1. Population change and historical perspective

Total population and change since 2011

Components of population change

Province and county change

Population change

Census 2016 results show that Ireland's population increased by 173,613 persons over the five years since April 2011, to reach 4,761,865 persons in April 2016.

This represents a total increase of 3.8 per cent over the 5 years, or 0.8 per cent on an annual average basis.

This compares with an annual average increase of 1.6 per cent over the previous inter-censal period 2006 to 2011.

It's a fact!

4,761,865 The population of Ireland in April 2016

173,613 The increase in the population since April 2011

Figure 1.1 Total population and inter-censal change, 1956 - 2016

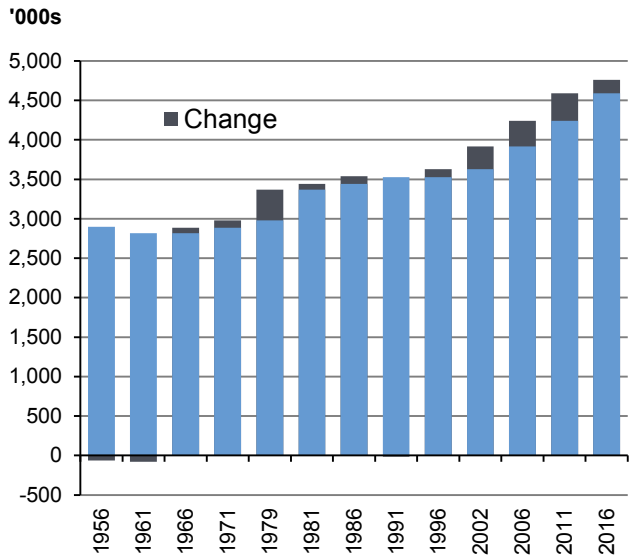


Table 1.1 Population, 1956-2016

Census year	Population	Change	%
1956	2,898,264	-62,329	-2.1
1961	2,818,341	-79,923	-2.8
1966	2,884,002	65,661	2.3
1971	2,978,248	94,246	3.3
1979	3,368,217	389,969	13.1
1981	3,443,405	75,188	2.2
1986	3,540,643	97,238	2.8
1991	3,525,719	-14,924	-0.4
1996	3,626,087	100,368	2.8
2002	3,917,203	291,116	8.0
2006	4,239,848	322,645	8.2
2011	4,588,252	348,404	8.2
2016	4,761,865	173,613	3.8

Historic population trends

The population of Ireland has increased by almost 1.9 million over the past 60 years, rising from 2,898,264 in 1956 to 4,761,865 in 2016.

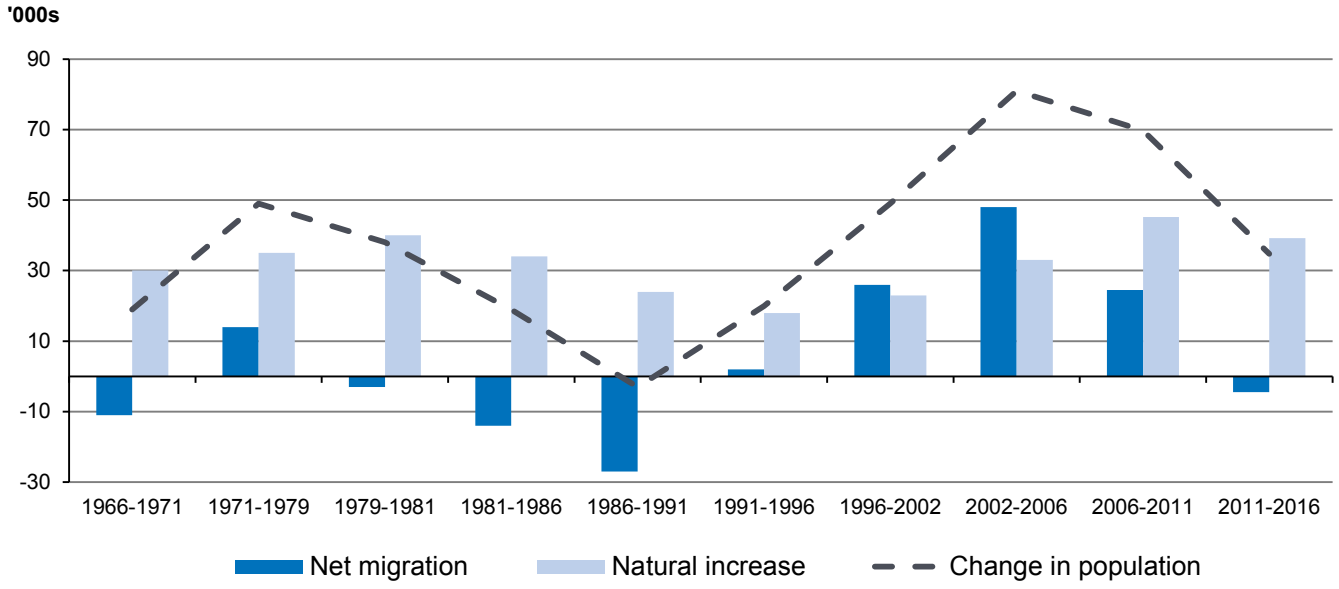
The population at each census from 1956 to 2016 is presented in Table 1.1. As can be seen, the population declined throughout the 1950s and early 1960s before beginning to increase in the late 1960s. This growth continued throughout the 1970s with almost 400,000 added to the population between 1971 and 1979 (there was no census in 1976).

