

Mid-2023 Population Estimates, Scotland

Published on 8 October 2024

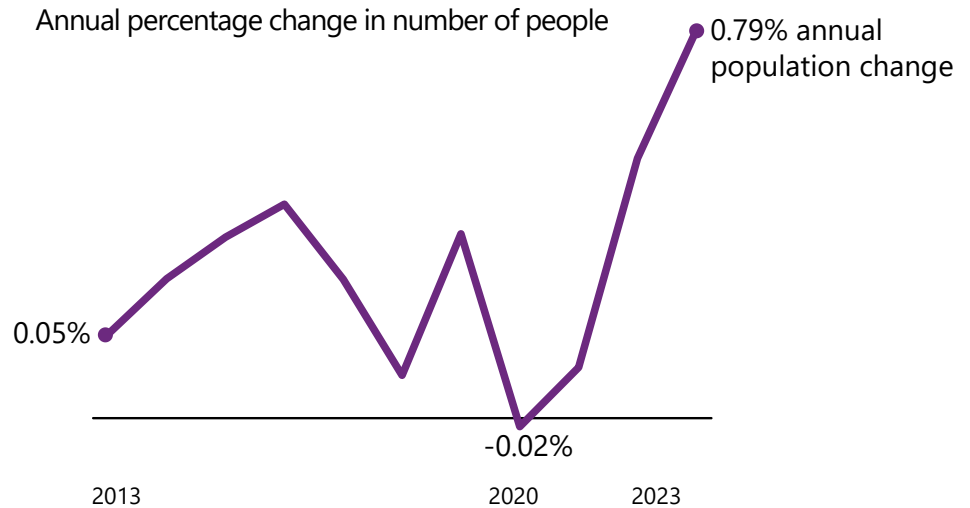


This statistical report provides population estimates for Scotland, its council areas and NHS boards, by sex and age.

Scotland's population growth peaked

The latest estimate of Scotland's population (on 30 June 2023) is 5,490,100.

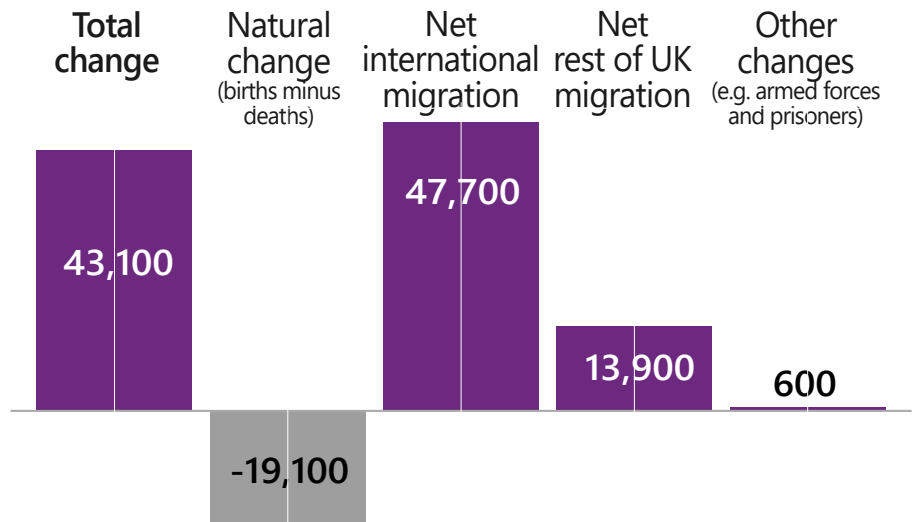
Population growth in the latest year was +0.79% (43,100 people), which is the highest annual growth in at least 76 years.



Migration was the main driver of population growth

International migration and migration from elsewhere in the UK continued to add to Scotland's population.

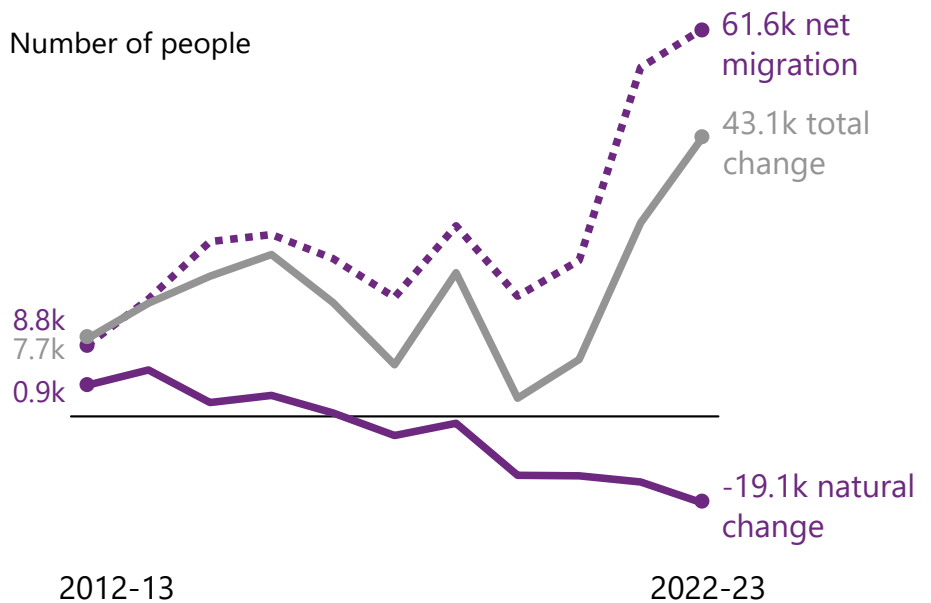
In contrast, deaths outnumbered births by the largest amount on record.



Deaths outnumbered births for ninth year

Deaths have outnumbered births in each of the last nine years, with the year ending June 2023 the largest difference on record.

More people moved to Scotland than left, as has been the case for the last two decades.

