

Social Indicators of Quality of Life

This bulletin focuses on the second report, *Dynamic Societies and Social Change*, in a series of theme reports released by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) measuring quality of life from 1990 - 2002.

The report identified positive trends in Canadian municipalities including a declining unemployment rate, higher educational attainment and lower functional illiteracy levels. General improvements in community health and decreased crime rates were also noted. Conversely, FCM found a national trend of increasing stress levels. One explanation is that the working generation is caring for both aging parents and younger children. A decline in widespread civic engagement was also noted.

The implications of these national trends for municipal governments include an increasing demand to provide services for an aging and more diverse population, a need to enhance civic participation and to continue working towards decreasing crime rates. FCM states that municipalities must monitor social change to respond to these needs through tailored policy actions stemming from national and provincial policies and programs to fit unique municipal needs.

How Do Social Factors Impact Quality of Life?

Education offers opportunities for personal improvement of quality of life, including increased income, mobility and employment prospects. The overall result is a more specialized workforce.

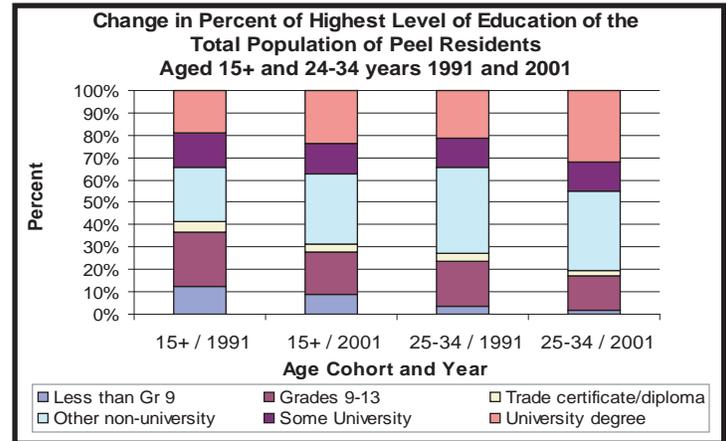
The age structure of a population is indicative of the present and future municipal service infrastructure needs required to maintain a high quality of life for residents of all ages. A vibrant economy with low unemployment rates is essential to high quality of life through increased productivity, reduced demands on social assistance and increased purchasing power.

Civic engagement activities foster social inclusion, which can have an enhancing effect on an individual's sense of community. Community health is essential to a high quality of life for Canadians, advanced through health care facilities, support services and public education.

Quality of Life In Peel

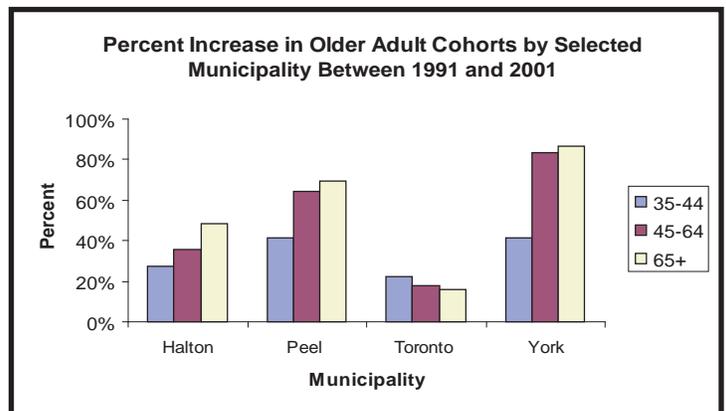
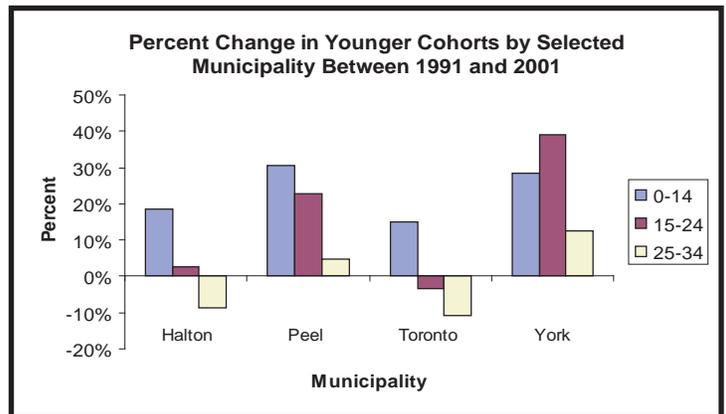
1. Education:

Peel residents are improving their quality of life through the pursuit of higher levels of education. There is a marked increase in the proportion of the total population age 15+ and 25-34 obtaining some form of post-secondary education between 1991 and 2001. There is an associated decline in the proportion of the population holding a high school diploma or less as their highest level of education. Also, Peel is in line with a national trend of decline in the proportion of individuals obtaining trade certificates or diplomas. Increased levels of education in Peel yields a more productive workforce, which contributes to a more vibrant economy.



