

Internal Migration

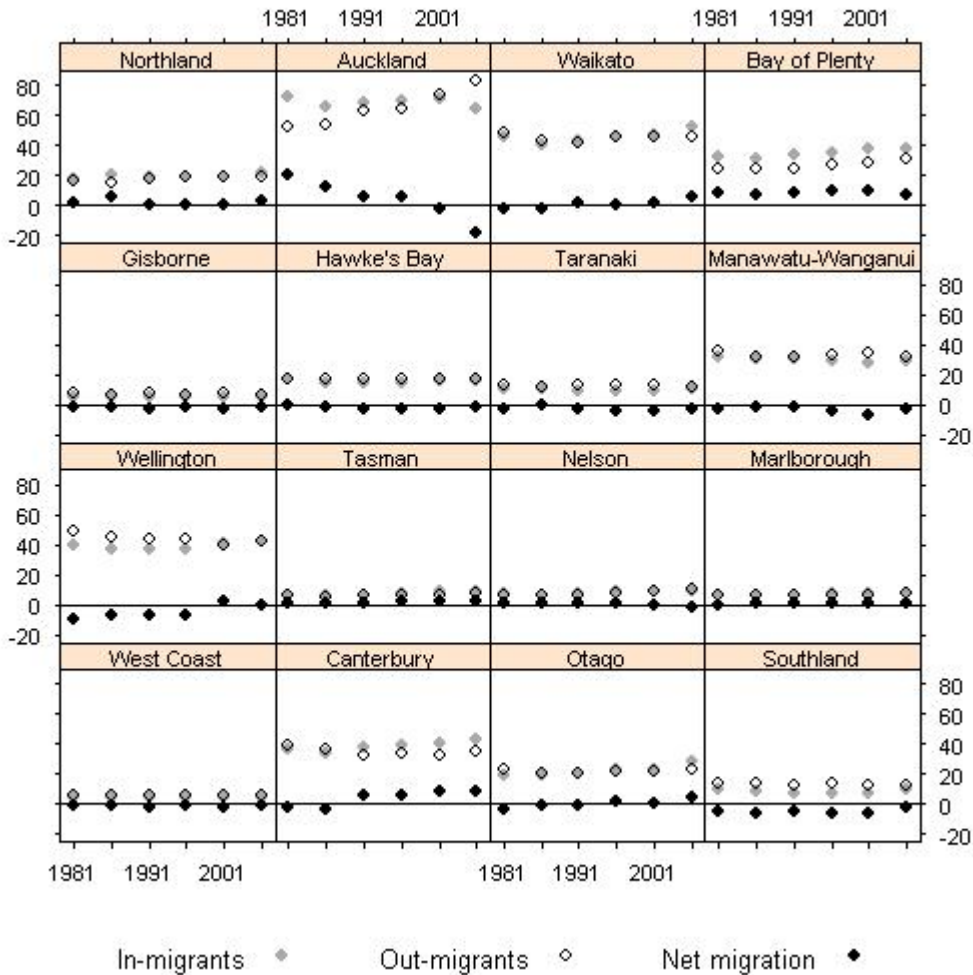
Trends in migration between regions

Introduction

For most regions of New Zealand, in-migration from other regions approximately matches out-migration to other regions. But some places, such as Bay of Plenty, have consistently gained population through internal migration. In recent years, Auckland has switched from net gains to net losses.

Figure 1 shows the numbers of people who had moved into or out of each of New Zealand's 16 regions during the five-year period before each census. For instance, the left-most grey dot in the "Wellington" panel shows that approximately 40,000 people who were living in the Wellington region in 1981 had been living elsewhere in New Zealand five years earlier. The hollow dot above it shows that 50,000 people who were living elsewhere in New Zealand in 1981 had been living in Wellington five years earlier. The black dot at the bottom shows that the combined effect of these inward and outward moves was a net loss of 10,000.