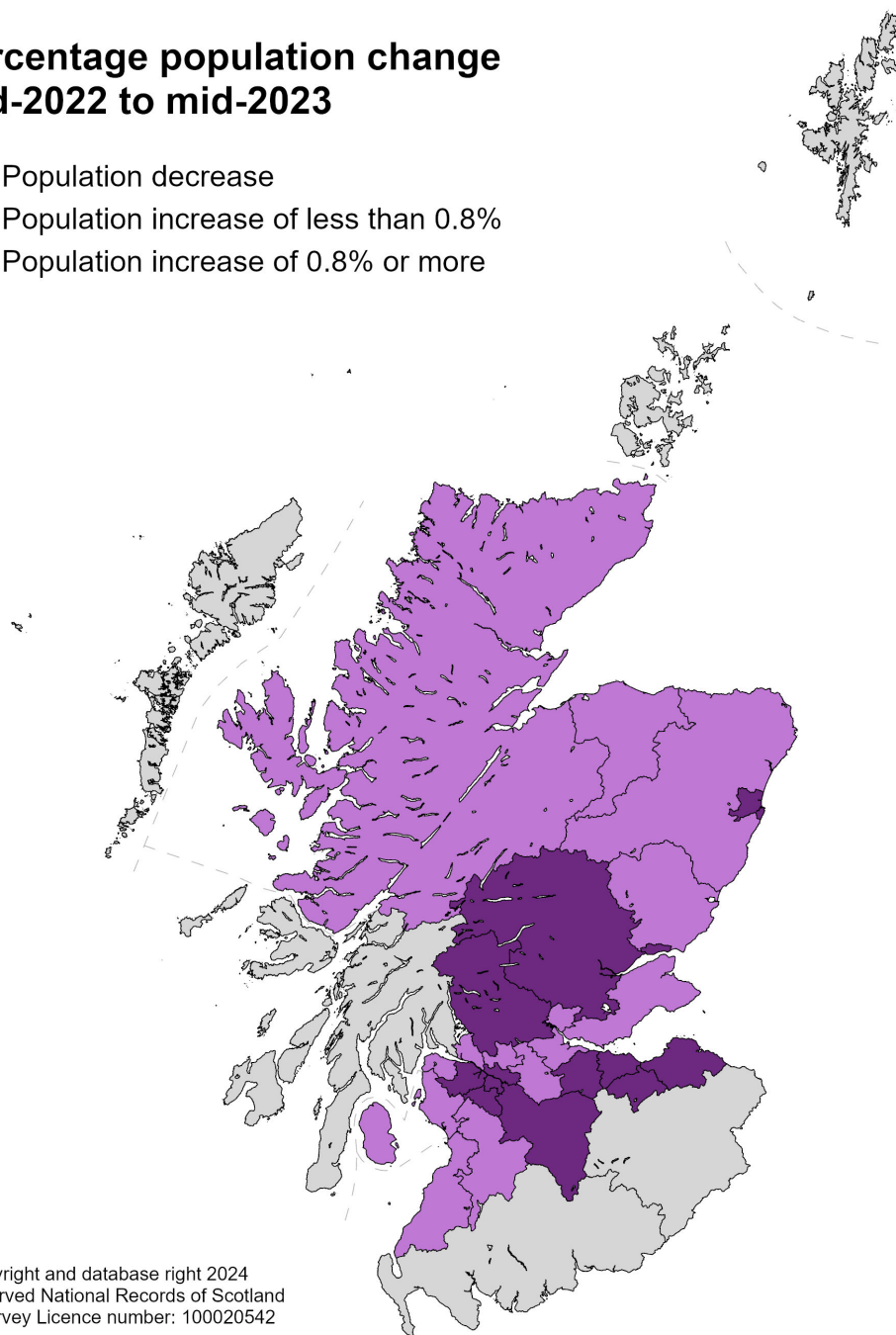


Population change varies across Scotland's council areas

Over the last year, 25 council areas increased in population and 7 decreased. The populations of the larger cities have grown the most between mid-2022 and mid-2023. In contrast, the populations of a number of rural and island council areas have fallen in the year to mid-2023.

Percentage population change mid-2022 to mid-2023

- Population decrease
- Population increase of less than 0.8%
- Population increase of 0.8% or more



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It is important to remember that within every council area, there are pockets of both growth and depopulation. NRS' small area population estimates for mid-2022 will be published in October 2024 – these can be used to help understand how the population of local areas is changing.

Main points

- Scotland's population was estimated to be 5,490,100 at mid-2023 (30 June 2023).
- The population increased by 43,100 (0.8%) in the year to mid-2023. This is the largest single-year increase in Scotland's population in at least 76 years.
- Migration was the main driver of population growth over the last year. Net international migration was +47,700 in the year to mid-2023. Net migration between elsewhere in the UK and Scotland was +13,900.
- The number of deaths registered in Scotland was greater than the number of births, and the difference is getting wider each year.
- Scotland's population is ageing. An estimated 20.3% of the population were aged 65 and over, an increase from 16.1% in 2003. An estimated 16.3% were aged 0 to 15 years, a decrease from 18.7% in 2003.
- The populations of the larger cities have grown the most between mid-2022 and mid-2023. City of Edinburgh grew by 1.7% (8,680 people), Glasgow City by 1.6% (9,920 people) and Aberdeen City by 1.6% (3,500 people). In contrast, the populations of a number of rural and island council areas have fallen in the year to mid-2023.
- In the year to mid-2023, net migration was positive in all of Scotland's 32 council areas. In contrast, natural change (births minus deaths) was negative in all council areas.
- These estimates reflect a revision to the mid-2022 population estimates (published on 8 October 2024) which saw the estimated population of Scotland decrease by 700 people or 0.01% from the figure originally published. The rebased population estimates for mid-2011 to mid-2021 will be updated to account for this in due course.

Contents

Main points	4
Scotland's population at mid-2023	6
Population across Scotland	10
The age structure of the population	11
How has the age structure of the population changed?	13
Population change across Scotland	15
Why has the population of an area changed?	18
How has the age structure of the population changed in Scottish areas?.....	20
Background notes	22
Amended 2022 mid-year population estimates and the back series	23
Future developments	23
Links to related statistics	24
Notes on statistical publications	24

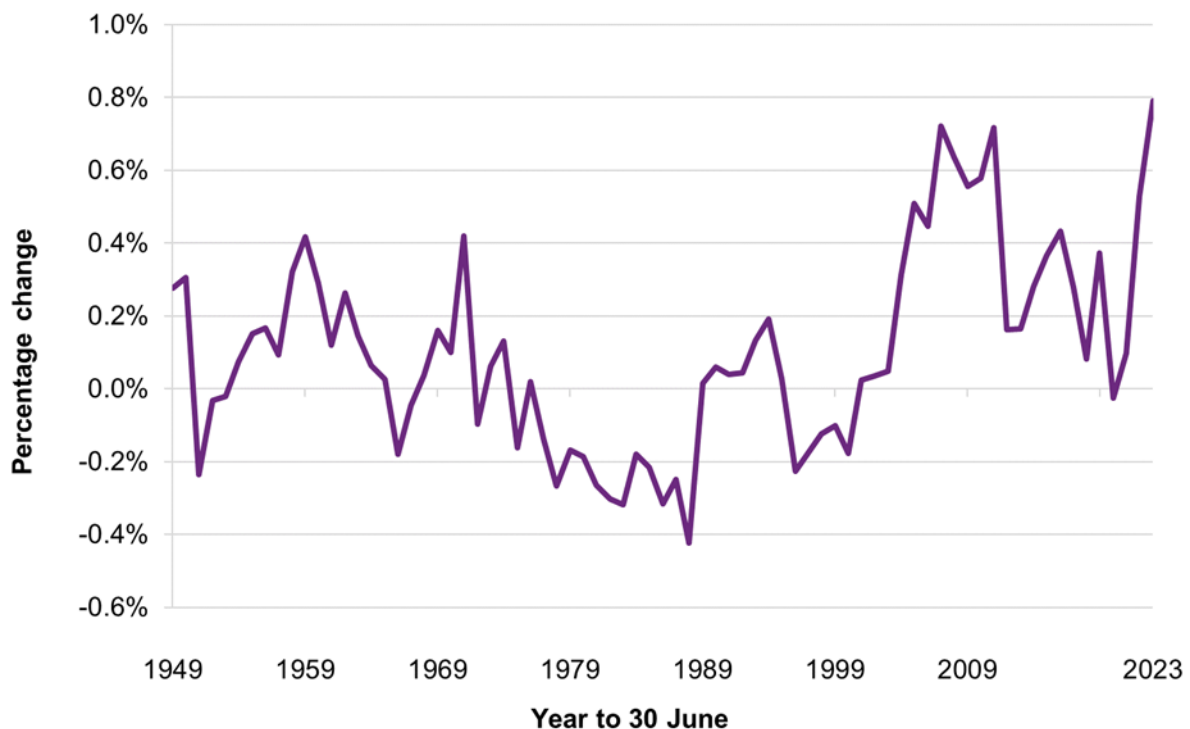
Scotland's population at mid-2023

We estimate that Scotland's population on 30 June 2023 was **5,490,100 people**. This is the highest Scotland's population has ever been.

