

Overview of Demographics for the Columbia Basin-Boundary Region



INTRODUCTION

2016 marked the first Census year in Canadian history where more seniors were counted than children.¹ Across Canada, fundamental changes in the population structure driven by low birthrates, longer life expectancies, and most notably, the aging baby boomers, are gaining momentum. In some parts of rural Canada, including the Columbia Basin-Boundary region, these trends are compounded by unique issues like the out-migration of youth and in-migration of retirees seeking the types of amenities that accompany rural living.²

Demographic shifts have important consequences for our communities. Different age groups and household structures have different needs in terms of housing, services (e.g., health, education), employment, and consumption. A reduction in the number of working-age people can challenge economies because of the smaller tax base and larger number of residents living with fixed incomes. On the other hand, baby boomers are retiring with better health and more wealth than previous generations, meaning that traditional concepts of aging are also shifting. Rural communities across BC and Canada are grappling with these issues and positioning to capitalize on associated opportunities.

Demographic data provides information about the people in a place and can help inform planning, decision-making, and budgeting. This research brief provides an overview of some demographic indicators for the Columbia Basin-Boundary region based on data from [Statistics Canada](#) and [BC Stats](#). The Census is the most reliable source of demographic information available to researchers due to its lengthy record, and rigorous and consistent approach. Various geographies are addressed, including census subdivisions (municipalities, regional district electoral areas, and Indian reserves), local health areas, and development regions. Comparisons to figures for British Columbia and Canada are also included. For more information on data reliability, and the advantages and disadvantages of various datasets, please see the RDI's [Columbia Basin Boundary Population Update](#) from spring 2017.

POPULATION & POPULATION CHANGE

According to Statistics Canada, 167,425 people live in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region—equivalent to 3.6% of BC's total population of just over 4.6 million. Our regional population has increased by 3.5% since 2011, from 161,741 residents.³ **Table 1** shows the total population for the last three Census years, and the population change from 2011 to 2016, for municipalities and regional districts. The population has increased in all of the Regional Districts and in 17 of our 28 municipalities, with Fernie and Invermere showing the largest increases.

| Municipality / Regional District | 2006 | 2011 | 2016 | % Change 2011 to 2016 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------------------------|
| Regional District of East Kootenay | 55,485 | 56,685 | 60,439 | 6.2% |
| Regional District of Central Kootenay | 55,883 | 58,441 | 59,517 | 1.8% |
| Regional District of Kootenay Boundary | 30,742 | 31,138 | 31,447 | 1.0% |
| Cranbrook | 18,267 | 19,319 | 20,047 | 3.6% |
| Nelson | 9,258 | 10,230 | 10,572 | 3.2% |
| Castlegar | 7,259 | 7,816 | 8,039 | 2.8% |
| Trail | 7,237 | 7,681 | 7,709 | 0.4% |
| Revelstoke | 7,230 | 7,139 | 7,547 | 5.4% |
| Kimberley | 6,139 | 6,652 | 7,425 | 10.4% |
| Creston | 4,826 | 5,306 | 5,351 | 0.8% |
| Fernie | 4,217 | 4,448 | 5,249 | 15.3% |
| Grand Forks | 4,036 | 3,985 | 4,049 | 1.6% |
| Sparwood | 3,618 | 3,667 | 3,784 | 3.1% |
| Rossland | 3,278 | 3,556 | 3,729 | 4.6% |
| Golden | 3,811 | 3,701 | 3,708 | 0.2% |
| Invermere | 3,002 | 2,955 | 3,391 | 12.9% |
| Elkford | 2,463 | 2,523 | 2,499 | -1.0% |
| Fruitvale | 1,952 | 2,011 | 1,920 | -4.7% |
| Warfield | 1,729 | 1,700 | 1,680 | -1.2% |
| Nakusp | 1,524 | 1,569 | 1,605 | 2.2% |
| Salmo | 1,007 | 1,139 | 1,141 | 0.2% |
| Valemount | 1,018 | 1,020 | 1,021 | 0.1% |
| Montrose | 1,012 | 1,030 | 996 | -3.4% |
| Kaslo | 1,072 | 1,031 | 968 | -6.5% |
| Radium Hot Springs | 735 | 777 | 776 | -0.1% |
| Canal Flats | 700 | 715 | 668 | -7.0% |
| Greenwood | 625 | 708 | 665 | -6.5% |
| Midway | 621 | 674 | 649 | -3.9% |
| New Denver | 512 | 504 | 473 | -6.6% |
| Slocan | 314 | 296 | 272 | -8.8% |
| Silverton | 185 | 195 | 195 | 0.0% |

Table 1: Population by jurisdiction (Statistics Canada Census years 2006, 2011, 2016)³

Within the regional districts, there is also notable variability at the scale of the electoral area. **Figure 1** shows the percentage change from 2011 to 2016.

