

FALLING FERTILITY IN CANADIAN CITIES

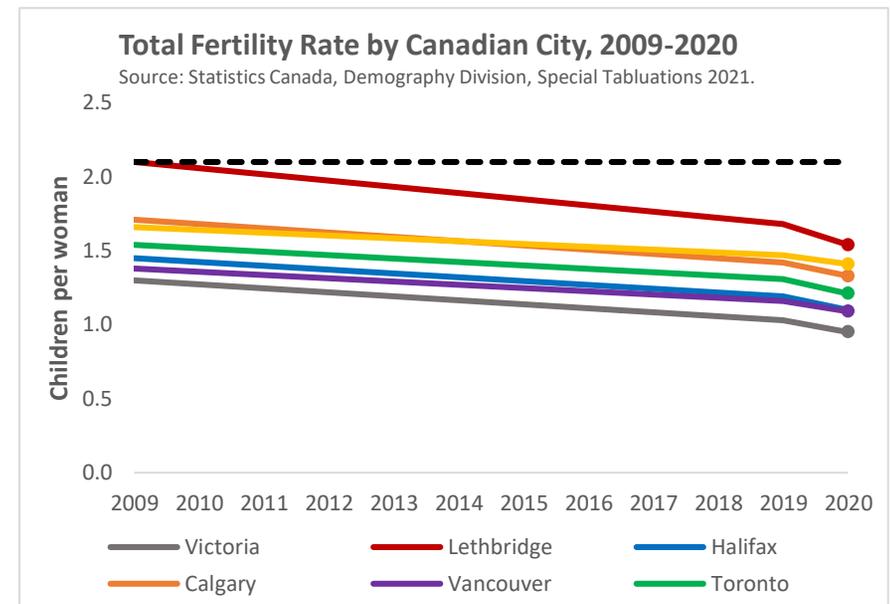
Since 2009, the fertility rate in all Canadian cities has fallen below the replacement rate. Without immigration city populations will shrink, and economic growth in those cities will slow.

The coloured lines in the figure show data on total fertility rates by selected Canadian municipalities from 2009-2020. They show the average number of children born to women in these cities throughout their child-bearing years, aligned to current fertility rates by age. The dashed line shows the [replacement rate](#) of 2.1 children, where, in the absence of immigration, one generation just replaces another, leaving population unchanged. In 2009, only one Canadian city, Lethbridge (red line), had a fertility rate at replacement levels. Since then, it has fallen to 1.5, while other Canadian cities range from a low of 0.95 (Victoria, grey line) to a high of 1.7 (Brantford, not shown).

Local policies aimed at welcoming and helping settle immigrants are rare examples of the ability of municipal governments to independently control the pace of change in local economic conditions.

Addressing the decline in municipal fertility rates requires immigration or pro-natalist policies. [Pro-natalism describes policies](#) designed to promote childbearing and rearing and can include policies that subsidize childcare and maternity. Municipal governments have limited options for introducing pro-natalist policies independent of the policies of other levels of government. This leaves them with policy choices made mainly at the federal level that may not best serve the specific needs of the local community.

Municipal governments are better able to independently influence local population growth with policies intended to encourage in-migration than they are with pro-natalist policies. These opportunities exist because as [recent research](#) shows, upon arrival in Canada the majority of immigrants stay in their initial city of residence. If municipal governments introduce immigration-friendly policies, those immigrants are likely to stay and help that community grow.



For some cities, the opportunities for using local government policies to encourage growth through immigration are particularly plentiful. These cities are key hubs through which immigrants flow, and which have non-profit organizations [skilled at the reception](#) and economic inclusion of immigrants and refugees into the community, such as [Calgary Catholic Immigration Society](#). In this way these agencies function as *de facto* city-builders. If municipal governments in those cities encourage and act in coordination with settlement service provider organizations, they have an opportunity to control the pace of change in local economic conditions.

Municipal governments and councils interested in having greater say in the pace of economic growth should consider the input of settlement agencies and invest in their services when planning the long-term population trajectories of the cities that they represent. With steadily declining fertility rates, the urgency for, and the benefit from such investments is steadily growing.