

Census data shows that New Zealand’s population grew at a slower rate

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The initial results of the Census undertaken on 7 March 2023 were released on 29 May 2024. These results tell us how population has changed since the previous Census undertaken on 6 March 2018. This CBRE brief investigates what the data tells us about New Zealand’s population changes in the five-year period.

New Zealand’s estimated population is slightly over 5.34 million. At a national level, the population growth between the last two census (2018 and 2023) was 6.3% (by around 294,000 people). However, this growth rate was lower than during the previous period between the 2013 and 2018 census (a 10.8% increase, an addition of circa 458,000 people), exposing a slowdown in New Zealand’s population growth in the five-year period between 2018 and 2023. Nevertheless, since the census was conducted New Zealand has been exposed to historically high net migration levels (an intake of around 111,000 net migrants in the year ended March 2024).

New Zealand population growth rate between 2018 and 2023

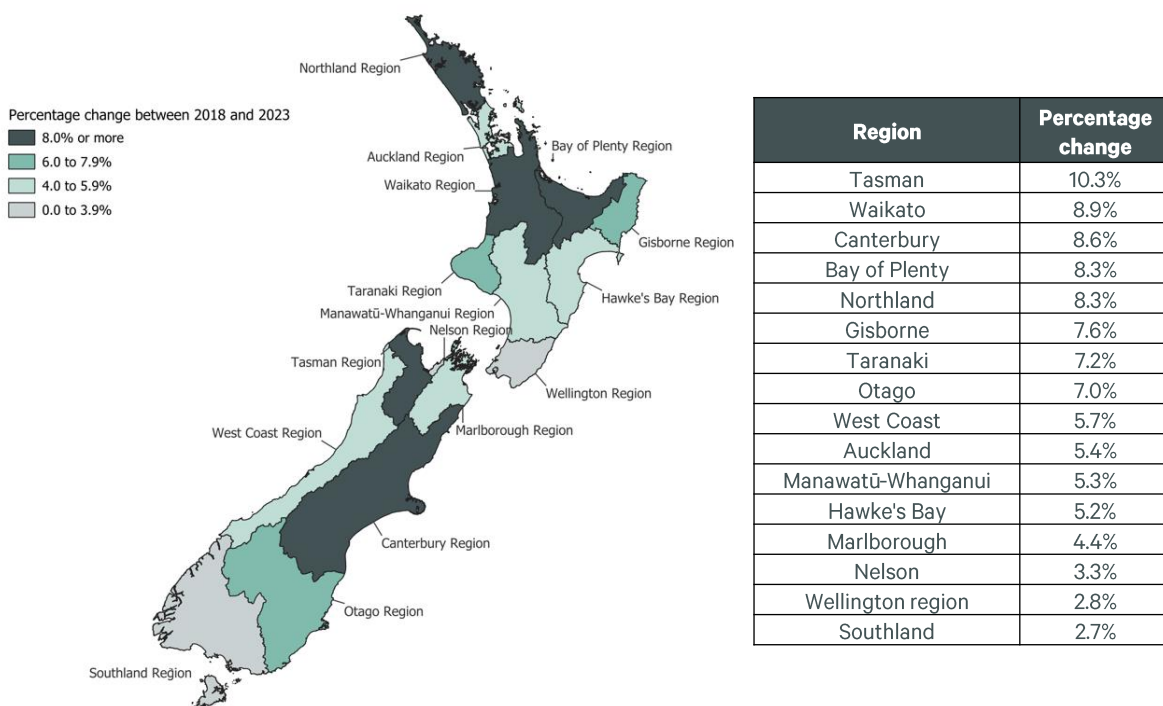
+6.3%

Change in number of people in New Zealand in the last five years

+294,201

Even though circa 73% of New Zealand’s population live in the North Island, the population in the South Island grew at a higher rate than in the North Island between 2018 and 2023 (7.3% vs 5.9%). At a regional level, the regions with the highest population growth rates were the Tasman region (up by 10.3%), the Waikato (up by 8.9%) and Canterbury (up by 8.6%). The regions with the lowest population growth rates were Southland (up by only 2.7%), followed by the Wellington region (up by 2.8%) and Nelson (up by 3.3%).

