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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Population and Migration

National population projections: 1998-based

The average age of Britons is expected to rise from 38.6 years in 1998 to 41.9 years by 2021, as the number of older people increases relative to the number of younger people.

Longer-term projections show continuing ageing of the United Kingdom population with the average age reaching around 44 years by about 2040, and then stabilising at that level.

Population projections* prepared by the Government Actuary and published today by National Statistics show that:

- 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 this level over the following decade.
- The working age population (currently defined as between ages 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women) is projected to rise by 6 per cent, from 36.4 million in 1998 to 38.3 million in 2010. Then, allowing for the change in women's state retirement age (from 60 to 65), it rises to 40.1 million in 2021. However, the average age of the working population will rise. Between 1998 and 2021, the 16-44 age group is projected to decrease from 24.2 million to 22.9 million while the 45-59 age group is projected to increase by nearly a quarter, from 10.8 million to 13.3 million.
- 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 2010, overtaking the number of children aged under 16 by 2008. Allowing for the change in women's state retirement age, the size of this age group will rise only slightly further to 12.2 million by 2021. A faster rate of increase will then resume, with longer-term projections suggesting the number peaking at nearly 16 million around 2040.

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- The population aged 80 and over will grow from 2.3 million in 1998 to 3.2 million by 2021. Longer-term projections show a more rapid growth to 4.3 million by 2031, eventually peaking at just under 6 million by the middle of the century.
- The dependency ratio, the ratio of children aged under 16 and population of pensionable age (allowing for the change in the state retirement age of women) to people of working age, is expected to fall gradually from 628 dependents per 1,000 working age people in 1998 to about 580 in 2020. It will then increase rapidly, with longer-term projections suggesting a levelling off around 700 from the mid-2030s.

Other key projections show:

- The UK population is projected to increase gradually from an estimated 59.2 million in 1998 to reach 63.6 million by 2021, equivalent to an annual growth rate of 0.3 per cent. Longer-term projections suggest the population will peak around 2036 at almost 65 million and then start to fall.
- Just over half the projected 4.4 million increase in the population between 1998 and 2021 is directly attributable to migration. The remainder is due to natural increase (more births than deaths).
- Due to differences in past and present demographic patterns, projected trends differ for the four countries of the UK. A gradual decrease in the population of Scotland is expected 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 2038, but at a low rate of growth.



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. Summary data on the 1998-based national population projections were previously published in a First Release on 25 November 1999 and in an article in *Population Trends 99*, the Spring 2000 issue of the ONS quarterly journal. This publication gives detailed results and a full account of the underlying assumptions.
3. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
4. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2000.