The 1980s saw a return to slower growth as a result of net outward migration with the population actually falling during the 1986-1991 inter-censal period.

Thereafter it has grown in each decade through a combination of natural increase and declining net outward migration resulting in the current population being almost 70 per cent larger than in 1961.

See web table EY001

Figure 1.2 Annual average change in population components, 1966-2016



High birth rate driving population growth

Population change is driven by three elements - births, deaths and net migration (immigration less emigration). Births less deaths is known as natural increase.

During the most recent inter-censal period 2011 to 2016 natural increase has continued to be the main driver of population growth in Ireland.

Over the past five years the natural increase in the population was 196,100, accounted for by 344,400 births and 148,300 deaths. This is a fall of 30,000 on the previous inter-censal figure of 226,100 and is due largely to a fall in births of 22,800. Deaths increased by 7,200 over the period.

It's a fact!

344,400	The number of births since Census 2011
148,300	The number of deaths since Census 2011
196,100	The natural increase 2011 - 2016

Table 1.2 Components of population change, annual averages, 1961-2016

Period	Births	Deaths	Natural increase	Change in population	Estimated net migration
	000's				
1961 - 1966	63	33	29	13	-16
1966 - 1971	63	33	30	19	-11
1971 - 1979	69	33	35	49	14
1979 - 1981	73	33	40	38	-3
1981 - 1986	67	33	34	19	-14
1986 - 1991	56	32	24	-3	-27
1991 - 1996	50	31	18	20	2
1996 - 2002	54	31	23	49	26
2002 - 2006	61	28	33	81	48
2006 - 2011	73	28	45	70	24
2011 - 2016	69	30	39	35	-4

Net migration

Net migration is derived as a residual of total population change less natural increase.

Of the three factors that determine population change (births, deaths and net migration), from an Irish perspective net migration is by far the most influential, volatile and uncertain.

In the five years to 2016 the population increased by 173,600 persons. With a recorded natural increase of 196,100 over the period, total net migration is estimated at -22,500 (net outward flow).

As clearly illustrated in Figure 1.2 (previous page) this is the first inter-censal period of net outward migration since the 1986-1991 period and contrasts sharply with a net inflow of 115,800 during the previous inter-censal period of 2006 and 2011.

Table 1.2 presents the annual averages of the main components of population change for the period 1961 to 2016.

The steady nature of the natural increase in the population over time contrasts sharply with the more volatile movements in net migration which ranged from an annual average outflow of 27,000 in the 1986-1991 period to an annual average inflow of 48,000 between 2002 and 2006.

Immigration in the year to April 2016 is dealt with in more detail later in this report on page 47.

