

Internal Migration

Is the population moving north or south?

Introduction

For many years, it has commonly been stated that more people were moving northwards, especially to northern regions such as Auckland, rather than moving southwards to regions in southern parts of the North Island and the South Island. Indeed, this was a feature of internal migration statistics recorded at the 1991 and 1996 Censuses, but by 2001 the northward trend had reduced significantly. At the recent 2006 Census, the internal migration trend had reversed to a significant net southward trend of population moves from the north of the North Island (Northland/Auckland region).

Net population gain or loss through internal migration

Net population gains and losses through internal migration over a five-yearly inter-censal period are results of population flows into and out of regions. By comparing the usual resident populations of regions at each census against residents' addresses five years ago at the previous census, it is possible to derive the size of the population gain/loss through internal migration from and to other regions.

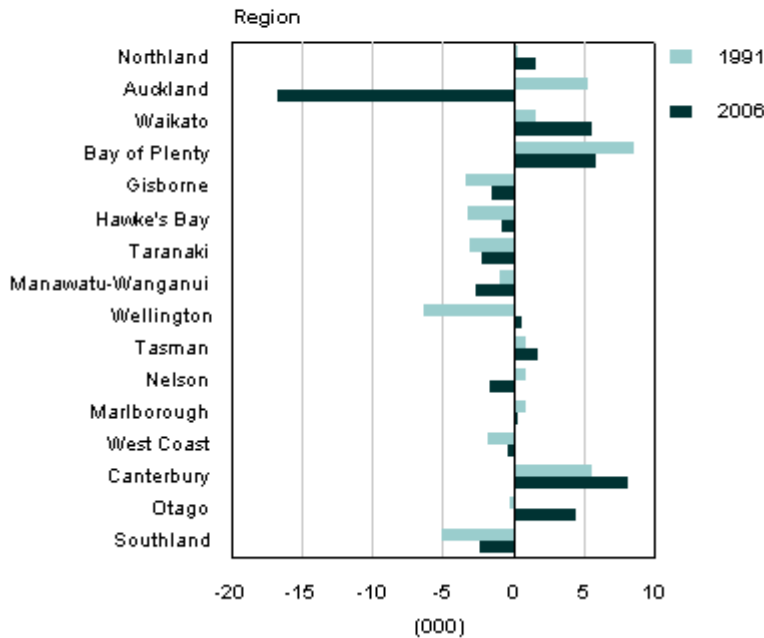
Regional councils

Six regions (Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Manawatu-Wanganui, West Coast and Southland) experienced a net internal migration loss at both the 1991 and 2006 Censuses, with moves out of the regions exceeding moves to the regions. The largest population increases from internal migration between 1986 and 1991 were in the Bay of Plenty and Canterbury regions (8,500 and 5,500, respectively). Between 2001 and 2006, however, Canterbury region gained the largest population increase from internal migration (8,100) followed by Bay of Plenty (5,900) and Waikato region (5,600). From the 1986–1991 to the 2001–2006 period, the most marked shift in internal moves occurred in Auckland region. The region had gained 5,300 from internal migration in 1991, but in 2006 had lost 16,700.

Figure 1

**Net Population Gain or Loss from
Internal Migration in Previous Five Years**

Regional council areas
1991 and 2006 Censuses



As the figure 1 shows, in 2006, the large net loss of internal migrants in Auckland was offset by large internal migration gains in regions just south of Auckland (Waikato and Bay of Plenty) and in the more highly populated South Island regions (Canterbury and Otago). Also, this significant net outflow from Auckland was offset by a large gain in permanent and long-term migration from overseas to this region (about 66,000 between 2001 and 2006). By contrast, in 1991, the population gains from internal migration mainly occurred in the northern regions of the North Island (that is, Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Waikato). The large net gain to Auckland was offset by modest gains in permanent and long-term migration from overseas (about 4,000 between 1986 and 1991).

The increased number of moves out of the north of the North Island compared with moves to this area from other parts of the country between 2001 and 2006 has been compensated by a significant increase in net permanent and long-term migration gain to Auckland region. This includes people who arrive in New Zealand intending to stay 12 months or more, and New Zealand residents returning after an absence of 12 months or more.