Scotland's population has been growing since the turn of the century. Between mid-2022 and mid-2023 the population increased by 43,100 people (0.8%), the largest annual percentage increase in at least 76 years. [Figure 1](#) shows the annual population change for each year since mid-1949. Estimates for the years immediately prior to 1949 reflected the continuing return of armed forces personnel following the end of World War 2 (population estimates covering the two world wars exclude the large numbers of armed forces serving overseas).

Figure 1: The population increase between 2022 and 2023 was the largest in at least 76 years

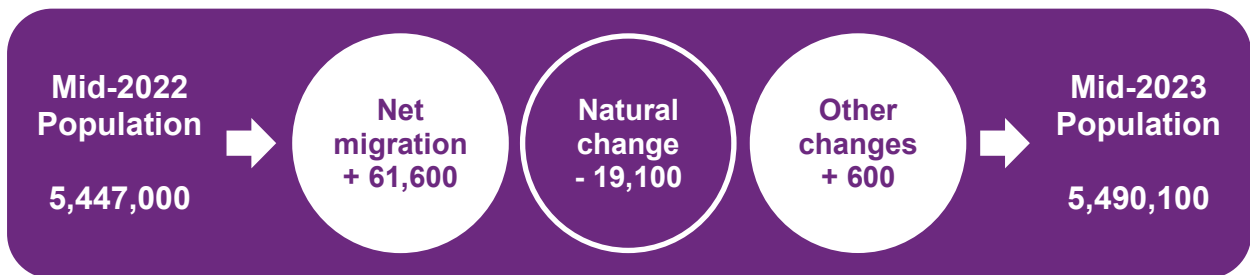
Annual population change (%), Scotland, 1949 to 2023



What has caused the growth in population?

Population change is driven by two main components, natural change and net migration:

- **Natural change** is the number of births minus the number of deaths.
- **Net migration** is the number of people moving into an area minus the number of people leaving.



In the year to mid-2023, there were:

- 46,000 births,
- and 65,100 deaths in Scotland.

This resulted in a ‘natural change’ of -19,100. There have been more deaths than births in each of the last nine years. As [Figure 2](#) shows, the gap between births and deaths has been getting wider over time, and the latest natural change was the largest yearly decrease since records began.

In the year to mid-2023:

- 131,200 people moved to Scotland; and
- 69,600 people moved out of Scotland.

This resulted in total net migration being +61,600. This is a record high and is the reason that Scotland’s population has grown since mid-2022. [Figure 2](#) shows that migration has been adding to Scotland’s population for the last 23 years, as more people have moved to Scotland than have left.

Links to data

What are you looking for?

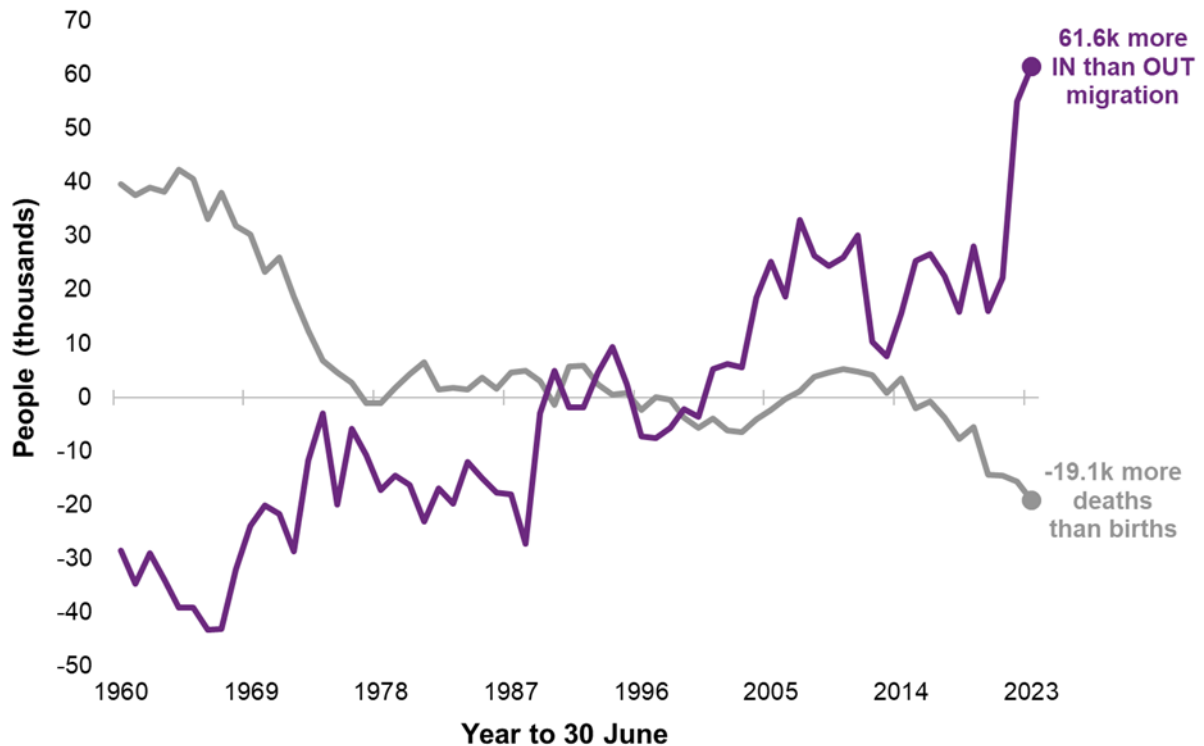
The data used in this publication
 Information on how the population is calculated
 Demographic profiles of council areas
 Select and compare the population of council areas
 Open data

Where is it?

[Data and charts](#)
[Methodology guide](#)
[NRS Council area profiles](#)
[Interactive charts](#)
[Open data](#)

Figure 2: More people moved into Scotland than left, while deaths exceeded births

Natural change and net migration, Scotland, 1960 to 2023



There are two types of migration flows which add to Scotland's population:

- **International** – moves between Scotland and countries outside of the UK
- **Rest of the UK** – moves between Scotland and other countries in the UK

International moves in and out

In the year to mid-2023:

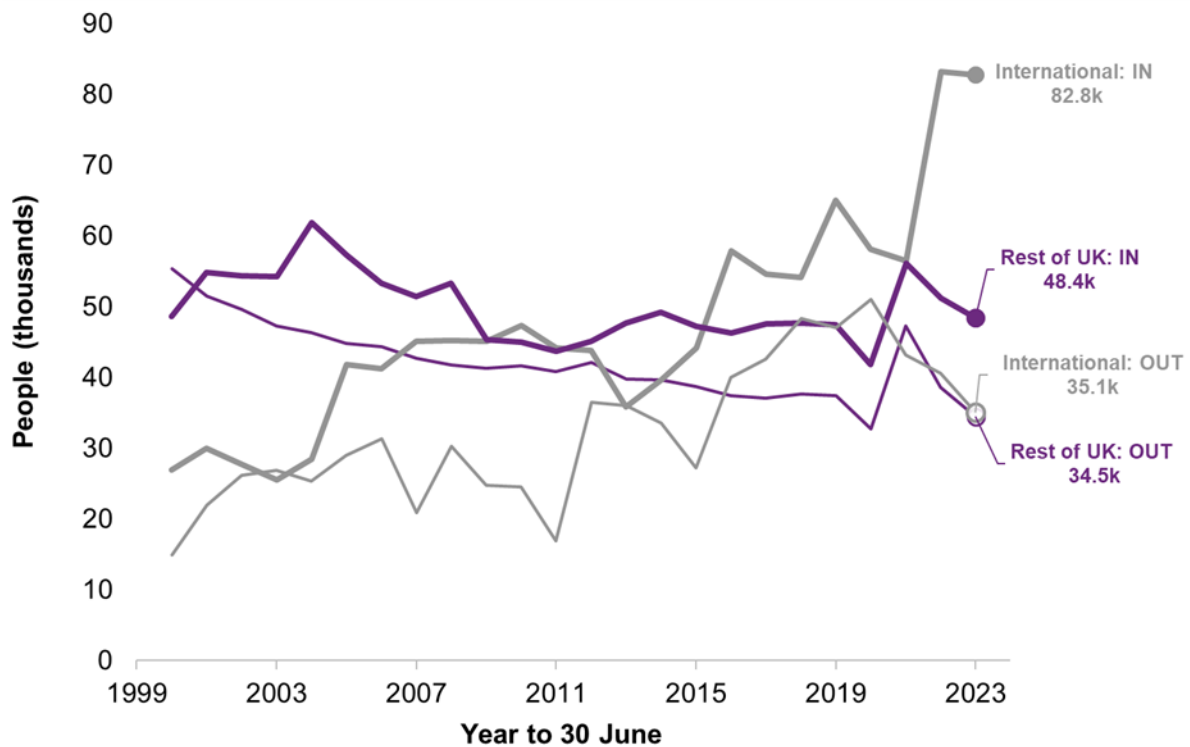
- international immigration into Scotland was 82,800; and
- international emigration from Scotland was 35,100.

This resulted in net international migration being +47,700. [Figure 3](#) shows that the number of people moving to Scotland from outside the UK increased by around 47% in the year to mid-2022, and has remained at roughly the same level in the year to mid-2023. In each of the last three years, the number moving out of Scotland to destinations outside the UK has fallen.

Note that, due to rounding, migration figures may not add up exactly.

Figure 3: International migration into Scotland remains high

Rest of UK and international in, out and net migration, Scotland, year ending mid-2000 to mid-2023



Moves between Scotland and the rest of the UK

In the year to mid-2023, more people moved to Scotland from the rest of the UK than moved to the rest of the UK from Scotland:

- 48,400 people moved from the rest of the UK to Scotland.
- 34,500 people moved from Scotland to the rest of the UK.

This resulted in net migration from the rest of the UK being +13,900.

There have also been 119,600 moves between council areas in Scotland over this period. However, this does not affect Scotland's total population.

Other changes

Other changes over the year to mid-2023 resulted in a small increase of 600 people across Scotland.

'Other changes' include:

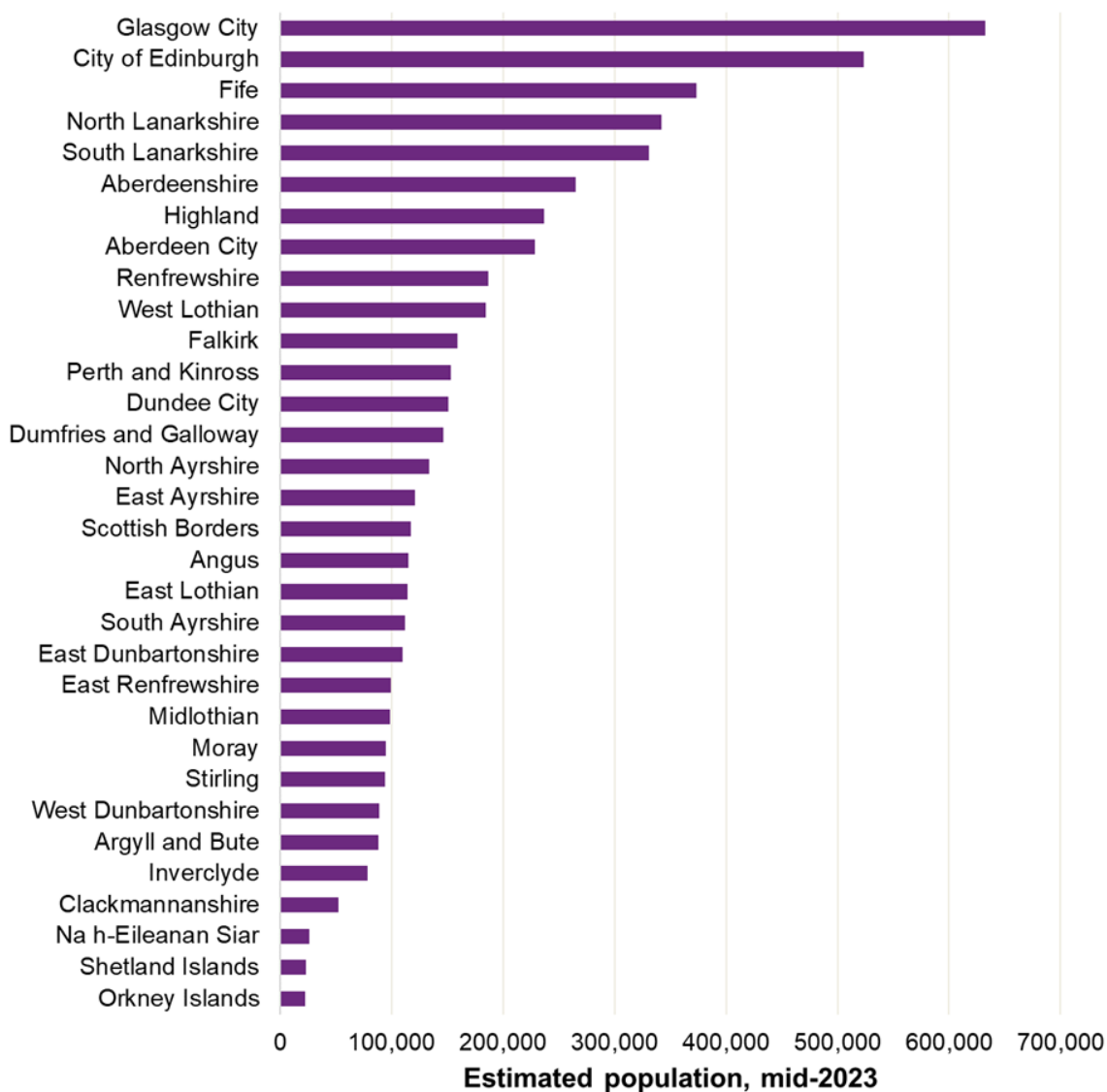
- Changes in the prison population;
- Changes in the number of armed forces personnel based in Scotland; and
- The effects of rounding.

Population across Scotland

Figure 4 shows the total estimated population at mid-year (30 June 2023) in each council area in Scotland.

Figure 4: The population of council areas in Scotland ranged from 631,970 in Glasgow City to 22,000 in Orkney Islands.

