

## POPULATION CHANGE IN THE UK – A DME

### Introduction

The first census of population in the UK occurred in 1801, although no census was taken in Ireland (then part of the United Kingdom). This was a relatively simple count of people and their houses, with a broad indication of occupations. The most recent full UK census occurred in 2001, but will not be available to the public until 2003. Figure 1 shows the UK's population profile from 1801 to 2026. The latest figures are the mid-year estimates from 1999, which put the population at 59,501,000 (20th largest in the world). This means that there are now more people living in the UK than at any other time. The population of the UK increased by 37 million between 1851 and 1999, although there have been variations in the rate of growth: England's population has almost trebled during this period, while Northern Ireland's increased by less than 20%.

### Population projections

Population projections, using assumptions based on past trends, suggest that growth in the UK's population will continue until 2026, when it will reach nearly 65 million people. It is anticipated that the population will then gradually decline. However, in Scotland a small decline in population is projected, while populations in Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to peak in around 30 years time and then start to fall.

Population change by gender and age can be seen in Figure 2. In 1821 just

Figure 1: Population of the UK, 1801–2026

	1801	1851	1901	1951	1991	1999	2021	2026
ENGLAND	8,305	16,764	30,515	41,159	48,208	49,753	53,715	54,443
WALES	587	1,163	2,013	2,599	2,891	2,937	3,047	3,062
SCOTLAND	1,608	2,889	4,472	5,096	5,107	5,119	5,058	5,016
N. IRELAND	N/a	1,443	1,237	1,371	,607	1,692	1,821	1,835
UK	N/a	22,259	38,237	50,225	57,814	59,501	63,642	64,355

Figures are in thousands

Source: adapted from Office for National Statistics; Government's Actuary Department

Figure 3: Age Distributions of UK Ethnic Groups, 1999/2000

GREAT BRITAIN	% Under16	% 16–34	% 35–64	% 65+	millions All ages
WHITE	20	26	39	16	53.1
BLACK					
Black Caribbean	22	28	40	10	0.5
Black African	33	35	30	0	0.4
Other Black groups	56	31	13	0	0.3
All Black groups	34	31	30	5	1.2
INDIAN	24	31	38	7	0.9
PAK/BANG					
Pakistani	36	35	25	4	0.7
Bangladeshi	40	34	23	0	0.3
All Pak/Bang	37	35	24	4	0.9
OTHER GROUPS					
Chinese	16	40	39	0	0.1
None of above	36	30	31	3	0.6
All other groups	33	32	32	3	0.8
ALL ETHNIC GROUPS	20	26	38	15	56.9

Source: adapted from Office for National Statistics; Government's Actuary Department

under half of the UK's population was aged under 20, and a quarter were aged 20–39. The number of people in each 10-year age band decreased sharply with age, reflecting the poor

survival rates at the time. In contrast the population pyramid for the UK in 1999 is more even, with a far higher proportion in the older age bands, over two-fifths of the population

Figure 2: Population by gender and age, 1821–1999

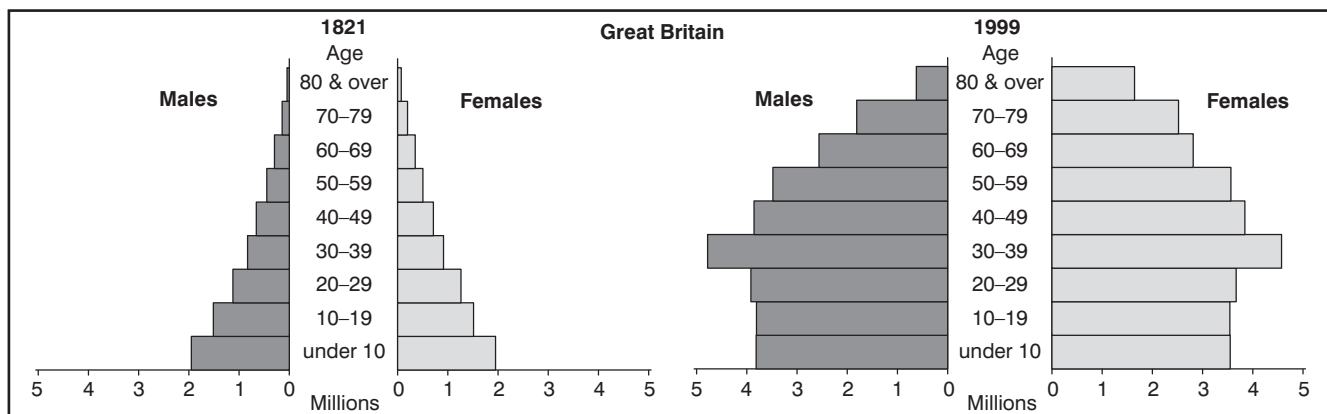
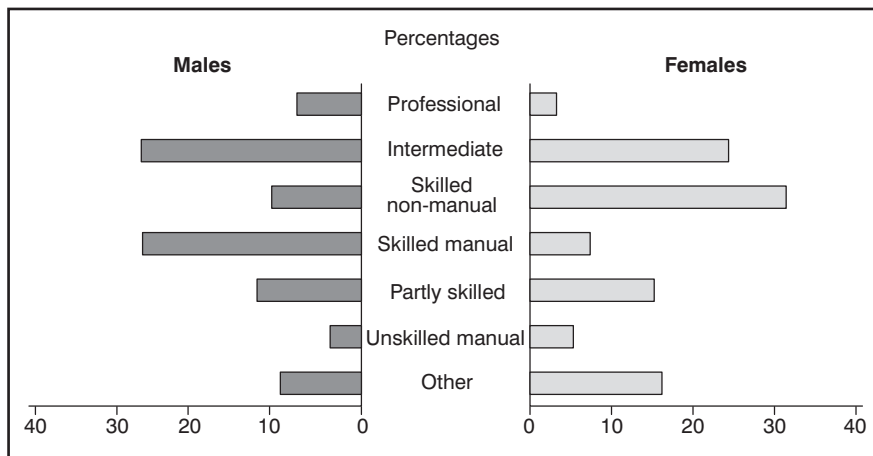