Table 1

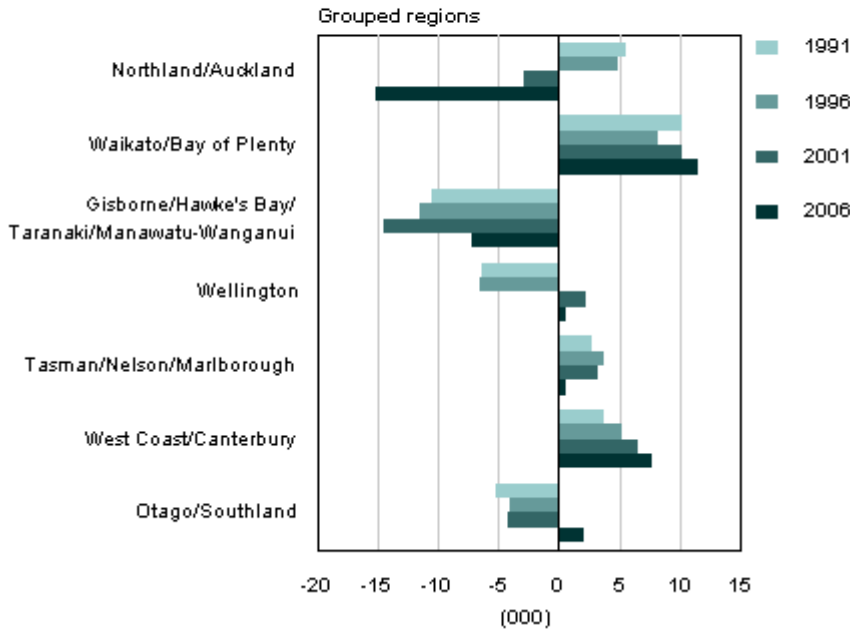
Permanent and Long-term Migration by Region Five years, at February					
Region		1986–1991	1991–1996	1996–2001	2001–2006
Northland/Auckland	Arrivals	11,451	138,223	143,966	183,803
	Departures	7,021	89,039	130,737	118,016
	Net migration	4,430	49,184	13,229	65,787
Waikato/Bay of Plenty	Arrivals	3,456	29,540	30,162	40,254
	Departures	2,076	28,383	42,526	40,479
	Net migration	1,380	1,157	-12,364	-225
Gisborne/Hawke's Bay/ Taranaki/ Manawatu-Wanganui	Arrivals	2,911	25,461	23,367	29,733
	Departures	1,833	25,061	34,524	30,572
	Net migration	1,078	400	-11,157	-839
Wellington	Arrivals	3,400	30,933	30,946	37,852
	Departures	2,949	33,340	43,486	34,824
	Net migration	451	-2,407	-12,540	3,028
Tasman/Nelson/ Marlborough	Arrivals	949	7,475	5,637	8,156
	Departures	360	5,193	8,074	7,351
	Net migration	589	2,282	-2,437	805
West Coast/ Canterbury	Arrivals	3,574	33,806	33,629	48,675
	Departures	2,021	25,998	39,776	36,475
	Net migration	1,553	7,808	-6,147	12,200
Otago/Southland	Arrivals	1,584	14,082	14,005	19,106
	Departures	990	13,487	19,730	16,188
	Net migration	594	595	-5,725	2,198

Grouped regions

In the following analysis, regional council areas have been grouped on a north to south basis to allow investigation of internal population movements across the country at a broad level. During the four periods 1986–1991, 1991–1996, 1996–2001 and 2001–2006, the combined Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions have consistently gained population increases of around 10,000 from internal migration in each five-year period. Other areas of the country experienced large changes in the magnitude and direction of flows. For example, regions in the middle of the North Island (Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki and Manawatu-Wanganui) reduced their combined net loss from internal migration, from 14,400 in 2001 to 7,200 in 2006, a marked change after increasing net losses between 1986 and 2001.

Figure 2

**Net Population Gain or Loss
from Internal Migration in Previous Five Years**
For groupings of regional council areas
1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



Both Waikato/Bay of Plenty and West Coast/Canterbury regions had increased gains in net internal migration gains at the 2006 Census. However, West Coast/Canterbury also had significant net permanent and long-term migration gains between 2001 and 2006 (12,200), whereas Waikato/Bay of Plenty had a marginal loss (200).