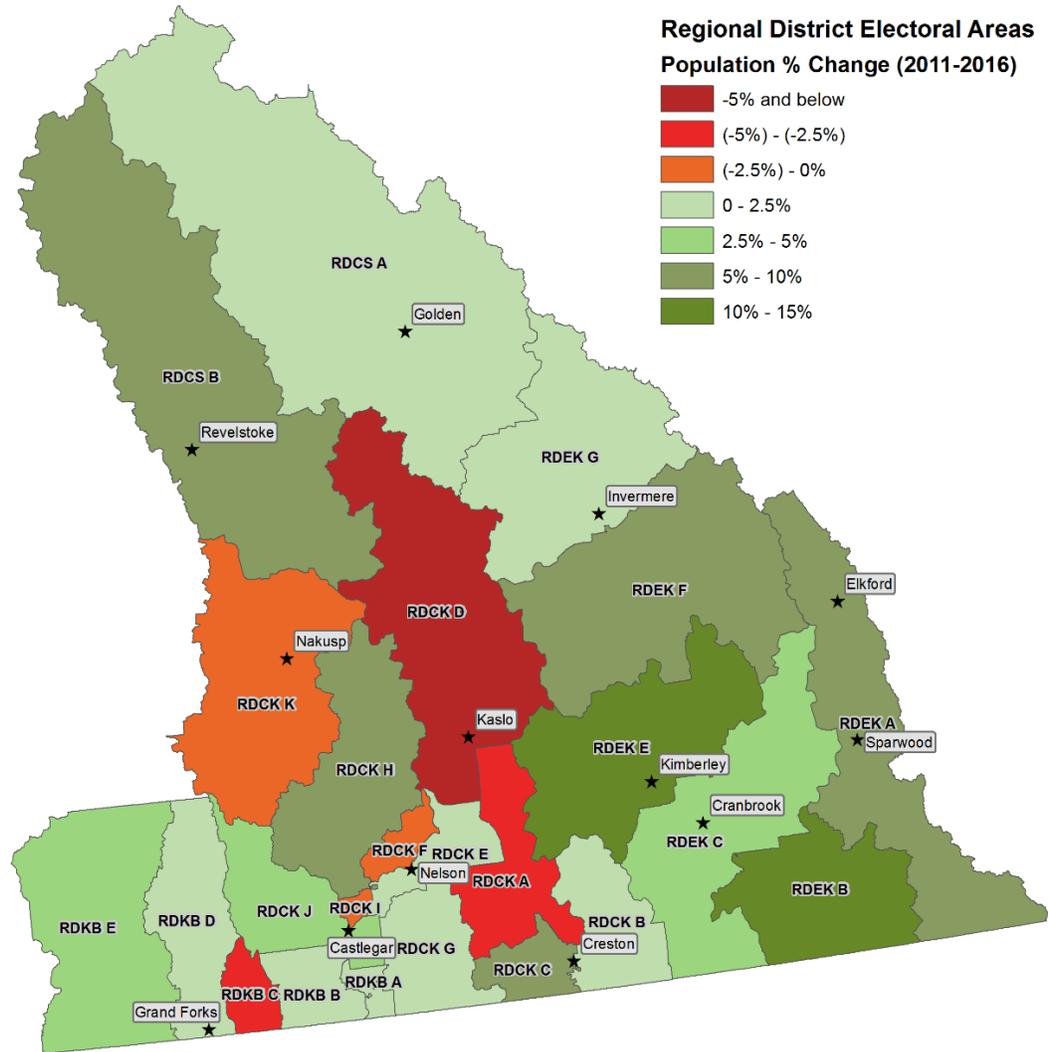


Figure 1: Percentage change in total population for electoral areas (2011-2016)³

In addition to the population living in municipalities and electoral areas, a total of 816 people live on reserves in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region (see **Table 2**).