FIGURE 1: Percentage change in the census usually resident population count between 2018 and 2023 by regional council



Source: Statistics NZ, CBRE

At a district/city level, Selwyn in Canterbury had the highest population growth rate between 2018 and 2023 (up by 29%, with circa 18,000 more people). It was followed by Queenstown-Lakes district (22.1%), Waikato district (13.7%), Tauranga City (11.5%) and Waimakariri district (also in Canterbury) (up by 11.3%). The additional population in these five districts represents one fifth of the total increase in New Zealand’s population in the last five years (circa 60,000 out of almost 294,000 people).

In relation to the population growth in New Zealand’s three main cities, both Christchurch (6.1%) and Auckland (5.4%) grew at lower rates than the national growth (6.3%). Also, the population in both cities grew at a slower rate between 2018-2023 than during the previous five years (8.1% and 11.0%, respectively). Wellington City’s population remained unchanged in the last five years, contrasting greatly with the growth that it recorded between 2013-2018 (6.2%). Based on the 2023 census, Auckland’s population sits at 1.66 million, whilst Christchurch’s population is close to 391,000 and Wellington City’s reaching almost 203,000.

Christchurch’s population growth rate between 2018 and 2023

+6.1%

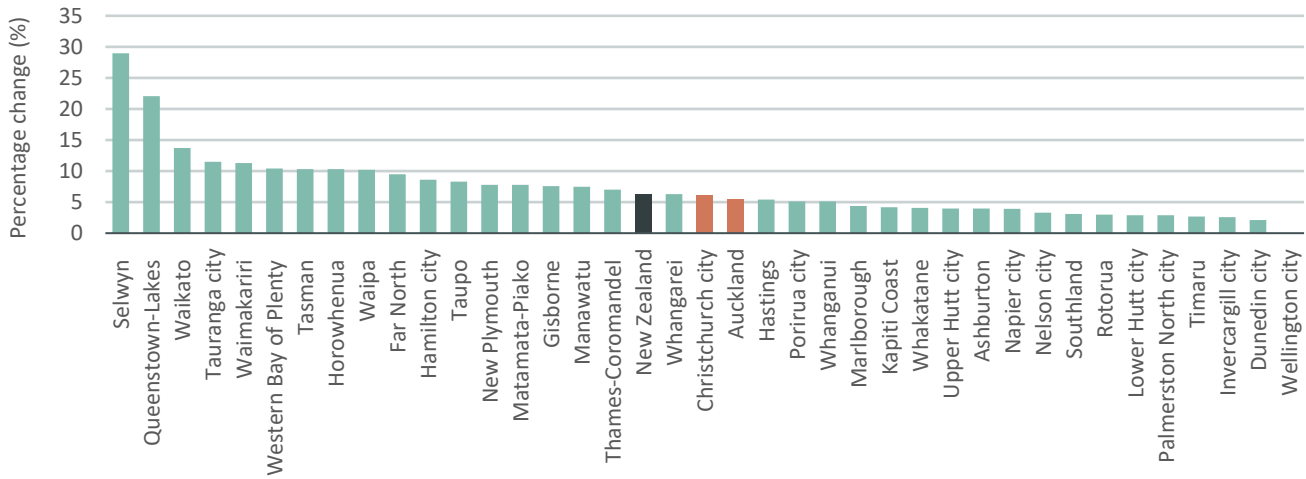
Auckland’s population growth rate between 2018 and 2023

+5.4%

Wellington City’s population growth rate between 2018 and 2023

-0.02%

FIGURE 2: Percentage change in the census usually resident population count between 2018 and 2023 by district with more than 30,000 people



Source: Statistics NZ, CBRE

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