Leinster exceeds State growth

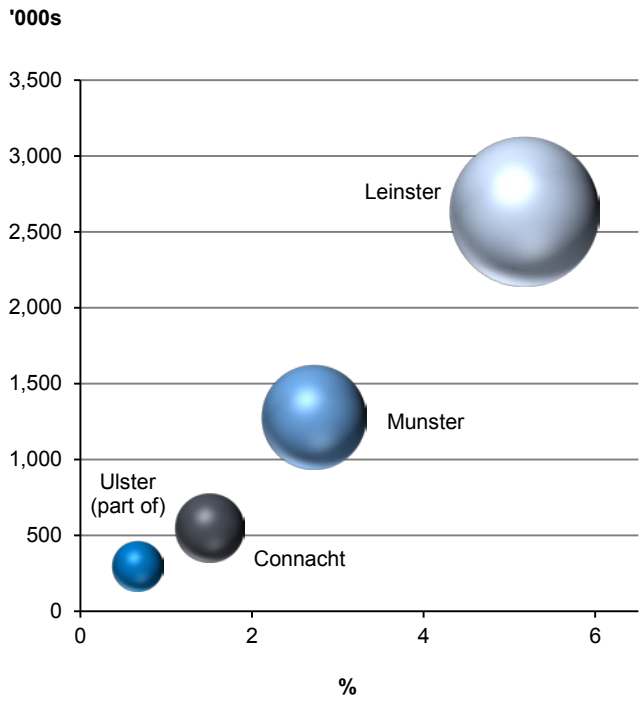
While the population of all provinces grew, only Leinster grew faster than the State overall, increasing by 5.2 per cent in the five years ending April 2016. Leinster accounted for 55.3 per cent of the population in 2016 compared with 54.6 per cent in 2011.

Ulster (part of) showed the slowest growth of the provinces at 0.7 per cent while its share of the population was 6.2 per cent.

Connacht grew by 1.5 per cent with 11.6 per cent share, while Munster grew 2.7 per cent and had 26.9 per cent share.

See web table EY004

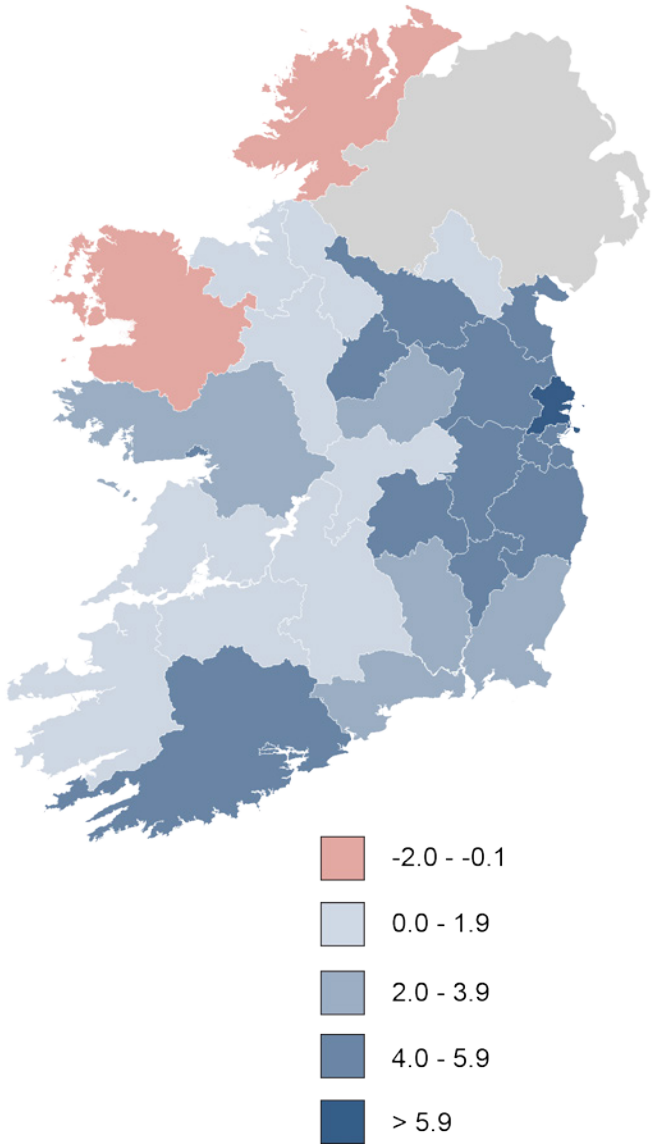
Figure 1.3 Percentage change in population by province, 2011-2016



Cities and counties

Population change by county varied widely. Fingal grew by 8 per cent over the five years, more than twice that of the state overall. Dublin city (5.1%), Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (5.7%) and South Dublin (5.1%) all grew by more than five per cent, as did the commuter belt counties of Laois (5.1%) and Meath (5.9%).

Galway city (4.2%) grew faster than the surrounding county (2.4%), as did Cork city (5.4%) compared with Cork county (4.4%).

Two counties showed falls in population, namely Donegal (-1.2%) and Mayo (-0.1%), while nine other counties grew by less than 2 per cent, as illustrated in Map 1.1.

Map 1.1 Percentage population change by county, 2011-2016