| Indian Reserve | 2011 | 2016 | Percent Change |
|-------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Cassimayooks (Mayook) 5 | 5 | 0 | -100% |
| Columbia Lake 3 | 131 | 140 | 6.9% |
| Creston 1 | 113 | 112 | -0.9% |
| Isidore's Ranch 4 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| Kootenay 1 | 104 | 170 | 63.5% |
| Shuswap | 293 | 319 | 8.9% |
| Tobacco Plains 2 | 57 | 75 | 31.6% |

Table 2: Population and percentage change by Indian Reserve³

AGE & GENDER

Most communities in our region have higher average ages than BC or Canada. The Aboriginal communities in our region tend to have the youngest populations, with the Creston 1, Kootenay 1, and Shuswap reserves showing the lowest average ages (31.9, 36.5, and 36.6, respectively). Silverton, Greenwood, and New Denver show the highest average ages (55.0, 54.8, and 54.4 respectively). The range in our region’s average ages exemplifies the diversity of our communities.

Fernie, Invermere, and the Columbia Lake 3 reserve are the only communities that became younger from 2011 to 2016. While the average age in BC and Canada rose from 2011 to 2016, our region, on the whole, is aging at a faster rate. Sixty-seven percent of Columbia Basin-Boundary census subdivisions saw a higher change in average age than BC, and 76% saw the same as compared to Canada. For a full table of average and median ages by census subdivision see the [RDI’s Age & Gender Update](#).

The region’s population pyramid (see **Figure 2**) is characterized by a large bulge in the population aged 50-70 (the baby boomers) and progressively smaller cohorts in the older population groups. A notable dip in the 20-29 age group is common to population pyramids in predominantly rural areas, and indicates an out-migration of young adults, likely seeking employment and education opportunities elsewhere. The senior component (65+) is slightly larger than the youth component (under 20). This represents a shift from the 2011 Census data, when the youth component represented 21% of the population and the senior component represented 18%.

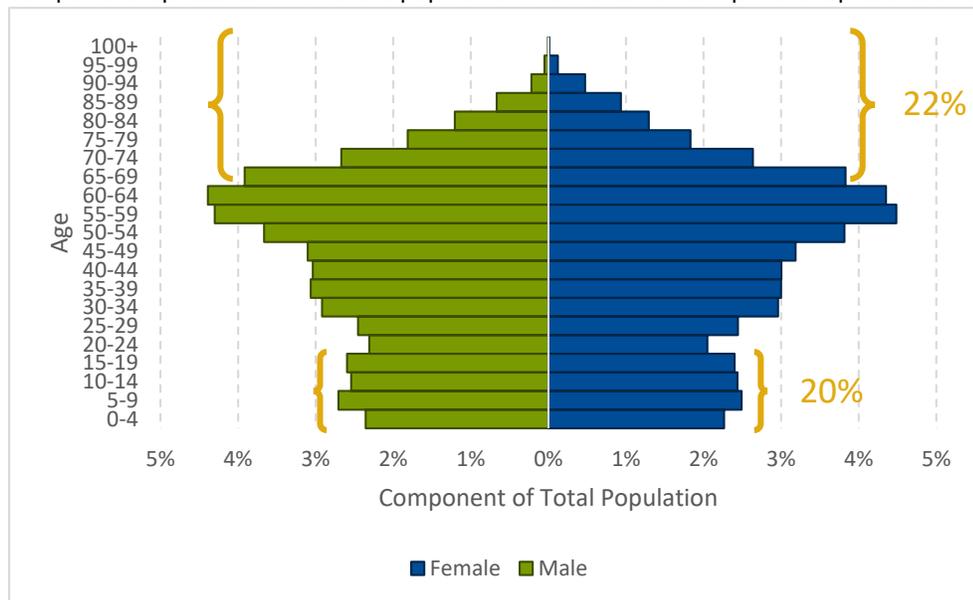


Figure 2: Columbia Basin-Boundary population structure by 5-year age cohort, 2016⁴

Our region has an even gender balance, with a ratio of one male per female in the total population. This differs from the overall BC and Canada figures, which both show slightly more females (51%) than males. It is common in developed countries for the population’s gender balance to lean slightly toward females. In Canada, this has been the case for almost 40 years, and is primarily attributed to the female population’s longer life expectancy.⁵ Women are typically over-represented in the older age cohorts. This may further influence the gender balance as the population ages. In the Columbia Basin-Boundary region, there are only 76 males for every 100 females over 80 years of age.

