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# New United Kingdom population projections

The United Kingdom population is projected to increase gradually from an estimated 59.2 million in 1998 to reach 63.6 million by 2021, according to new figures released today.

The projections by the Government Actuary for the UK and its constituent countries are based on the estimated population at the middle of 1998 and replace the previous 1996-based projections.

The new figures show that:

- The projected increase is equivalent to an average annual rate of growth of 0.3 per cent. Longer-term projections suggest the population will peak around 2036 and then gradually start to fall.
- Just over half the projected 4.4 million increase between 1998 and 2021 is attributable to net inward migration. The remainder is due to projected natural increase (more births than deaths).
- The population will gradually become older with the average (mean) age expected to rise from 38.6 years in 1998 to 41.9 years by 2021.
- In 1998, there were nearly 1.4 million (13 per cent) more children aged under 16, than people of pensionable age. However, by 2008, the population of pensionable age is projected to exceed the number of children.

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- The number of children aged under 16 is projected to fall by 6.5 per cent from 12.1 million in 1998 to 11.3 million in 2011 and then to remain at around this level over the next 10 years.
  - The number of people of working age (currently defined as between ages 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women) is projected to rise by six per cent from 36.4 million in 1998 to 38.5 million in 2011. The planned change in women's state retirement age from 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020 will further increase the working age population to 40.1 million by 2021.
  - The number of people over pensionable age is projected to increase by 11 per cent from 10.7 million in 1998 to 11.9 million in 2011. Allowing for the change in women's state retirement age, the population of pensionable age will rise only slightly further (to 12.2 million) by 2021. However, a faster increase will then resume with longer-term projections suggesting the number over pensionable age peaking at nearly 16 million around 2040.
  - Due to differences in demographic patterns, projected trends differ for the four countries of the United Kingdom. A small decline in the population of Scotland is projected to continue from 1998, while the populations of Wales and Northern Ireland are projected to peak in around 30 years' time and then start to fall. The population of England is still projected to be rising at 2031, but at a decreasing rate of growth.
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The assumptions underlying the projections are based on an analysis

of recent demographic trends. For the United Kingdom as a whole, the key assumptions for the future are that:

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- Average completed family size, which has been falling from a peak of nearly 2.5 children for women born in the mid 1930s, will level off at 1.8 children for women born in or after 1975.
  - ~~Life expectancy at birth, based on the mortality rates for that year,~~  
will rise from 74.9 years in 1998-99 to 78.5 years in 2020-21 for men, and from 79.7 years in 1998-99 to 82.7 years in 2020-21 for women.
  - Net inward migration to the United Kingdom will be 95,000 people per year from 2001-02 onwards.

**Table A. Projected components of population change, United Kingdom, 1998-2021 (annual averages)**

	<i>Thousands</i>				
	1998 - 2001	2001 - 2006	2006 - 2011	2011 - 2016	2016 - 2021
Population at start	59,237	59,954	60,860	61,773	62,729
Births	714	704	698	708	715
Deaths	630	618	610	612	628
Natural change	84	86	88	96	88
Net inward migration	155	95	95	95	95
Total change	239	181	183	191	183
Population at end	59,954	60,860	61,773	62,729	63,642

**Table B. Projected population of United Kingdom and constituent**

## countries, 1998-2051

	1998	2001	2011	2021	<i>Longer-term projections</i>		
					2031	2041	2051
United Kingdom	59,237	59,954	61,773	63,642	64,768	64,781	64,089
England	49,495	50,187	51,922	53,715	54,924	-	-
Wales	2,933	2,950	2,993	3,047	3,061	-	-
Scotland	5,120	5,109	5,087	5,058	4,947	-	-
Northern Ireland	1,689	1,708	1,771	1,821	1,836	-	-

**Table C. Projected population by age, United Kingdom, 1998-2021**

Ages	1998	2001	2006	2011	<i>Thousands</i>	
					2016	2021
0-14	11,380	11,294	10,890	10,594	10,541	10,603
15-29	11,580	11,358	11,629	11,936	11,837	11,438
30-44	13,347	13,854	13,538	12,477	11,845	12,118
45-59	10,820	11,247	11,993	12,734	13,579	13,273
60-74	7,783	7,767	8,231	9,300	9,920	10,642
75 & over	4,327	4,434	4,579	4,731	5,007	5,568
All ages	59,237	59,954	60,860	61,773	62,729	63,642
Mean age (years)	38.6	38.9	39.6	40.4	41.1	41.9
Under 16	12,110	12,057	11,695	11,322	11,259	11,305
Working age*	36,397	37,096	37,947	38,537	39,431	40,127
Pensionable age*	10,730	10,800	11,219	11,915	12,040	12,210

\*Working age and pensionable age populations based on state retirement age for given year. Between 2010 and 2020, state retirement age will change from 65 years for men and 60 years for women, to 65 years for both sexes.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Government Actuary, in consultation with the Registrars General of England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, prepares the national population projections and the assumptions regarding the future on which they are based. A new set of projections, based on a full-scale review of the trends affecting the underlying assumptions, is made every second year. These projections, based on the estimated population at the middle of 1998, replace the previous 1996-based projections. The main focus of the projections is on the first 25 years, that is, up to 2023. Longer term projections to the year 2038 for individual countries, and to 2068 for the United Kingdom and Great Britain only, are also available. However, the further ahead the projections go, the greater is the degree of uncertainty.
2. Further information on the 1998-based national population projections for the United Kingdom and constituent countries are available on the GAD web site (<http://www.gad.gov.uk>). An article on these projections will be published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in *Population Trends 99* in March 2000. A reference volume (ONS series PP2 no.22), containing full commentary and results, as well as details of variant projections based on alternative assumptions of future fertility, mortality and migration, will be published later in 2000.
3. All figures presented here have been rounded independently, so component figures may not add exactly to totals.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data, including a description of the release categories featured on the front page of ONS releases, are available from the press office.
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