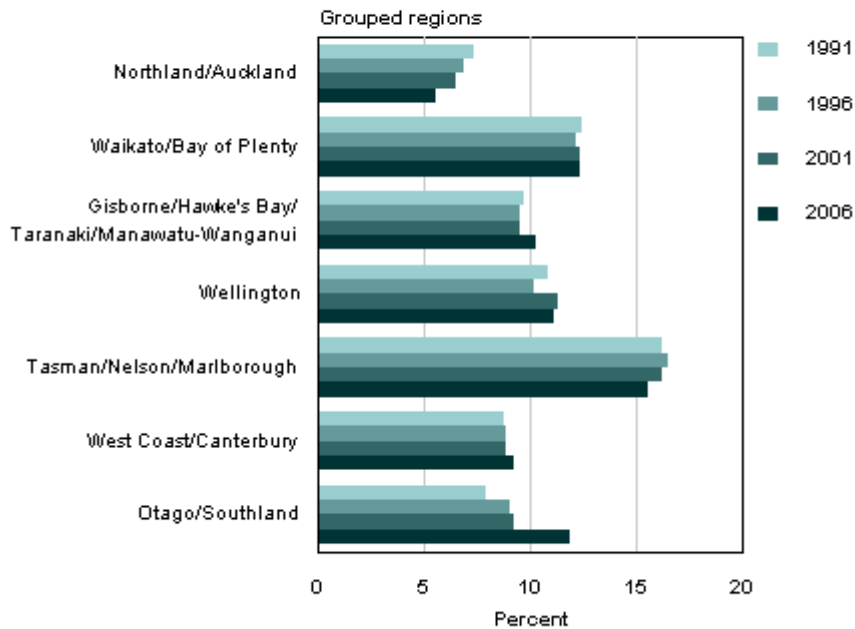
The number of people moving to regions during the five-yearly periods between censuses might seem large, but relative to the population of the regions these may be insignificant. The combined regions of the northern part of the South Island had only a marginal gain in 2006 from internal migration, but movers to this region accounted for 16 percent of the population of the region. This was the largest percentage inflow of all the combined regions. The Otago/Southland region had the most marked change in number of people moving to the region in proportion to its resident population, from 8 percent in 1991 to 12 percent in 2006. In contrast, the proportion of moves to the Northland/Auckland region per population had gradually decreased to below 6 percent in 2006.

Figure 3

Percentage of Moves to Region⁽¹⁾

For groupings of regional council areas

1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



(1) Per resident population in New Zealand five years ago.

Moving north or south

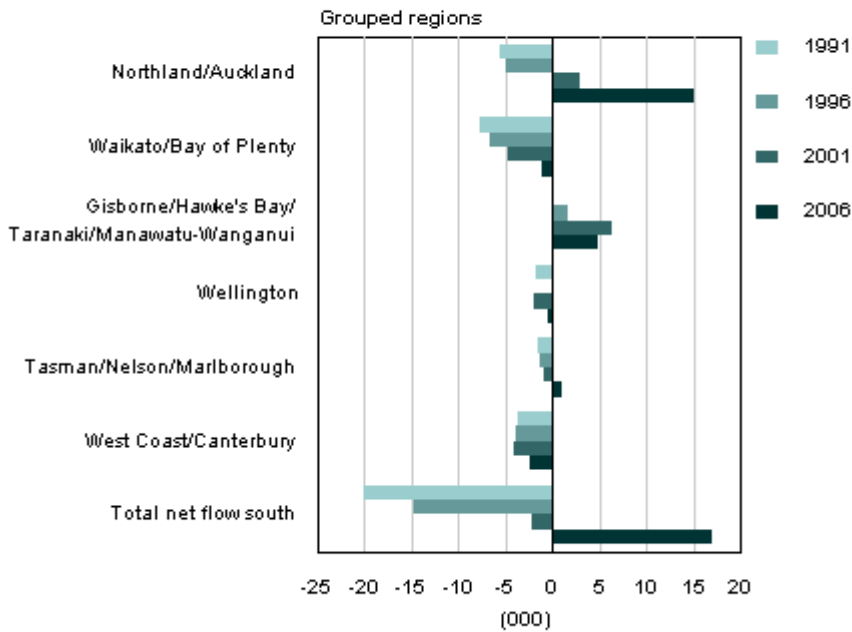
At the 1996 Census, there was a net gain of 1,700 residents to Waikato/Bay of Plenty region from moves between the Waikato/Bay of Plenty and Northland/Auckland regions.

Gisborne/Hawke's Bay/Taranaki/Manawatu-Wanganui and Wellington regions had net losses of 3,400 and 3,800 residents, respectively, to the Northland/Auckland region. A significant outflow from the Gisborne/Hawke's Bay/Taranaki/Manawatu-Wanganui region also resulted in a net gain of 6,400 residents from this area to the Waikato/Bay of Plenty region.

Ten years later, at the 2006 Census, the picture of net gains and losses between regions had somewhat changed. The Waikato/Bay of Plenty region had a net gain of 10,300 residents who had lived in Northland/Auckland five years previously. All of regions except Wellington recorded net gains from population moves between the Northland/Auckland region and the other five regions. In summary, at the 2006 Census, the total net loss to Northland/Auckland from moves to and from this region was 15,100 – a marked reversal from a net gain of 4,800 to Northland/Auckland between 1991 and 1996. (See table 4 of the downloadable tables at the end of this page.)

Figure 4

Net Population Flow South⁽¹⁾
For groupings of regional council areas
 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



(1) To regions south of usual residence five years ago.