DEPENDENCY

Demographic researchers commonly compare the component of the population that is considered to be of working age (20-64) with the senior and youth components to get a sense of an economy's level of dependency on workers. Our region's total dependency ratio is 71 dependants per 100 workers, up from 65 in 2011. The change is primarily driven by an increase in the senior dependency ratio from 30 to 37 dependants per 100 workers. The youth dependency ratio dropped slightly from 35 to 34 dependants from 2011 to 2016. Our region's dependency ratio is higher than that for BC and Canada (see **Figure 3**).

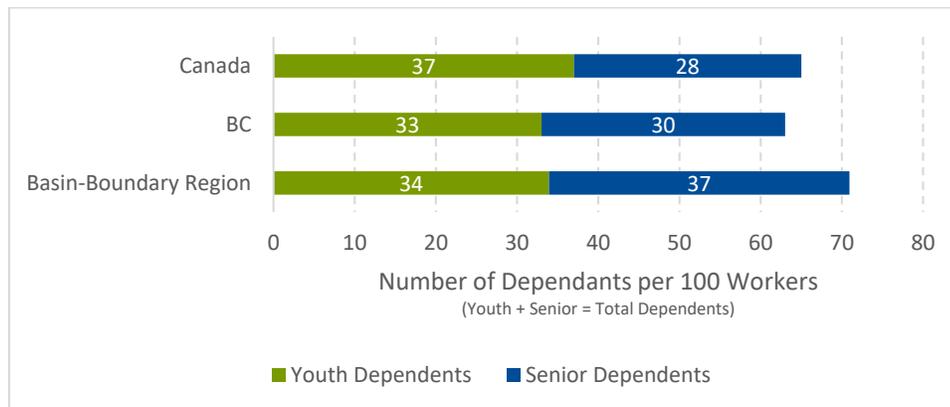


Figure 3: Columbia Basin-Boundary dependency ratios as compared to BC and Canada⁴

Dependency ratios vary significantly by community. Those with the highest overall rates of dependency include Midway, Creston, New Denver, and Greenwood. Each of these communities have more dependants than workers, and the dependency is primarily driven by the large senior population. The communities with the lowest rates of dependency include the Tobacco Plains 2, Shuswap, and Kootenay 1 reserves. Dependency in the Indigenous communities in our region is primarily driven by the large youth population. For detailed youth, senior and total dependency ratios for each Columbia Basin-Boundary municipality, regional district and electoral area, see the [RDI's 2017 Age & Gender Update](#).

Note that dependency ratios are calculated strictly based on the age of the population. They do not account for people of working age that do not work, or vice-versa. Dependency ratios are useful for comparative purposes and to understand the general structure of a population, but are not a true reflection of the component of the population that is economically dependent.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

According to BC Stats, the region's populationⁱ is projected to grow by about 4,732 residents by 2037, representing an overall increase of 2.9%. Compared to the projected change for BC (21.8%), this rate of growth is low. **Figure 4** shows the projected youth (under 20), worker (20-64), and senior (65+) populations. Historic data shows that our region has recently undergone a shift, where the senior component has overtaken the youth component in size. Projections show that the senior component will continue to grow as the baby boomers age. At the same time, the

ⁱ Population projection calculations exclude Valemount as they are based on figures provided to the geographic scale of the Local Health Area (LHA). The Prince George LHA, of which Valemount is a part, includes a major population centre that is not included within the boundaries of the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.

worker population will shrink. These trends are anticipated to stabilize in the late 2020s before the population begins a slow shift back toward a more sizeable worker component.