2. Age Structure of the Population:

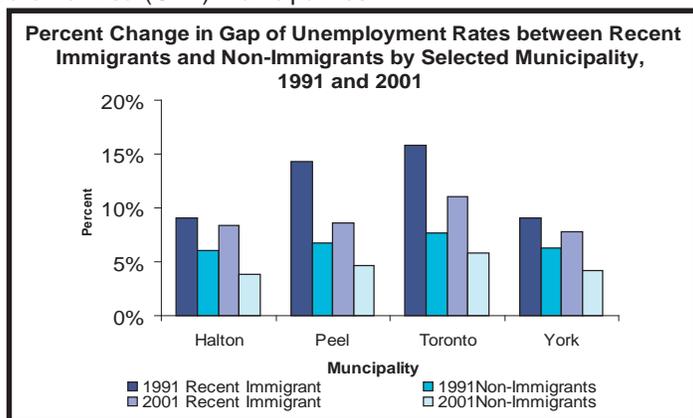
Peel is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada and is experiencing increases in both older adult age cohorts and younger, under age 25 cohorts. FCM points out the result is a competing demand for delivery of services and investment in facilities for both seniors and families. Peel experienced the highest municipal increase in Canada of those 0-14 years of age; 30.4% increase between 1991 and 2001. At the same time, Peel's population of 45-64 year olds increased by 64.5% and 65+ by 69.2% between 1991 and 2001.



Quality of Life in Peel: Dynamic Societies and Social Change

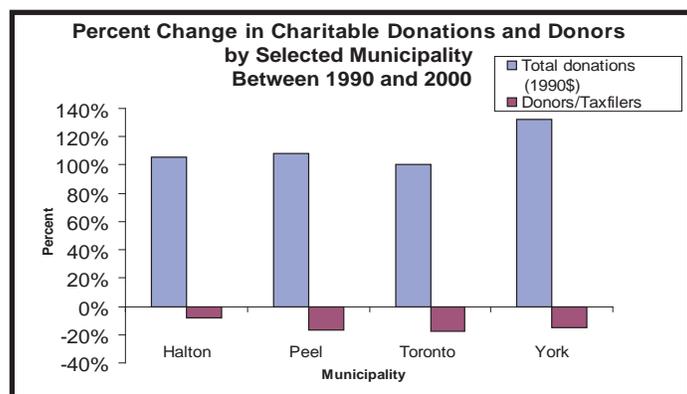
3. Unemployment Rates:

The Region of Peel has experienced a narrowing gap in unemployment rates* between recent immigrants and non-immigrants. From 1991 to 2001, the gap between these rates declined from 7.6% to 4.0%. Compared to Canadian and municipal data, Peel had a higher gap than national and municipal percentages in 1991, but in 2001 improved to be in line with Canadian and municipal averages. Peel has made progress in the number of foreign born individuals in the workforce, while keeping unemployment rates comparable to nearby Greater Toronto Area (GTA) municipalities.



4. Civic Engagement:

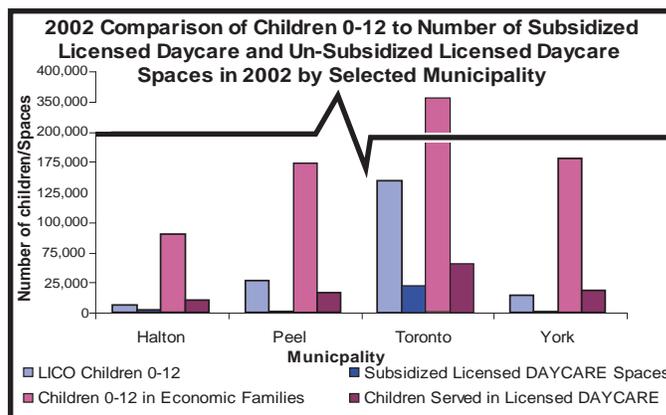
In Peel, voter turnout rates in federal elections remain high when compared to other municipalities; however, they have followed a national trend of decline since 1993. Civic engagement is present in the Region of Peel as demonstrated through a 108% increase in total charitable donations between 1990 and 2000 and through the significant participation of women on municipal council. As of mid 2003, Peel had the highest proportion of municipal councillors who were women at 59.1%, more than any other participating municipality. Following the November 2003 municipal election, Peel's proportion further increased to 63.6%. Similar to national patterns, Peel saw a decline in municipal voter turnout, a 7.6% drop in volunteerism between 1997 and 2001 and a decrease in the percent of eligible donors making donations by 16.6% over the same period. Overall, a smaller proportion of the population is civically engaged.



* Note: Unemployment Rates are Statistics Canada Average Annual Rates of Unemployment from 1991 to 2001.

5. Children in Low Income Families:

Daycare facilities are essential for child development and support for parents while participating in the workforce. Peel has a shortage of subsidized licensed daycare spaces, the result of the highest child population growth rate of all the municipalities, an increasing number of children living in poverty and provincial funding cuts. The ratio of children in low income families to subsidized daycare spaces in Peel is 7.4 children per available space, the highest of all participating municipalities. Overall, there is a significant demand for both subsidized and unsubsidized licensed daycare spaces in the GTA.



6. Community Health:

FCM indicators of community health include premature mortality and teen births. The number of suicides and stress levels are used as measures of mental health. Peel follows the general trend of gains in community health, through declines in premature mortality, teen births and suicides from 1991 to 2001. However, Peel also follows a trend of rising stress identified by the increasing proportion of work hours lost as part of total work hours worked.

Conclusion:

Quality of Life in Peel has been enhanced through increased levels of educational attainment, health improvements and lower unemployment rates, which are accompanied by a narrowing gap in unemployment rates, between recent immigrants and non-immigrant populations. Challenges for Peel presented in the report are a result of the changing population age structure, and limited civic engagement. There is a shortage of subsidized licensed daycare spaces due to a growing population of children aged 0-14 years and an increase in proportion of children living in poverty. The working age generation are now caring for both younger and older age cohorts, which is creating stress and missed work hours. The Region of Peel will strive to respond to the challenges these social trends present while enhancing the existing positive improvements to make Peel a more liveable region for all residents.

Note: All Charts and Graphs are based on data provided by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Quality of Life Reporting System Issues Report, prepared by Acacia Consulting and Research for FCM using Statistics Canada data.