The resulting net population flows gained or lost by regions due to internal migration during the five-yearly periods provide an indication of whether these flows imply a migration trend towards the north or south. As already illustrated, Auckland/Northland gained internal migrants from other regions both at the 1991 and 1996 Censuses but had net losses to other regions at the 2001 and 2006 Censuses. During the four inter-censal periods, the combined Waikato/Bay of Plenty region had a reducing net gain from other regions south of this area, from 7,600 in 1991 to 1,100 in 2006.

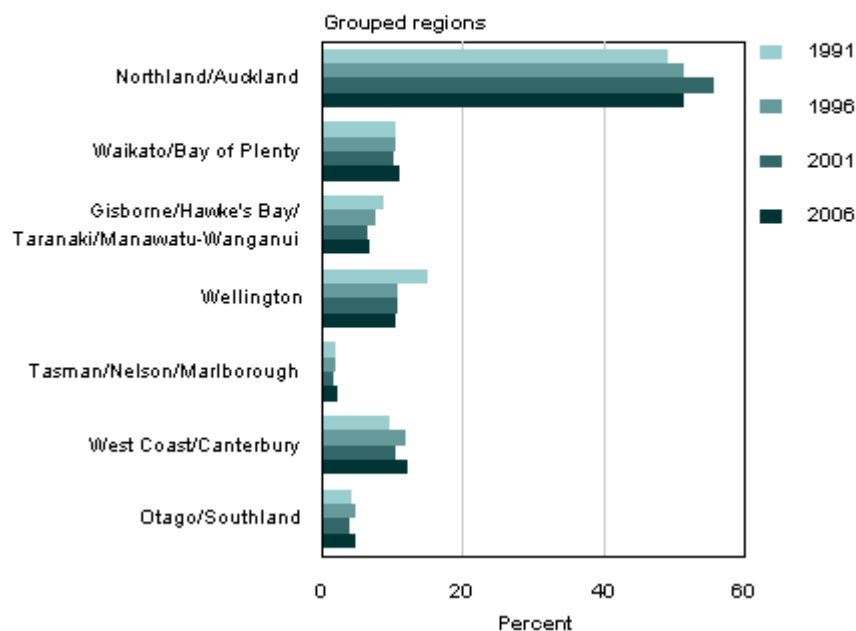
There has been a complete reversal of the total net population moves from each of the seven broad regions to regions further south over the last quarter century. Up to 2001, total net losses were experienced by regions to regions north of their location: 20,000 from 1986–1991, 14,800 from 1991–1996, and 2,200 from 1996–2001. However, between 2001 and 2006 there was a total net gain of 16,900 people by regions located south of the region. From these historic internal migration trends analysed at the broad regional level, it seems appropriate to say that net internal population moves have at recent censuses gradually favoured regions located south of Northland/Auckland. (See table 4 of the downloadable tables at the end of this page.)

Where have people who moved from overseas settled?

At each of the last four censuses, the proportional geographic distribution of new arrivals in the country has remained approximately the same. More than 50 percent were living in the Northland/Auckland region at each of the census years 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006. On average, in 2006, a further 11 percent of residents living overseas five years ago were living in Waikato/Bay of Plenty region, 12 percent in Wellington, and another 11 percent in Canterbury/West Coast region. However, in numerical terms the increase in number of residents who had arrived from living overseas five years ago at each census varied significantly across the broad regions. At the 2006 Census, in Northland/Auckland, the number of residents who had arrived from overseas had increased by 44,000 (to 176,600) compared with 2001 (132,600) – a much higher increase in overseas arrivals compared with previous censuses.

Figure 5
Proportion of Usual Residents Living Overseas Five Years Ago

For groupings of regional council areas
1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



The magnitude and location of settlement of people arriving from or returning from overseas has a significant relationship to the pattern of internal migration flows. At least part of the reason for the change in the net internal migration gains or losses to the Auckland region is related to people arriving from overseas who had settled in that region for a period and then relocated to other parts of New Zealand as their circumstances and aspirations changed. People moving into or back into the country contribute to the internal migration flows just as those resident in New Zealand do.

Information sources

1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Dwellings

Glossary

Please refer to [Glossary](#).

Further information

This page is part of a web-based analytical report by Statistics New Zealand.

The report includes more than 10 topics. To see the other topics, go to the [*Internal Migration report*](#) introduction page.

Tables

The following tables can be downloaded from the Statistics New Zealand website in Excel format. If you do not have access to Excel, you may use the [Excel file viewer](#) to view, print and export the contents of the file.

1. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, regional council areas, 1991–2006
2. Population flows by usual residence five years ago, regional council areas, 1991–2006
3. Population flows by usual residence five years ago, groupings of regional council areas, 1991–2006
4. Net population flow to regions south of usual residence area five years ago, groupings of regional council areas, 1991–2006
5. Census usual resident count by region of usual residence, for residents living overseas five years ago, 1991–2006