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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Population and Migration

Over 80s set to reach nearly 5 million by 2031

The population aged 80 and over in the United Kingdom will grow from 2.5 million in 2002 to reach 4.9 million by 2031. Longer-term population projections suggest a continuing increase for around a further 20 years, peaking in the early 2050s at nearly 7 million.

This is one of the key results from the most recent population projections for the UK and its constituent countries. The projections, made by the Government Actuary, were based on the estimated population at the middle of 2002 and were published in December 2003. Detailed results are published today* together with a full account of the underlying assumptions.

The projections show that:

- The number of older people will increase significantly relative to the number of younger people, with the average (mean) age expected to rise from 39.3 years in 2002 to 43.6 years in 2031.
- The number of children aged under 16 is projected to fall by 7.4 per cent from 11.8 million in 2002 to just below 11 million in 2014 and then to rise slowly until the late 2020s.
- 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 3.5 per cent from 36.6 million in 2002 to 37.8 million in 2011. Allowing for the planned change in women's state pension age from 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020, the working age population will increase further to 39.4 million by 2021 and then gradually start to fall.

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- The working population will also become much older. Although little change is projected in the number of adults under age 30, the 30-44 age group is projected to fall by 11.6 per cent from 13.5 million in 2002 to 11.9 million in 2017 before rising to 12.7 million in the late 2020s. Conversely, the 45-59 age group is projected to increase by 15.2 per cent by 2018 before beginning to fall.
- The number of people over state pension age is projected to increase by 11.9 per cent from 10.9 million in 2002 to 12.2 million in 2011. Given the change in women's state pension age, the population of pensionable age will then rise only slightly further (to 12.7 million) by 2021. However, a faster increase will then resume, with longer-term projections suggesting that the number over state pension age will peak at over 17 million in about sixty years' time.
- The UK population is projected to increase gradually from an estimated 59.2 million in 2002 to reach 64.8 million by 2031. This is equivalent to an annual growth rate of 0.3 per cent. Longer-term projections suggest the population will peak around 2050 at over 65 million and then gradually start to fall.
- Due to differences in past and present demographic patterns, and those assumed for the future, projected trends differ for the four countries of the United Kingdom. A small decline in the population of Scotland is projected to continue from 2002, while the populations of Wales and Northern Ireland are projected to peak in around thirty years time and then start to fall. The population of England is still projected to be rising at 2040, but at a low rate of growth.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) produces national population projections for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries at the request of the Registrars General for England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The assumptions used are agreed in consultation with the statistical offices of the four constituent countries.
2. A new set of projections is normally made every second year, based on a full-scale review of the trends affecting the underlying assumptions about fertility, mortality and migration. The next full set, scheduled for issue in October 2005, will be based on the estimated population at the middle of 2004. However, ONS will be publishing revised population estimates for England and Wales on 9 September 2004. Consequently, GAD will be producing an interim set of UK national population projections, based on the population at the middle of 2003, on 30 September 2004. See <http://www.gad.gov.uk/news.asp?nid=628> for further details.
3. The main focus of the projections is on the period to 2031. Longer-term projections to the year 2042 for the individual countries, and to 2072 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.
4. Summary data on the 2002-based national population projections were previously published in an ONS/GAD First Release on 18 December 2003 and in an article in *Population Trends 115*, the Spring 2004 issue of the ONS quarterly journal. Full details of the 2002-based national population projections for the United Kingdom and constituent countries were published on the GAD website (www.gad.gov.uk) on 18 December 2003. *National Population Projections: 2002-based* gives detailed results and a full account of the underlying assumptions.
5. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the ONS press office.
6. 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 2004.