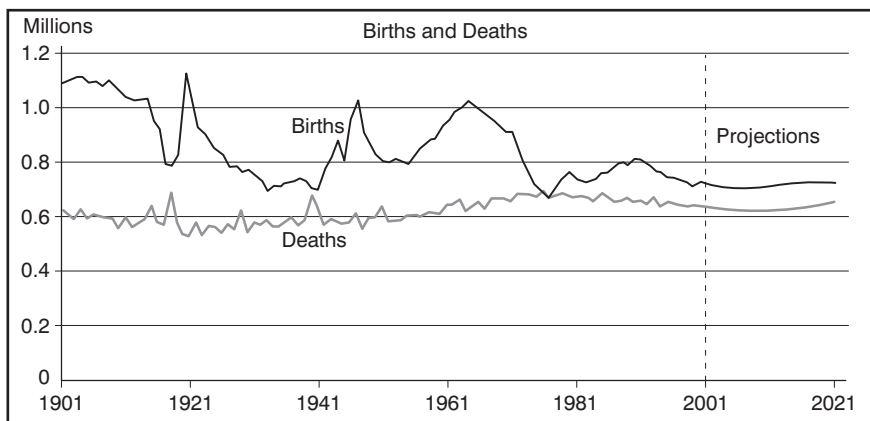
Figure 4: Population of working age by gender and social class (spring 2000)



Source: Adapted from Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Figure 5: UK population change 1901–2021

(a) Births and deaths



(b) Population change (000s)

Census period	Pop. at start	Live births	Deaths	Net natural change	Net migration	Overall change
1901–1911	38,237	1091	624	467	-82	385
1911–1921	42,082	1075	689	286	-92	194
1921–1931	44,027	824	555	268	-67	201
1931–1951	46,036	785	598	188	28	213
1951–1961	50,287	839	593	246	12	258
1961–1971	52,807	962	638	324	-14	310
1971–1981	55,928	736	666	69	-27	42
1981–1999	56,357	757	655	103	43	146
1991–1999	57,814	744	637	107	104	211
1999–2001	59,501	716	627	88	140	228
2001–2011	59,954	701	614	87	95	182
2011–2021	61,773	712	620	92	95	187

Source: adapted from Office for National Statistics

being aged 40 or over. Higher survival rates during the 20th century, together with a declining birth rate, have resulted in the current age distribution.

The UK has an ageing population, brought about by improving mortality rates for older people, and lower fertility rates. Population

projections show this process continuing so that by 2016 it is expected that the number of people aged 65 or over will exceed those aged under 16. An ageing population is a characteristic the UK shares with other countries in the EU.

The age profile of the population varies between ethnic groups (Figure

3). Members of ethnic minority groups were present in the UK in small numbers throughout the Victorian period and indeed earlier. However, their numbers increased dramatically after the Second World War. This growth was initiated by large-scale immigration from the countries of the New Commonwealth, following the passing of the 1945 British Nationality Act and at a period when there was a labour shortage here. This trend was subsequently curtailed by legislation introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2000, about one person in 15 in the UK was from an ethnic minority group. In general, ethnic minority groups have a younger age structure than the White population.

The occupational structure (Figure 4) of the UK also changed during the 20th century. Trends include the increasing participation of women in the workforce. Among women there have been increases in the numbers in professional jobs. For men there has been a strong upwards trend in the share of professional, managerial and supervisory grades. Women still predominate in certain occupations such as clerical and secretarial jobs.