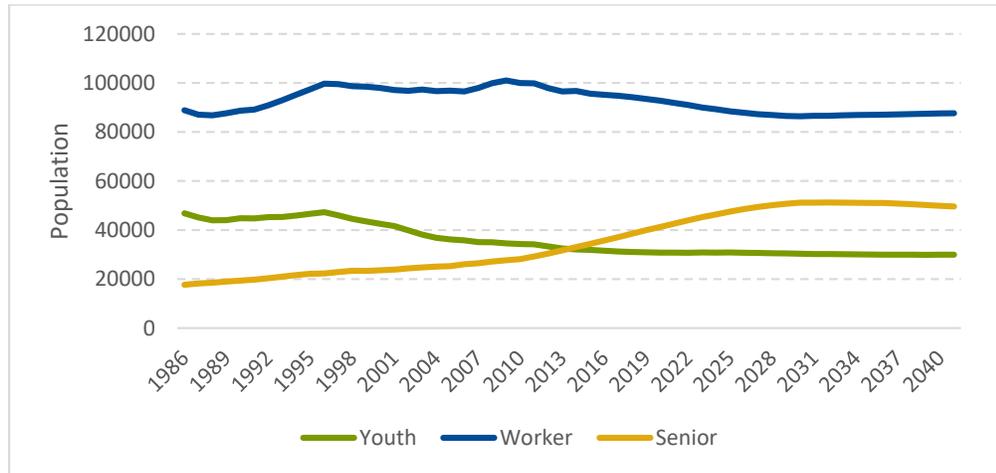


Figure 4: Combined projected population to 2040 for all Columbia Basin-Boundary Local Health Areas, by population component⁶

Projections vary across the region (see Figure 5). BC Stats provides projections to the scale of the Local Health Area, of which there are 14 in the region (Valemount not included). The Castlegar Local Health Area is projected to have the highest population increase to 2037.

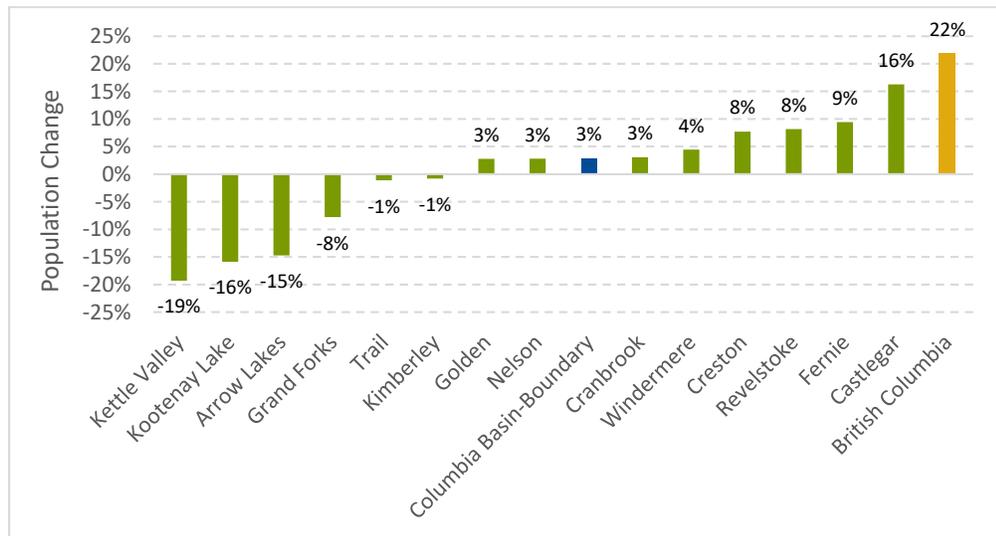


Figure 5: Projected change in total population by Local Health Area (2017-2037)⁷

BC Stats’ projections are based on past conditions and possible future changes related to fertility, mortality, and migration. They represent the anticipated outcome of only one possible future scenario, and should therefore be used with caution.⁸

MIGRATION

Another demographic indicator is migration – the movement of people. This indicator measures the movement of people into the Kootenay Development Regionⁱⁱ. *International* migration refers

ⁱⁱ The Kootenay Development region includes all three Kootenay Regional Districts.

to people who move to the region from outside of Canada, *interprovincial* refers to people who move from another province, and *intraprovincial* refers to people who move from elsewhere within the province.

As shown in **Figure 6**, more people were leaving the Kootenay Development Region than entering from 2015 to 2016. This net out-migration is accounted for by the large intraprovincial outflow, with the loss of 445 people to other parts of the province. This net out-migration differs from the two years previous, which saw a net in-migration of 584 (2014-2015) and 548 (2013-2014). The bulk of in-migration to the region is interprovincial movement. Looking at migration data, as well as ethnic origin and language, can help to identify and understand pathways for diversity.

