Waves and Troughs—Choppy Seas at School Age

Population projections are often mistrusted. Figure 7 provides ample evidence that the projections reported in this Brief are unfolding as indicated. Between 2001 and 2006, most of the nation’s 67 Territorial Authority Areas (TAs) saw an increase in their 13-18 year old populations, the legacy of relatively high birth-rates around 1991 (the so-called ‘baby blip’ or ‘baby boom echo’).

Declining birth-rates across the rest of the 1990s and into the early 2000s are now seeing a decline at these ages, the map for 2006-2013 clearly showing that almost all TAs experienced the trend. Over the next 5 years, growth at these ages will return, but it will be both patchy and temporary, as a recent baby blip—born 2002-2008—reaches those ages and flows through New Zealand’s high school classrooms. In the interim, New Zealand will see around 20,000 fewer school leavers (15-18 years of age), and a further 8,000 fewer the following 5 years. Numbers will then similarly—but again only temporarily—surge.

The population of New Zealand has grown steadily over the past 27 years, from 3.3 million in 1986 to around 4.2 million in 2011 (+33 per cent). Continued steady growth is anticipated with the Statistics New Zealand medium case projections indicating a population of 5.2 million by 2031 (+17.9 per cent). The high variant projection indicates a 2031 population of 5.43 million; the low, just on 5 million.

The trend was experienced across both the North and South Islands, with the South Island seeing a slightly greater proportion of declining CAUs. The trend was spread thinly across 36 districts, while 20 districts either declined or did not grow. Only five districts each gained more than 2 per cent of growth. Deepening decline amidst the overall growth is very evident at Census Area Unit level. Between 2006 and 2013, 35 per cent of New Zealand’s 1,869 Census Area Unit (CAU) populations with more than 10 persons declined or experienced zero growth, up from 25.4 per cent across the 2001-2006 period. The trend was experienced across both the North and South Islands, with the South Island slightly proportionally declining CAUs.

These trends are expected to continue, as population ageing reduces the proportion at reproductive age, and the numbers at older ages come to exceed those at younger ages, leading to the end of natural increase (more births than deaths), and for many regions, the end of growth/onset of permanent depopulation. As elsewhere, future growth will disproportionately occur at older ages: two-thirds of New Zealand’s growth to 2031 will be at 65+ years. For Auckland, just one-third of growth will be at 65+ years. For the remaining regions (‘The Rest’) growth at 65+ years will account for all growth and will partially offset decline at several (in some cases all) other ages.

It is important to place these trends in their global context. Across the next 17 years, overall growth in the 58 More Developed Countries (MDCs) is expected to be less than 5 per cent (medium variant). At 65+ years, almost 100 million people will be added to the current 200 million (+49 per cent); all other age groups 0-64 years are projected to decline by around 41 million (+49 per cent). New Zealand’s population aged 65+ years will grow by around 88 per cent, while all other age groups combined will grow by about 7 per cent. New Zealand thus lags the field in terms of structural ageing, but as 2013 Census data confirm, the phenomenon is well underway.

Over the next 5 years, past demographic trends will deliver a surge of students to New Zealand’s high schools, while there will be around 20,000 fewer school leavers, and a further 8,000 fewer the following 5 years.

Summary

The population of New Zealand has grown steadily over the past 27 years, from 3.3 million in 1986 to around 4.2 million in 2011 (+33 per cent). Continued steady growth is anticipated with the Statistics New Zealand medium case projections indicating a population of 5.2 million by 2031 (+17.9 per cent). The high variant projection indicates a 2031 population of 5.43 million; the low, just on 5 million.

The growth is not, however, spread evenly across the country. Between 2006 and 2013, 11 of New Zealand’s 12 cities (Christchurch excluded) shared three-quarters of the growth. The remaining growth was spread thinly across 36 districts, while 20 districts either declined or did not grow. Only 5 districts each gained more than 2 per cent of growth. Deepening decline amidst the overall growth is very evident at Census Area Unit level. Between 2006 and 2013, 35 per cent of New Zealand’s 1,869 Census Area Unit (CAU) populations with more than 10 persons declined or experienced zero growth, up from 25.4 per cent across the 2001-2006 period. The trend was experienced across both the North and South Islands, with the South Island slightly proportionally declining CAUs. These trends are expected to continue, as population ageing reduces the proportion at reproductive age, and the numbers at older ages come to exceed those at younger ages, leading to the end of natural increase (more births than deaths), and for many regions, the end of growth/onset of permanent depopulation. As elsewhere, future growth will disproportionately occur at older ages: two-thirds of New Zealand’s growth to 2031 will be at 65+ years. For Auckland, just one-third of growth will be at 65+ years. For the remaining regions (‘The Rest’) growth at 65+ years will account for all growth and will partially offset decline at several (in some cases all) other ages. It is important to place these trends in their global context. Across the next 17 years, overall growth in the 58 More Developed Countries (MDCs) is expected to be less than 5 per cent (medium variant). At 65+ years, almost 100 million people will be added to the current 200 million (+49 per cent); all other age groups 0-64 years are projected to decline by around 41 million (+49 per cent). New Zealand’s population aged 65+ years will grow by around 88 per cent, while all other age groups combined will grow by about 7 per cent. New Zealand thus lags the field in terms of structural ageing, but as 2013 Census data confirm, the phenomenon is well underway.

