Age and Ethnic Structure

With 16.4 per cent aged 65+ years in 2013, the population of the Northland Region is New Zealand’s second-oldest (of 16 regions; nationally 14.2 per cent is aged 65+ years). However age structures differ markedly by ethnic group. Fig 7 compares the age structures of the Northland Region’s European and Māori populations*, which account for just over 62 per cent and 26 per cent of the total (compared with 65 and 13 per cent nationally). In 2013 the median age for the region’s Māori population was 26 years (that is, one-half of the Māori population was aged less than 26 years), compared with 46 years for those of European origin. The graphs also show how each population has aged structurally since 2001 (unshaded bars), due to the declining birth rates, increasing longevity, and net migration loss at the key reproductive ages already discussed. The Northland Region is somewhat less multi-ethnic than is the case nationally, with just 2.6 per cent Pacific Island, 2.3 per cent Asian, 0.3 per cent Middle Eastern/Latin American/African, and 7.4 per cent ‘not identified’, compared with 6.3, 10.1, 10.4, and 4.9 per cent respectively at national level.

Notes: *Statistics New Zealand’s ‘multiple count’ method of ethnic enumeration means that people may be counted in more than one ethnic group

Northland has New Zealand’s second-oldest regional population; but, elsewhere, the population of European origin is relatively old and the population of Māori origin is relatively young.

The population of Northland Region has grown slowly but steadily over the past 27 years, from 127,656 in 1986 to 158,700 in 2013 (+23.4 per cent). Under the medium case assumptions, the population is projected to grow slowly to approximately 173,490 by 2031 (+9.6 per cent), most of the growth accounted for by those aged 65+ years. The major cause of the region’s growth and that of its TAs is natural increase, net migration, contributing significantly between 2001 and 2006 and 2009-2010 only. Increasingly, natural increase will be driven by growth at 65+ years, as the baby boomer cohorts (born 1946-65) move into these age groups and numbers rise due to increasing longevity. Eventually however, the same cohorts will drive the end of natural growth, as deaths will increase and will not be replaced by births. The Northland Region and its TAs experience an ongoing problem in terms of net migration loss at 15-19 and 20-24 years of age. Net migration gains at most younger and older ages partially offset that loss, but are not perfect substitutes because the sustained loss at young adult ages compounds over time to reduce the primary reproductive age group (20-39 years), and thus the number of children. The trends have resulted in the Northland Region having the second-oldest population of the 16 regions. The Far North District has a slightly younger population than the regional average, and the Whangarei and Kaipara Districts, slightly older. Mover and Stayer data from 2013 Census indicate that around two-thirds of those enumerated as living in the Northland Region on census night had been living there in 2008; almost identical to the proportion at each of the previous three censuses. Auckland typically accounts for Northland Region’s largest gains and losses of internal migrants, followed by Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. The Northland Region has a significantly greater proportion Māori, double the national average, and a smaller proportion of those of Pacific Island, Asian, or Latin American/African origin. The relative youth of the region’s large Māori population has the potential to bestow an economic advantage, as the older European population disproportionately enters retirement, and the number of labour force entrants declines.


Northland Region Population Size and Growth

The population of the Northland Region has grown slowly but steadily over the past 27 years, from 127,656 in 1986 to around 158,700 in 2013 (+23.4 per cent) (Figure 1). The population is projected to grow slowly over the next two decades with the Statistics New Zealand medium case projections (2006-base) indicating a population of 173,490 by 2031. However numbers could range as high as 192,280 (high series) or as low as 154,830 (low series).

Figure 1: Population of Northland Region 1986-2011 and projected to 2031

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Subnational Population Projections by Age and Sex, 2006(base)-2031 (October 2012 update)

Components of Change

The major component of the Northland Region’s growth has long been natural increase (the difference between births and deaths), augmented on occasions by spurts of net migration gain. Significant net migration gain occurred between 2001 and 2006 and 2009-2010. Net migration loss almost completely offset natural increase around 2000-2001, and this situation threatened again over the last two years.

Figure 2: Components of change: Northland Region

Source: Compiled from Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

Notes: *Statistics New Zealand’s ‘multiple count’ method of ethnic enumeration means that people may be counted in more than one ethnic group
Components of Change by Component Flow

Using New Zealand’s first “demographic accounting model” (Jackson & Pawar 2013), the broad components of Northland’s population change can be broken down into their underlying flows. Figure 3 shows that between 2008 and 2013, the Northland Region grew by approximately 4,000 persons. Natural increase (births minus deaths) accounted for 4,748 persons, slightly reduced by an estimated net migration loss of 748 persons. The natural increase component was in turn comprised of 11,371 births partially offset by 6,623 deaths. From estimated net migration we then account for “known” net migration (-3,956), comprised of net internal migration (+318) and net international permanent/long term (PLT) migration (-4,274).

This leaves an unaccounted for component of migration, which we call the ‘residual’ component (+3,208 people enumerated as moving to the region between 2008 and 2013, but some of their 2008 origin is unknown). The model further disaggregates each known net migration component into its respective inflows and outflows (14,941 internal immigrants and 14,523 internal emigrants; 7,326 PLT international immigrants and 11,600 PLT international emigrants). The overall picture is one of considerable ‘churn’, generated by large numbers of leavers and arrivals relative to the net outcome. Data for the 1996-2001 and 2001-2006 periods are available from the full Report (Jackson 2014).

Between 2008 and 2013, Northland experienced a small net migration loss but considerable population ‘churn’, generated by relatively large numbers of Leavers and Arrivals.

Components of Change by Age

Figure 4 shows that between 2008 and 2013, Northland experienced notable net migration loss at 15-19 and 20-24 years of age (a continuation of the situation between 1996 and 2001, and 2001 and 2006). However with just one minor exception, small net gains were evident at 0-9 and 30-69 years across all three periods, and at 70-89 years between 2008-2013, indicating overall the net arrival parents, children, and increasingly those of retirement age. All age groups saw both internal and international (PLT) arrivals and departures.

Population Ageing

As elsewhere, declining birth rates, increasing longevity, and—in Northland’s case—net migration loss at young adult ages, are causing the population to age structurally. Between 2011 and 2031, numbers at 0-14, 15-24, and 40-54 years are projected to decline, and those at 65-74, 75-84 and 85+ years to increase significantly (Fig 6). By 2031, 27.7 per cent of the population of the Northland Region is projected to be aged 65+ years, up from 16.4 per cent in 2011. The Far North District has a slightly younger population than the regional average, and the Whangarei and Kaipara Districts, slightly older. Figure 6 shows that the trends for Northland and its TAs are not that different to those for total New Zealand, which also experiences minor decline at 15-24 and 40-54 years. The Far North and Whangarei Districts can expect to have more elderly than the regional average, and the Whangarei and Kaipara Districts, slightly older. Figure 6 shows that the trends for Northland and its TAs are not that different to those for total New Zealand, which also experiences minor decline at 15-24 and 40-54 years. The Far North and Whangarei Districts can expect to have more elderly than the regional average, and the Whangarei and Kaipara Districts, slightly older. Figure 6 shows that the trends for Northland and its TAs are not that different to those for total New Zealand, which also experiences minor decline at 15-24 and 40-54 years. The Far North and Whangarei Districts can expect to have more elderly than the regional average, and the Whangarei and Kaipara Districts, slightly older.

Figure 6: Projected change (numbers) 2011-2031 by broad age

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Subnational Projections by Age and Sex, 2006(base)-2031 (October 2012 update).