Population projections provide a useful starting point for anticipating future population change. Under the medium series produced by Statistics New Zealand, the number of Māori is projected to reach 811,000 by 2026, with 697,000 and 937,000 as the lower and upper bounds (Figure 6). The projected Māori growth rate of 1.3 per cent per annum exceeds the European rate (0.4 per cent), but is substantially lower than the expected growth for both Asian and Pasifika peoples (3.4 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively). For Māori and Pasifika peoples, growth will continue to be driven by natural increase; for Asian peoples future growth will be driven almost entirely by migration. Ethnic differences in growth rates have consequences for Māori demographic visibility. By 2026 the number of Māori and people from all Asian ethnic groups combined will be close to parity.

### Summary

- In the 2013 Census, 598,602 individuals identified as ethnic Māori. They comprised nearly 15 per cent of the New Zealand population responding to the ethnicity question. The Māori ancestry population was larger, or still at 668,724 persons. Māori have much higher demographic visibility than Indigenous peoples in the other colonial settler states.
- The number of Māori increased, on average, by 0.8 per cent per annum between 2006 and 2013. This was significantly below the 2001–2006 annual growth rate (1.4 per cent), and partly reflects a decline in the rate of natural increase (the excess of births over deaths).
- In 2013 the Māori median age (23.9 years) was much younger than the New Zealand median age (38.0 years). The youthful Māori population offers a potential for a collateral “demographic dividend,” with benefits for Māori and New Zealand.
- The number of Māori is projected to reach 811,000 by 2026, with the greatest increase at the kaumātua ages. By 2026, the number of Māori and people from all Asian ethnic groups combined will be close to parity.

### References:


Population Growth

The two-year delay in the Census due to the Christchurch earthquakes means that the Māori intercensal growth rate between 2006 and 2013 is not comparable with earlier five-year census periods. As such, the average annual rates of growth shown in Figure 2 are more informative. Between 2006 and 2013 the number of Māori increased, on average, by 0.8 per cent per annum. This was significantly below the 2001-2006 rate (1.4 per cent), and partly reflects a decline in the rate of natural increase (the excess of births over deaths), as shown in Figure 3.

Time-series analysis shows the volatility of Māori population growth over the last century. The 1950s and 1960s were the decades of the greatest growth. Improvements in mortality coupled with high fertility saw Māori growth rates peak at about 4.0 per cent per annum. Internationally such levels are now rarely seen, even in many of the world’s least developed countries. The period of rapid growth ended with the onset of the Māori fertility decline which began in the late 1960s (SNZ 2013). Until that time, it was one of the most dramatic fertility declines observed anywhere in the world.

Definitional and question changes have also impacted on Māori growth rates, along with broader shifts in thinking about identity. Until recently, Māori growth rates had outpaced national growth rates owing to higher fertility. In 2013 the Māori Total Fertility Rate was 2.5 (TFR of 2.1 is replacement fertility) versus nearly 2.0 nationally. While New Zealand has experienced a long-term decline in the rate of natural increase (Figure 3), births still outnumber deaths and net migration gain provides an additional source of growth. As an Indigenous people, Māori do not have the option of population replenishment through migration.

Age-Sex Structure

Along with size and growth, age structure is a core feature of Māori demography. At just under 24 years, the Māori median age in 2013 was much younger than the New Zealand median age of 38.0 years. The different age structures are evident in Figure 4. The triangular shape of the Māori age-sex pyramid, with the large base of tamariki (0-14) and rangatahi (15-19), contrasts sharply with the cylindrical shape of the national age-sex structure.

Size and Relative Share of Age Groups

While the Māori population is structurally young, the number of older Māori has grown significantly in the last decade. Between 2001 and 2013 the number of Māori aged 65 years and older almost doubled, from 17,637 to 32,184. The increase was largely owing to improvements in survivorship and outpaced the growth of older people nationally. The burgeoning population of older Māori expands the potential pool of those able to take up kaumātua and kuia roles in whānau and communities. As more Māori reach advanced ages, different forms of support, both social and material, will be needed to expand their opportunities to live fulfilling lives.

The Potential for a Māori Demographic Dividend

The ageing of New Zealand’s population is largely driven by the ageing of the Pākehā (NZ European) population, and accelerated by the outwards migration of those aged 30 to 39 years. As the Pākehā ‘Baby Boomers’ retire over the next twenty or so years, they will be replaced by relatively smaller cohorts. Unless there is a very large and sustained increase in migration, New Zealand is likely to face substantial labour shortages over the next 20 to 30 years, particularly in non-urban areas already subject to accelerated ageing. All other factors remaining constant, the young will be in short-supply but will benefit from increasing competition for their labour and skills (Jackson 2011a).

For Māori, there are potential windfalls to be made. A large share of Māori are at the ages in which most educational qualifications are gained (usually 15-24 years), or are entering the labour-market. While the proportion of Māori aged 0-14 years has been declining since at least 2001, the Māori share of the national population at those ages is still growing.

In 2013, Māori comprised nearly one quarter of all New Zealand children; by 2026 the projected share will be around 29 per cent. The divergent Māori and Pākehā age structures—one youthful, the other ageing—creates the potential for what Jackson calls a “collateral Māori demographic dividend” (2011b), with benefits not only for Māori, but for New Zealand generally. However, this widow of demographic opportunity is finite. The potential to gain from a youthful Māori population will only be realised through immediate strategic planning and investment in rangatahi Māori in areas such as education and training.