Population by council area, mid-2023



Glasgow City had the highest population (631,970), followed by City of Edinburgh (523,250). Council areas which are mainly rural tend to have lower estimated populations than mainly urban ones. However, Aberdeenshire had the sixth highest estimated population (264,320) and Highland had the seventh highest (236,330).

The three island council areas had the lowest estimated populations in Scotland: Na h-Eileanan Siar (26,030), Shetland Islands (23,000), and Orkney Islands (22,000).

The age structure of the population

Figure 5 shows the number of females and males for each year of age, from 0 to 90 and over. The effect of a lower birth rate in recent decades can be seen at younger age groups, with the effect of the high birth rate following the Second World War showing around ages 72 to 76. At older ages, the number of females is much higher than the number of males due to higher female life expectancy.

Figure 5: There are more females than males in older age groups

Population by single year of age and sex, mid-2023

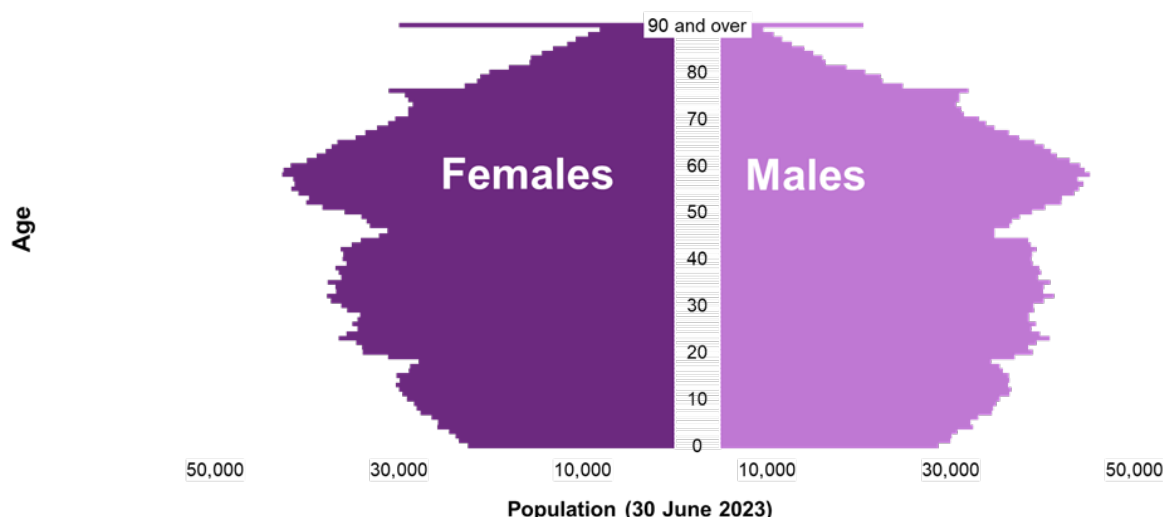


Figure 6 shows the percentage of the population in three age groups in each of Scotland's council areas.

In mid-2023, the four largest cities in Scotland (Glasgow City, City of Edinburgh, Aberdeen City and Dundee City) had the highest percentages of population aged 16 to 64 years, as well as some of the lowest percentages of people aged 65 and over.

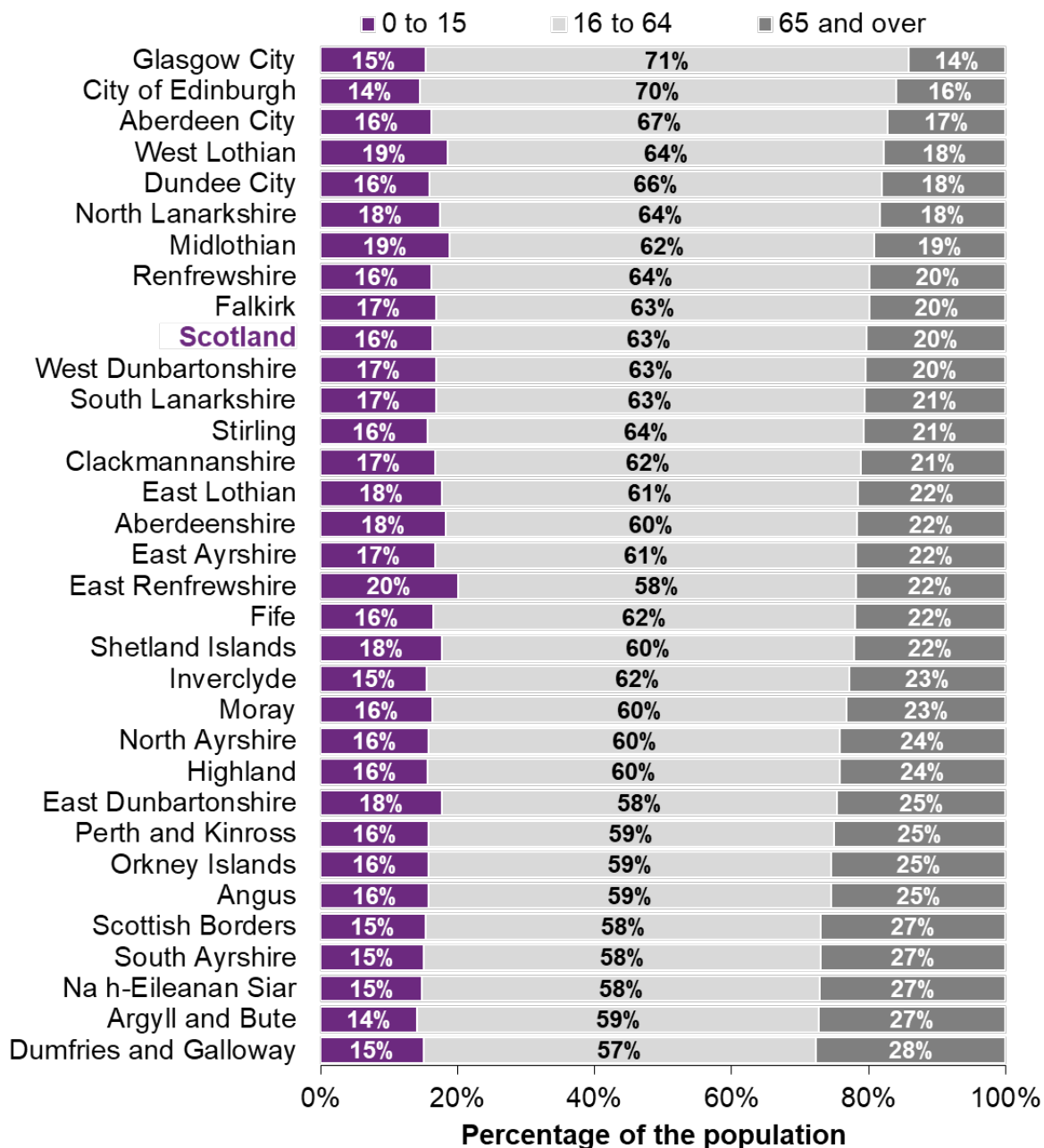
The areas with the lowest percentages of children aged 0 to 15 years included Argyll and Bute (14%), City of Edinburgh (14%), Na h-Eileanan Siar (15%) and Dumfries and Galloway (15%). The highest figures were all in areas which border cities - East

Renfrewshire (20%), Midlothian (19%), West Lothian (19%) and Aberdeenshire (18%).

Rural and island areas tended to have an older age profile. They had some of the highest percentages of people aged 65 and over.