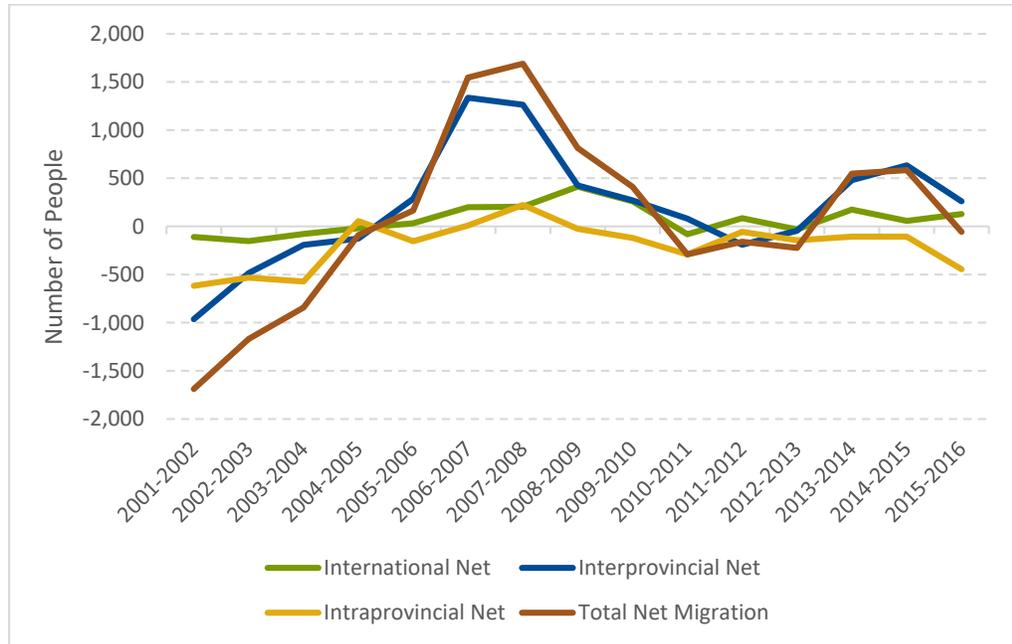


Figure 6: Net migration for the Kootenay Development Region from 2001 to 2016⁹

Migration trends in the Kootenay Development Region have been somewhat similar to trends seen in the Cariboo, Nechako, North Coast, and Northeast Development regions. The Thompson-Okanagan and Vancouver Island & Coast Development Regions typically experience greater volumes of growth similar to that of the Lower Mainland-Southwest. While the bulk of the Kootenay Development Region’s migration is interprovincial, at a provincial level, migration is largely accounted for from international migrants.

LANGUAGE

Language data can help us understand the degree of ethnocultural diversity in our population. This indicator measures the percentage of people who speak English, French, or “other” languages most often at home. “Other” languages include Aboriginal languages and selected non-Aboriginal languages. Language data from the 2016 Census shows that the vast majority (96.3%) of residents in the Columbia Basin-Boundary speak English most often at home, higher than BC (79%) and Canada (63.7%) (see **Figure 7**). The percentage of residents speaking French most often at home is 0.6%, which is similar to that of BC at 0.4%, but the percentage speaking other languages in our region (3.1%) is considerably lower than BC (20.7%) as well as Canada (16.3%). Little change in this indicator is seen when comparing our region’s 2011 census data to that from 2016.