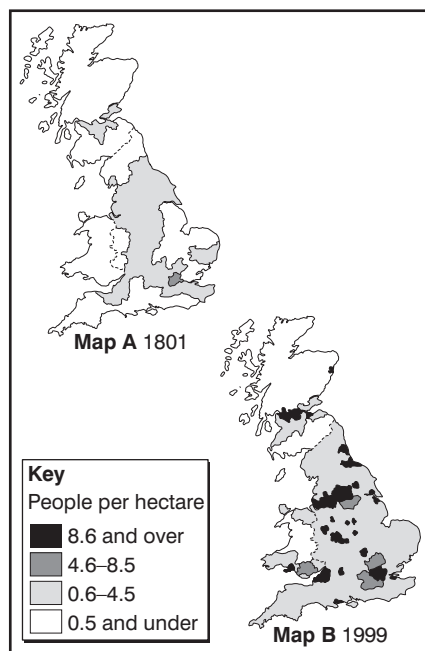
### Population trends in the UK

The rate of population change in the UK depends on natural increase, the difference between the numbers of births and deaths (see Figure 5). Most of the UK’s growth can be attributed to this change. However, in recent years inward migration has also been an important factor in population growth. Between 1991 and 1999 “natural” change was matched by migration change.

The fastest period of UK population growth occurred in the first decades of the 20th century. This was due to the high number of births during these decades. The considerable fall in births following the 1960s’ “baby boom” helps to explain the slower population change of the 1970s.

In 1999 the majority of the UK’s population lived in England (Figure 6). Northern Ireland has the smallest UK population, at around 3%. Population density within the UK varies considerably, with England having 381 people per km<sup>2</sup>, while Scotland has only 65 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Figure 7 shows projected population change to 2011.

Figure 6: Population density by area, 1801 and 1999



Sources: Census, Office for National Statistics; National Assembly for Wales; General Registry Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

### Case Study: London and South East England

London, the capital of the UK, had a population of 7.2 million people in 1999. London’s boroughs can be classified into City, Inner London, and Outer London and the suburbs. The borough with the highest population density is Kensington and Chelsea, with over 14,161 people per km<sup>2</sup>; the lowest density is in the City of London, with only 1,737 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

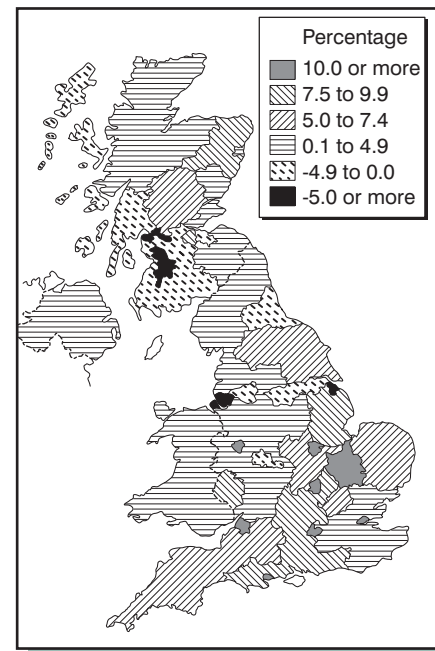
Population change in the London region recorded a significant fall in 1999, when there was a net 65,000 loss

of people to other regions of the UK. However, this was partly offset by a net inflow of international migrants settling in the capital. Two-fifths of people leaving London in 1999 moved into the neighbouring South East region. Net losses occurred mostly in the 35–44 and under 15 age groups. London, however, experienced an increase in people aged 15–24. Some of this increase can be attributed to the rising immigrant populations, linked to the steep increase in asylum-seekers from former Yugoslavia and countries such as Turkey, Somalia and Sri Lanka. The number of people seeking asylum in 1988 was 4,000 and in 1999 around 71,000.

In 1999 the South East region (excluding London) had a population of 8.0 million, slightly more than the London conurbation. Within the South East, population density was highest in Portsmouth at 4,750 people per km<sup>2</sup> and lowest in Chichester in West Sussex at 137 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The many cities and towns in the South East tend to have much higher population densities than the rural areas which surround them. Variations in population density can partly be explained by relief, the chalk uplands of the Chiltern Hills, North and South Downs, and the fact that almost a third of the South East area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and around a fifth is green belt land.

The South East is a region of considerable prosperity and economic growth. Employment rates and average weekly earnings are the highest in the UK. London has the highest average earnings. Good

Figure 7: Projected population change, 1998–2011



transport links have encouraged the growth of the commuter town and village, and most towns within the South East are within a 90 minute commute to London by rail. In some parts of the South East the population is ageing faster than the rest of the UK. This is partly explained by the greying resorts of Brighton, Worthing and Bognor Regis, where retirement homes have seen the fastest growth in property exchanges.