Figure 6: Rural areas tend to have the highest percentages of people aged 65 and over

Age structure of council areas, mid-2023



Figures are rounded so may not add up to 100%. Ordered by percentage aged 65+.

How has the age structure of the population changed?

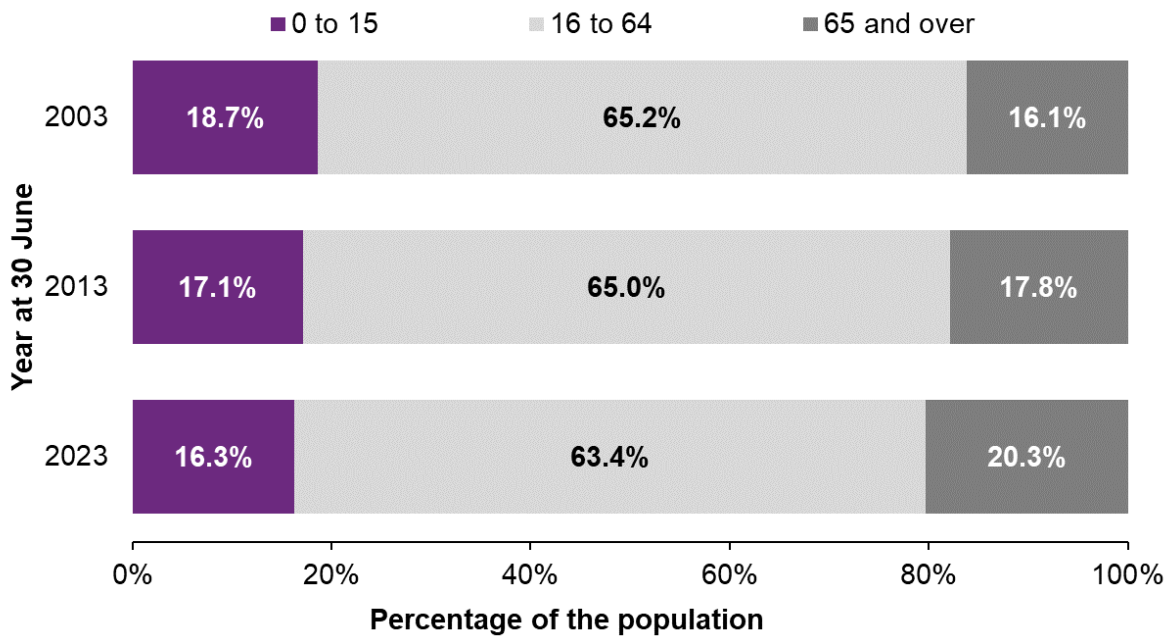
Scotland's population has been increasing but the growth has differed by age group. In the last two decades, the number of people aged:

- 0 to 15 years has decreased by 51,400 (-5%)
- 16 to 64 years has increased by 175,200 (+5%)
- 65 years and over has increased by 297,800 (+36%).

[Figure 7](#) shows how Scotland's population has aged in comparison with previous decades.

Figure 7: The percentage of 0-15 year olds has fallen, whilst the percentage of people aged 65 and over has increased

Age groups as percentage of Scotland's population, mid-2003 to mid-2023



Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

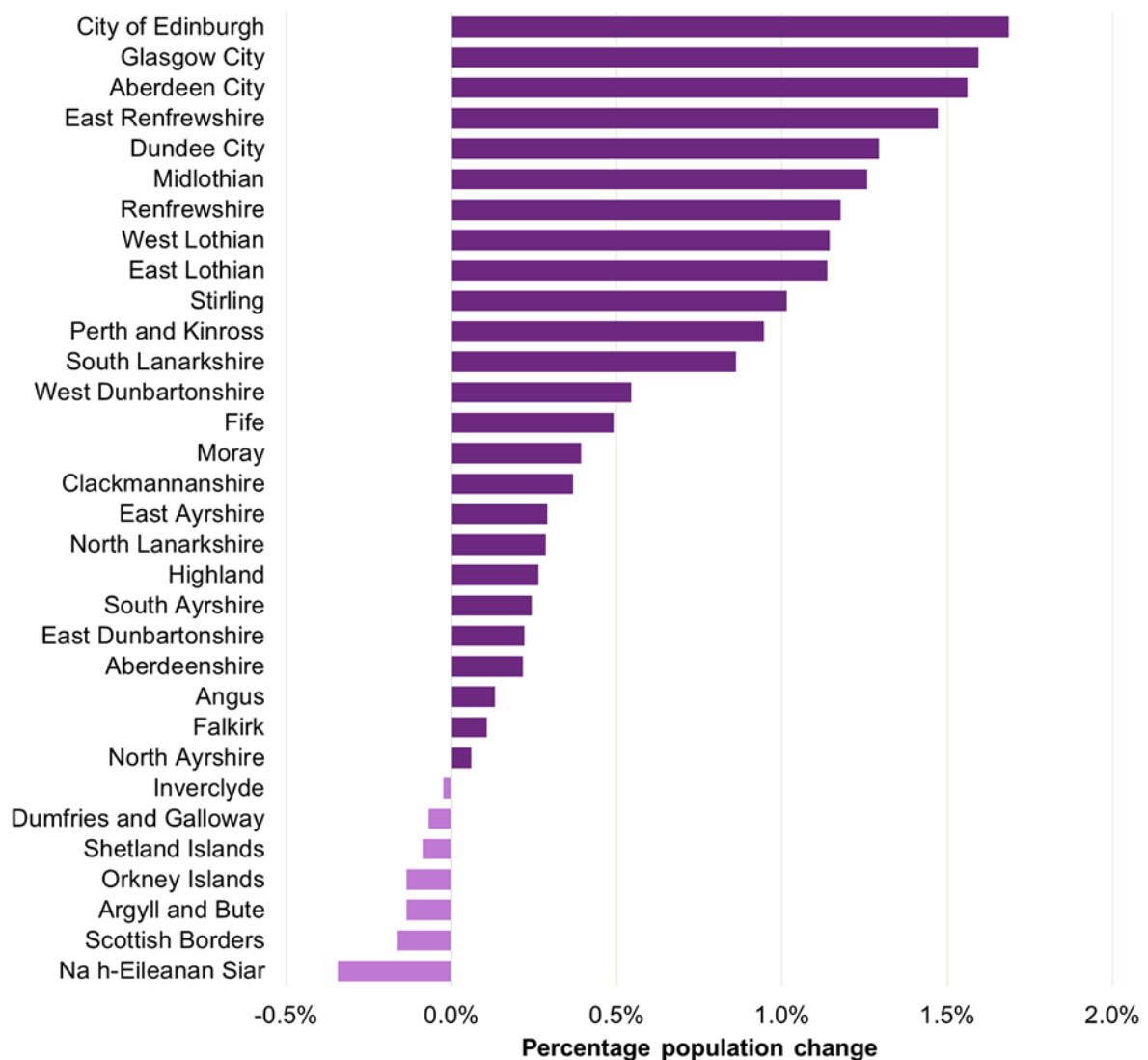
Population change across Scotland

Population change varies across Scotland. In the year to mid-2023, the population grew in 25 council areas and decreased in the other seven areas.