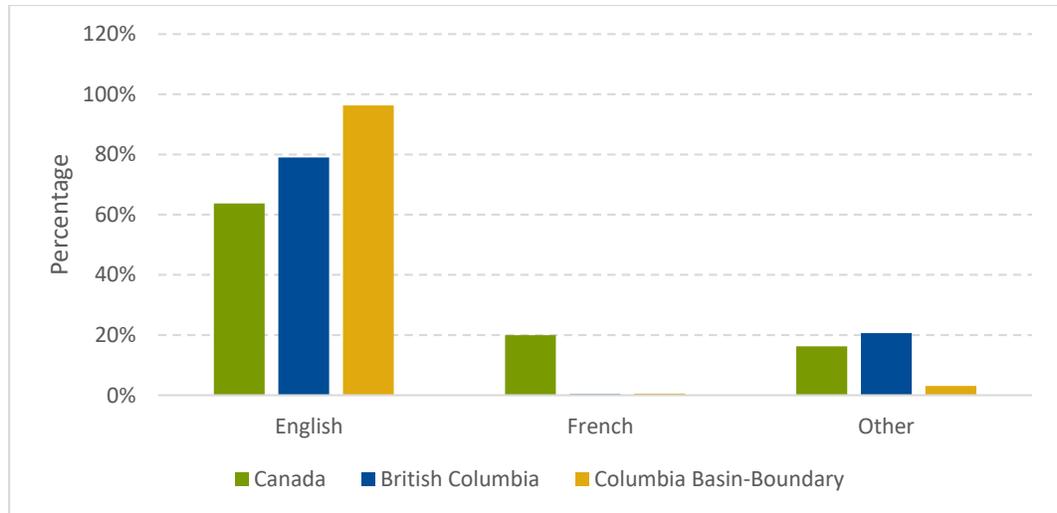


Figure 7: Language spoken most often at home, 2016³

The data indicates that there are at least 60 different languages within the “other” category, including languages such as Afrikaans, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Panjabi, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and more. Higher numbers of people who speak other languages are generally found in our larger communities, such as Cranbrook, Castlegar, Nelson, Revelstoke, Trail, and Golden. The communities of Rossland, Revelstoke, Fernie, and Nelson have the highest number of French speakers.

HOUSEHOLD & FAMILY STRUCTURE

An analysis of family and household structure can help us understand the impact of demographic shifts on important societal configurations. This indicator measures average household size, as well as the prevalence of certain family types in our communities.

Among Columbia Basin-Boundary communities, average household size ranges from a high of 3.1 people on the Kootenay 1 reserve, to a low of 1.8 in Silvertown and New Denver, with a median of 2.2. More than half of communities saw a drop in average household size from 2011 to 2016, and only eight had a higher average household size than BC (2.4) in 2016³. Collectively, these statistics are likely indicative of declining birthrates and our region’s aging population, which is accompanied by a higher number of households occupied by retirees whose children have left the home.

There are 49,675 families in our region. Of those, 16,505 are couple families with children, 26,625 are couple families without children, and 6,535 are lone-parent families. The communities with the highest percentage of couple families with children are the Tobacco Plains and Kootenay 1 reserves (50% and 44%, respectively). The communities with the highest percentage of couple families without children are Silvertown and Central Kootenay Area A (77% and 71%, respectively). **Figure 8** shows that, in comparison to BC, our region has a higher percentage of couple families without children and, conversely, a lower percentage of couple families with children. Again, these figures are reflective of the fact that our region’s population, in comparison to that of BC, is aging at a faster rate.

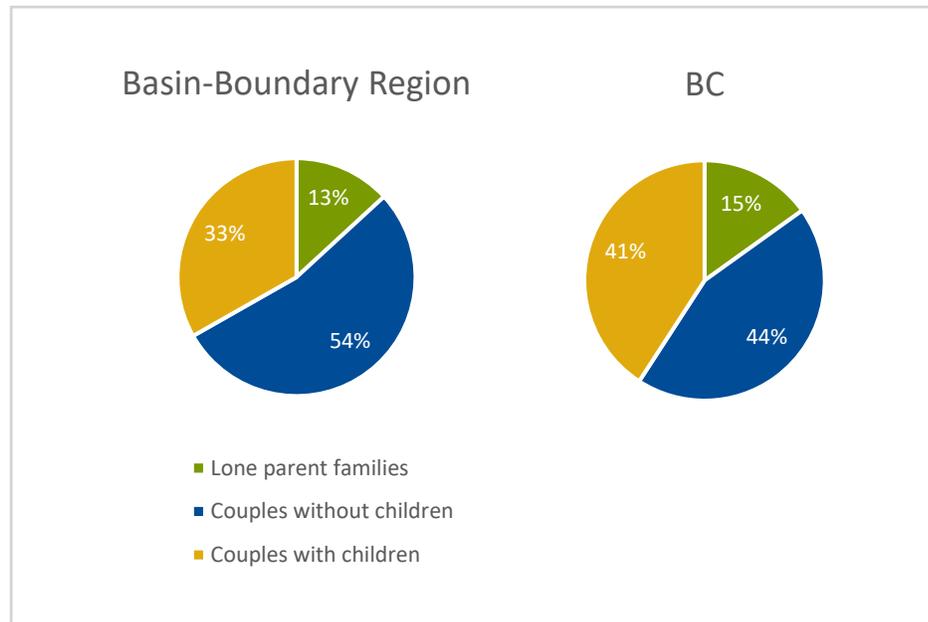


Figure 8: Family types as a component of all families in the region and BC, 2016³

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The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, at Selkirk College, is a regional research centre with a mandate to support informed decision-making by Columbia Basin-Boundary communities through the provision of information, applied research, and related outreach and extension support. Visit www.cbrdi.ca for more information.