### Impacts of population change 2000–2026

- A rapidly ageing population has implications for skill and labour shortages, health care, social care,

Figure 8: Migration – Inter-regional movements UK, 1999

Destination	NE	NW	Y&H	EM	WM	E	L	SE	SW	ENG	WAL	SCO	NIRL	UK
North East		6	8	3	2	3	4	4	2	33	1	4	1	39
North West	7		18	10	13	7	11	12	8	86	9	4	2	105
Yorks & Humber	10	19		16	8	8	8	11	6	86	3	8	1	95
East Mids	4	11	18		16	17	11	18	8	103	3	5	1	111
West Mids	3	13	8	14		8	10	14	13	82	8	4	1	94
East	3	8	8	14	8		59	29	10	139	3	3	1	148
London	5	13	10	10	11	29		54	16	148	5	5	2	163
South East	5	14	11	14	14	30	88		34	211	8	8	1	228
South West	2	10	7	9	17	14	22	47		128	10	8	1	143
England	38	94	88	89	88	117	214	190	96		51	51	10	112
Wales	1	12	3	3	10	4	6	9	9	56		2		58
Scotland	4	8	5	3	3	5	7	8	4	47	2		2	51
N Ireland		2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	9		2		12
UK	44	115	97	96	102	126	228	209	110	112	53	55	12	

Source: adapted from Office for National Statistics; Government’s Actuary Department

Figure 9: Average international migration, 1989–1993

United Kingdom						
	1989–93			1994–96		
	inflow	outflow	balance	inflow	outflow	balance
New Commonwealth	49.9	25.9	24.0	49.3	23.5	25.8
European Union	66.4	61.3	5.1	83.9	62.3	21.7
Old Commonwealth	52.7	57.6	-4.9	57.0	50.9	6.1
USA	25.3	34.8	-9.5	30.5	24.9	5.6
Middle east	9.0	11.3	-2.3	11.4	8.9	2.5
Rest of Europe	12.5	9.7	2.8	13.4	12.3	1.0
Rest of America	2.3	3.6	-1.3	2.8	2.9	-0.1
Other	24.4	19.4	4.9	29.3	18.6	10.6
All countries	242.5	223.6	18.9	277.6	204.4	73.2

- now to 2026.
- 4. An outline of the possible solutions to the negative outcomes identified in task 3.
- 5. Produce an annotated pie chart to show the information in Figure 10.

economic productivity, pension provision and planning.

- The transformation of villages and small towns close to major conurbations, as a result of counter-urbanisation and brownfield development policies.
- Political, economic and geographical pressure on green belts to provide housing and transport solutions for regions experiencing population growth, such as the South East.
- Accelerating decline of some regions as the economically mobile move out and an “underclass” remain.
- Increasing rural deprivation in areas away from major population concentrations, and growing rural/urban inequalities.
- Pressure on inner cities and the South East from uncontrolled international immigration, including growth of organised crime and destabilisation of local labour markets.
- Growth in “grey” services (i.e. for the elderly) and in tourism and recreation, causing overcrowding in select coastal resorts.

### Conclusion

Population change varies across the UK. Re-urbanisation, counter-urbanisation and political and economic immigration are likely to dominate change in the first quarter of the 21st century. Changing fertility patterns and the resultant ageing of the UK population will require careful political, social and economic planning.

### Decision-making exercise

Your job is to prepare a report to the United Nations Population Fund, together with a briefing for the UK’s broadsheet newspapers about the changes in the UK’s population. Your report should include:

1. Assessment of current population situation.
2. An analysis of population change 1801–2026 identifying main population “drivers”. Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 will help you here.
3. An evaluation of the problems and positive outcomes of change from

Figure 10: International migration – asylum applications and decisions, 1999

UK	Europe & Americas	Africa	Middle East	Rest of Asia	Not known	‘000s All areas
Applications received	30.3	18.4	4.2	17.5	0.8	71.2
Decisions taken						
RF	6.5	0.8	0.4	0.1	0.1	7.8
NR	0.1	0.7	0.4	1.2	0.0	2.5
RA	3.4	2.9	0.3	4.4	0.0	11.0
GA	3.5	5.6	0.3	1.6	0.1	11.1
RL	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.1	0.0	1.3
Total decisions	13.9	10.7	1.4	7.4	0.3	33.7
Applications withdrawn	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.7
Applications outstanding at end of year	41.8	28.6	8.0	22.1	0.9	101.5

RF – recognised as a refugee and granted asylum  
 NR – not recognised as a refugee, but granted exceptional leave  
 RA – refused asylum and exceptional leave  
 GA – granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain under backlog criteria  
 RL – refused leave under backlog criteria

Source: Adapted from Office for National Statistics; Government’s Actuary Department