Figure 8 and Figure 9 show how population change varies across the country. The populations of the larger cities have grown the most between mid-2022 and mid-2023. City of Edinburgh grew by 1.7% (8,680 people), Glasgow City by 1.6% (9,920 people) and Aberdeen City by 1.6% (3,500 people). In contrast, the populations of a number of rural and island council areas have fallen in the year to mid-2023. The population of Na h-Eileanan Siar has fallen by 0.3% (-90 people), Scottish Borders by 0.2% (-190 people) and Argyll and Bute by 0.1% (-120 people).

Figure 8: The population has increased in 25 council areas but has fallen in the other 7

Population change by council area, mid-2022 to mid-2023

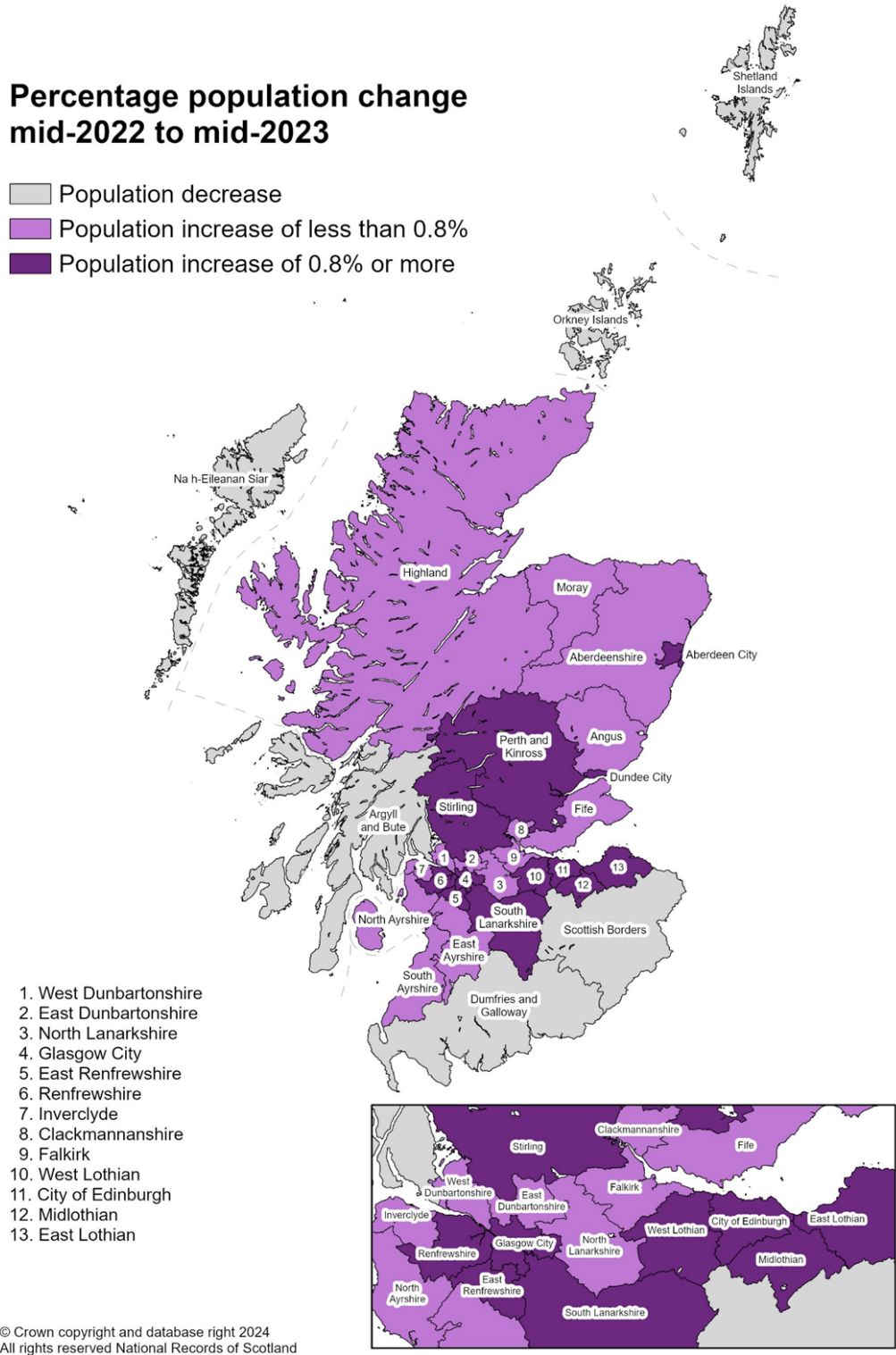


This publication is accompanied by [interactive charts](#) and [time series data](#), which allow users to view data for a particular area, and see how it has changed over time.

Figure 9: The largest population increases were mainly in the cities and some of the surrounding areas
 Population change by council area (%), mid-2022 to mid-2023

Percentage population change mid-2022 to mid-2023

- Population decrease
- Population increase of less than 0.8%
- Population increase of 0.8% or more



1. West Dunbartonshire
2. East Dunbartonshire
3. North Lanarkshire
4. Glasgow City
5. East Renfrewshire
6. Renfrewshire
7. Inverclyde
8. Clackmannanshire
9. Falkirk
10. West Lothian
11. City of Edinburgh
12. Midlothian
13. East Lothian

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Why has the population of an area changed?

Figure 10 shows the components driving population change in council areas between mid-2022 and mid-2023. The main components of population change are natural change and net migration.

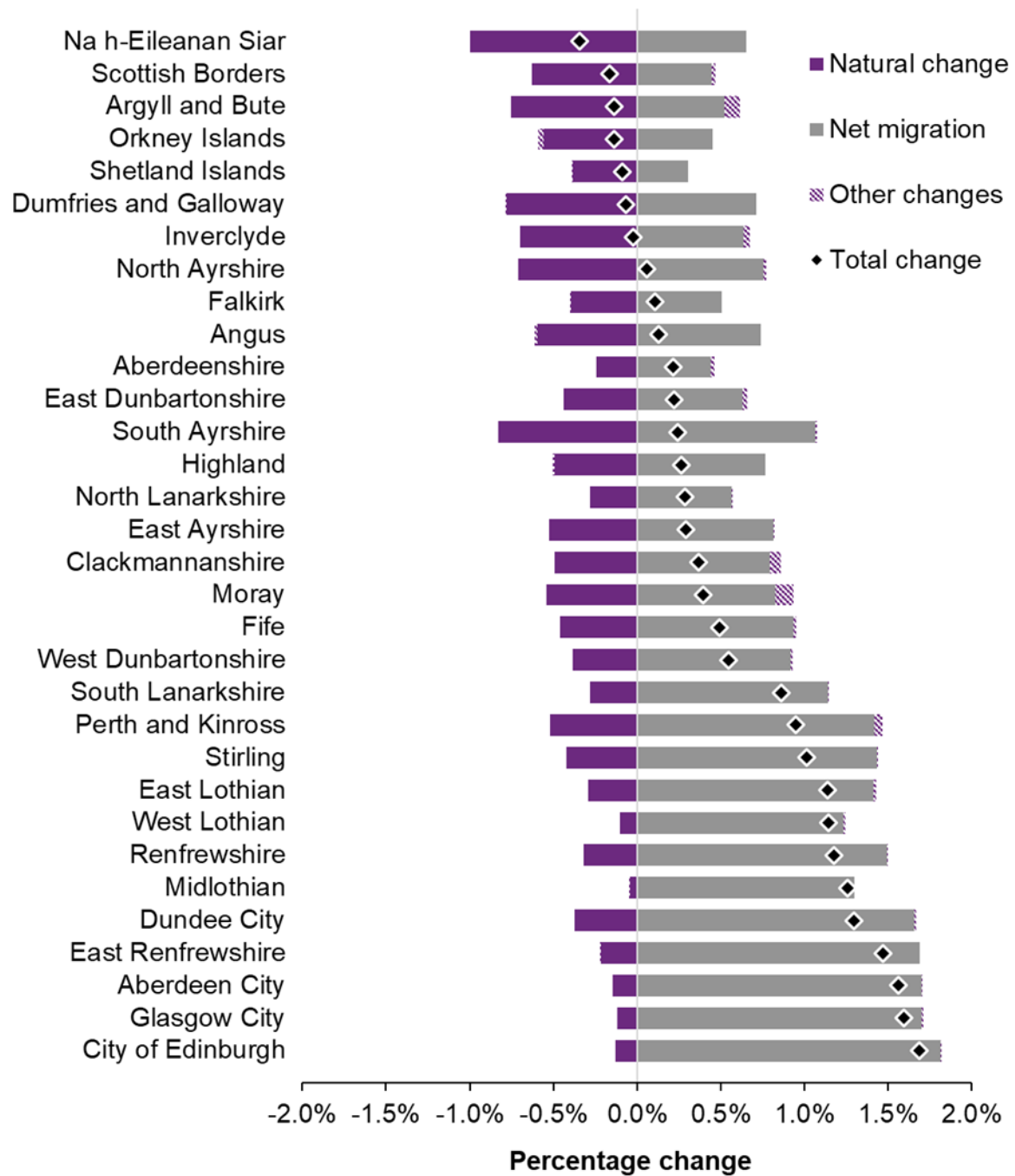
Other smaller changes come from the prison population and number of armed forces personnel based in Scotland, and small rounding adjustments.