Figure 7: Change (per cent) at 13-18 years of age, 2001-06 and 2006-13, Total New Zealand by Territorial Authority Area

Natalie Jackson

New Zealand—Population Size and Growth

The population of New Zealand has grown steadily over the past twenty-seven years, from around 3.3 million in 1986 to around 4.2 million in 2011, an increase of 33 per cent (Figure 1). Continued steady growth is anticipated with the Statistics New Zealand medium case (50th percentile) projections indicating a population of 5.2 million by 2031 (+17.9 per cent). There is not a great deal of variance in the projections, with the high projection indicating a 2031 population of 5.43 million, and the low projection, just on 5 million.

Figure 1: Population of New Zealand Population 1986-2011 and Projected to 2031

Agglomeration

Between 2006 and 2013, 11 of New Zealand’s 12 cities (Christchurch excluded) shared three-quarters of New Zealand’s growth (Figure 2). Auckland took 52 per cent of the growth. The remaining growth was spread thinly across 36 districts, while 20 districts either declined or did not grow. Only five districts each gained more than 2 per cent of growth. New Plymouth and Queenstown-Lakes (each 2.5 per cent), Waikato (2.7 per cent), Waimakariri (3.3 per cent), and Selwyn (5.2 per cent) reflect Christchurch’s loss. It should be noted that these data are for the Census Usually Resident Population (URP) and are thus missing an adjustment for people temporarily overseas on Census night, and Census undercount, which may alter these percentages slightly. However the URP data are comparable over time, and thus the comparisons are internally consistent.

Figure 2: Share (per cent) of New Zealand’s Population Growth 2006-2013, by City

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THE DEMOGRAPHIC FORCES SHAPING NEW ZEALAND’S FUTURE—2013 UPDATE

Natalie Jackson

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Decline Amidst Growth

Deepening decline amidst the overall growth is very evident at Census Area Unit level (Figure 3). Between 2006 and 2013, 35 per cent of New Zealand’s 1,869 Census Area Unit (CAU) populations more than 10 persons declined or experienced zero growth, up from 25.4 per cent across the 2001-2006 period. The trend was experienced across both the North and South Islands, with the South Island seeing a slightly greater proportion of declining CAUs. For the North Island, 32.2 per cent of CAUs declined between 2006 and 2013, up from 25.1 per cent 2001-2006 (28.1 per cent increase), for the South Island the proportion declining 2006-2013 was 35.8 per cent, up from 27.3 per cent 2001-2006.

Population Ageing

Figure 4: Age-Sex Structure 1996 (unshaded bars) and 2013 (shaded bars), selected regional council populations

The selection of four regional council populations in Figure 4 show how markedly regional age structures differ across the country. As elsewhere they are also ageing at different rates (shaded bars = 2013; unshaded bars = 1996). Of these four regions, Auckland has the structurally youngest population with just 11.2 per cent aged 65+ years, and Northland the oldest (18 per cent) — nationally the Figure is 14.2 per cent (Otago and Southland have 15.4 and 16.2 per cent respectively). Structural ageing is particularly pronounced for Northland due on the one hand to a disproportionate net migration loss of young adults, and on the other, to net migration gains of older working age adults and retirees. Southland also experiences these trends, but slightly less so. By contrast, Auckland and Otago experience disproportionate gains at 20-24 years, which show up particularly strongly for Otago.

The Big Picture—New Zealand in Global & Local Context

Globally, nationally, and locally, demographic change is ushering in a dramatically new set of challenges—and opportunities for those who proactively engage with these trends. Across the next 17 years, overall growth in the 58 More Developed Countries (MDCs) is expected to be less than 5 per cent (medium variant). At 65+ years, almost 100 million people will be added to the current 200 million (+49 per cent); all other age groups 0-64 years are projected to decline by around 41 million (-4 per cent). The latter is the key pool from which the MDCs compete for their skilled migrants, and this competition will affect New Zealand’s ability to ensure the levels of migration it has experienced in the past—and assumed in the projections reported here.

Projected Change by Age

The projected growth for total New Zealand of around 17.9 per cent by 2031 indicated earlier in Figure 1 is broken down by 5-year age group in Figure 5, and shown for Auckland (which accounts for one-third of the nation’s population) and ‘The Rest’. These data show that—as elsewhere—growth will disproportionately occur at older ages; two-thirds of New Zealand’s growth to 2031 will be at 65+ years. For Auckland, just one-third of growth will be at 65+ years. For the remaining regions (‘The Rest’), growth at 65+ years will account for all growth and will partially offset decline at several other ages (in some cases, all other ages).

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