 20 population per 100 over the age of 60, 2019

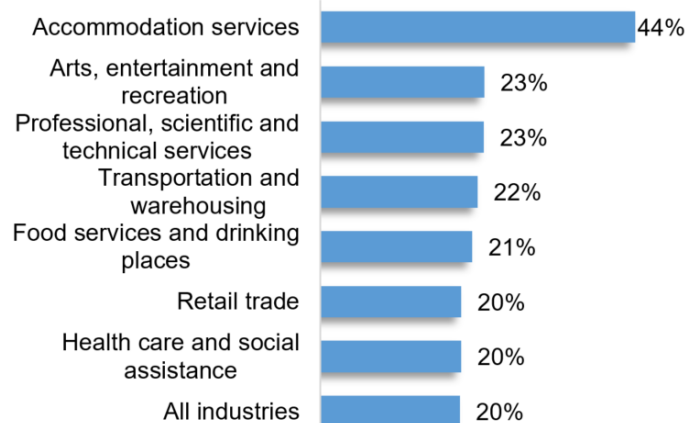


Source: Statistics Canada Table: 17-10-0135-01.

- **Attract people from outside the region**

There is no doubt that the biggest opportunity to boost the talent pipeline involves continuing to attract young people and families, including immigrants. Since 2013, all net growth in the labour market across Canada has come from immigrants⁴. Immigrants have become an important source of workers for the economy in recent years. As of the 2016 Census, 20% of everyone participating in the Squamish workforce was not born in Canada. There are a number of important industries where immigrants account for at least 1 out of every 5 workers, including accommodation services, in which 44% of the workers were not born in Canada (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Immigrants as a share of the workforce, selected sectors, Squamish



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

Immigration: an important part of the Squamish talent pipeline

Along with other efforts to boost the workforce, a steady flow of immigrants settling in the Squamish Region could ensure the talent pipeline is large and strong enough to meet local industry demands and provide a source of new entrepreneurs.

⁴ The number of people born in Canada exiting the workforce is greater than the number of people born in Canada joining each year.

Helping to grow the local economy

Attracting more immigrants in the coming years would create new demand for local products and services. Every 100 new immigrant families with an average household income directly generate over \$9 million worth of new household expenditures, much of this spending in the local community⁵.

Statistics show that these 100 immigrant families would spend:

- \$2.2 million per year on housing, such as mortgage payments, electricity and property taxes,
- \$1.4 million each year on transportation, such as vehicle purchases and maintenance, and
- \$925,000 on food at local grocery stores and restaurants.

These 100 new families could also generate about \$2.2 million worth of taxes per year for local, provincial and federal governments.

Other positive effects

Attracting immigrants to Squamish helps support a vibrant economic and social life in many other ways. Civic and business groups have a growing pool from which to draw members.

Helping to sustain high quality public services

There is a direct relationship between economic growth and provincial and local government capacity to provide high quality public services and public infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals. A growing economy and population in Squamish could lead to a greater public investment in services and infrastructure.

Older residents play an important role in the community

Residents of all ages contribute to the well-being of their communities and their province by working, paying taxes and giving back through volunteer and charitable activities. As residents of Squamish retire and move into a new stage in life, it creates new economic opportunities in health care, personal services and recreation industries. In the years ahead, the community can and should benefit from the economic opportunities arising from more retirees, as well as the opportunities arising from attracting and growing the younger workforce.

Squamish in 2035

What will Squamish look like in 2035? Will there be enough workers and new entrepreneurs to ensure the region can both meet workforce demand and take advantage of new growth opportunities?

District of Squamish Economic Development is working to attract investment in a [wide variety of sectors](#) including tourism, wood products manufacturing and education. Squamish also wants to attract film production and waterfront development. Immigration could continue playing an important role in the region's economic growth and prosperity.

For more information on how immigration matters across Canada, visit canada.ca/immigration-matters.

⁵ Assumes the new household spending conforms to the current spending pattern in British Columbia.