In the year to mid-2023, **net migration was positive in all of Scotland's 32 council areas**. In contrast, natural change (births minus deaths) was negative in all council areas.

More information about the population and components of population change for the year to mid-2023 are available from the [data](#) tables on the NRS website.

Figure 10: In every council area, more people have moved in than have moved out and there have been more deaths than births

Components of population change by council area, mid-2022 to mid-2023



Ordered by descending percentage population change.

How has the age structure of the population changed in Scottish areas?

Figure 11 shows how the population has changed in broad age groups over the last decade to mid-2023.

- Over the last decade, most areas have seen a decrease in the population of children aged 0 to 15. Areas with the greatest decrease in population aged 0 to 15 were mainly rural and island areas. Many of the areas which had the greatest decreases in the population aged under 16, also had the greatest decline in the population aged 16 to 64 (Na h-Eileanan Siar, North Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Inverclyde). In contrast, Midlothian (16%), East Renfrewshire (11%) and Aberdeen City (9%) saw the largest increases in population aged 0 to 15.
- All 32 Scottish council areas have seen an increase in their population aged 65 and over in the last decade. The greatest increases in the population aged 65 and over were in Aberdeenshire (29%), East Lothian (28%) and West Lothian (24%).

Figure 1: The number of people aged 65 years and over has increased in every council area since 2013
 Percentage change in age group by council area, mid-2013 to mid-2023



Background notes

How are population estimates calculated?

Population estimates are based on the census and are updated each year to account for population change from 1 July to 30 June. They are based on the usually resident population which covers people living in Scotland for a period of at least 12 months, whatever their nationality. The three elements of population change are:

- Natural change: births minus deaths
- Net migration: the difference between long-term moves into and out of Scotland
- Other changes: changes in the armed forces, prison population and any rounding adjustments

International migration

The estimates of international migration into and out of Scotland which inform these population estimates are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). They are based on the provisional [long-term international migration](#) estimates for the year ending June 2023, published by ONS in November 2023, which are classed as being official statistics in development. They are based on administrative and survey data using a range of data sources, and are part of an ongoing programme of work to transform population and migration statistics.

How are population estimates used?

Population estimates are used for a variety of purposes including:

- Resource allocation
- Planning of services such as education and health
- Informing local and national policy
- Modelling the economy
- As a base for demographic projections
- Incorporating into a range of other official statistics

Strengths and limitations

It is important to have high quality statistics on the latest population (mid-year population estimates). NRS produces detailed annual estimates on the resident population of Scotland using a range of data gathered from statistical censuses and surveys, as well as administrative data. There are processes in place to check the suitability of these sources.

Quality assurance takes place throughout the production of population estimates, with checks in place to ensure consistency and completeness. More information on the [quality assurance arrangements](#) for administrative data used in population

estimates is available on the NRS website, along with information on the suitability of each data source used in the production of the population estimates.

It is important to consider the **limitations** when using population estimates. The population estimates use the census as the base population. Population change is applied to the base population each year to create the annual population estimates.

Migration is the most difficult part of the population estimates to estimate precisely, as migratory moves are not registered in the UK, either at the national or local level. The best proxy data available on a consistent basis, such as patient registers, other administrative data and surveys, are used to estimate migration. NRS are part of a cross-government transformation programme, being led by the Office for National Statistics, to [improve population and migration statistics](#) through greater use of administrative data sources.

Amended 2022 mid-year population estimates and the back series

This release also includes updated population estimates for mid-2022, revised to reflect amended data on long-term international migration for Scotland. As a result, Scotland's total population for mid-2022 has been adjusted downward by 700 people, from 5,447,700 to 5,447,000. The revision provides a more accurate account of inward migration of individuals aged 16 and under.

The next step will be to revisit the [rebasement exercise](#), taking account of the subtle changes in the estimate of international migration, to produce finalised population estimates for 2011 to 2021.

Future developments

The methodology used in the mid-year estimates changes as different methods and data sources become available to NRS. Any improvements to the data sources and methodology of these statistics are discussed and assessed with the [Population and Migration Statistics Committee \(Scotland\)](#).

Transformation of population and migration statistics

NRS are working with the Office for National Statistics, and other Government Statistical Service partners, as part of the [transformation programme](#) to improve population and migration statistics.

NRS administrative data based population and household estimates project

One goal of the census programme is to make recommendations for future censuses. This is supported by NRS' Future of Population Statistics project. An aim of the project is to investigate administrative data collected by public bodies and services, which could be used to augment, complement or replace NRS' data

collected by a traditional census. The most recent sets of [administrative data based population estimates for 2016 to 2018](#) were published by NRS in August 2023. These are not Official Statistics – they have been created to allow a discussion with users about the use of administrative data within the field of demographic statistics.

Links to related statistics

The first results from Scotland's Census 2022 were published on 14 September 2023. The [Scotland's Census](#) website contains census results, information, and planned dates for future publications.

[Population projections](#) for Scotland and sub-national areas are available from the NRS website.

[Population estimates for the UK](#) and its constituent countries are available from the Office for National Statistics website.

Population estimates for [small areas and other areas](#) within Scotland for mid-2022 will be released later in 2024.

The [Vital Events Reference Tables](#) including calendar year births and deaths are available on the NRS website.

Population estimates of [centenarians and people aged 90 and over](#) at Scotland and sub-national levels for mid-2022 will be published later in 2024.

Notes on statistical publications

Accredited Official Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as Accredited Official Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the [UKSA](#) website).

Accredited Official Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded Accredited Official Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of Accredited Official Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. Accredited Official Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc. can be found in the [metadata](#) that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland's Census](#) website.

We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

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