Figure 1
Numbers of Internal Migrants (Thousands)
By region
 1981–2006 Censuses



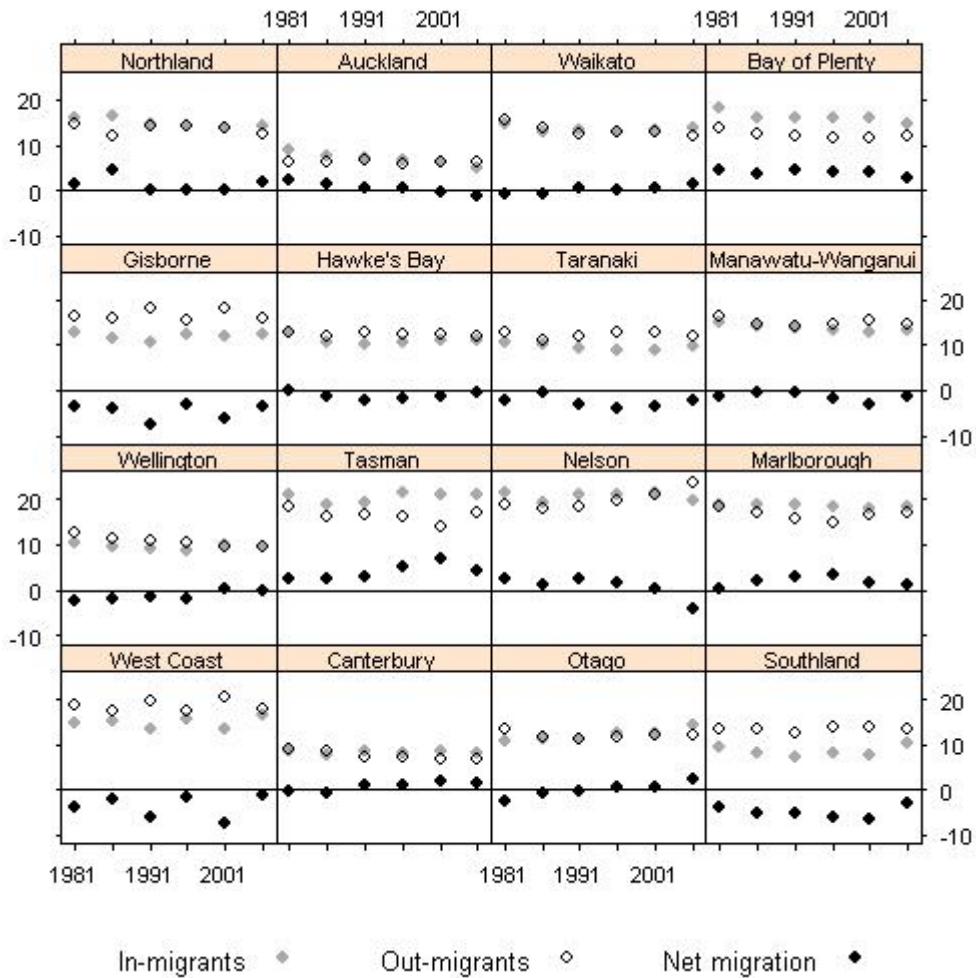
At first sight, the fact that most regions simultaneously have large inflows and outflows is strange. If thousands of people decide that they would be better off moving into a particular region, why do thousands of other people decide that they would be better off moving out? The answer is that the people moving in and the people moving out are typically seeking different things. For instance, the out-migrants could be young people moving to the big city for employment, while in-migrants were middle-aged people looking for a good place to raise a family. (The section on Migration and age discusses this further.)

Over the whole period covered by the 1981–2006 censuses, the region with the biggest net gains from internal migration was Bay of Plenty, which received 48,700 more people than it lost. The region with the biggest net losses was Southland, which lost 28,800 more people than it received.

Recently, however, migration patterns have been changing. In 2001–2006, the region with biggest net gain (8,200) was to Canterbury, and the region with the biggest net loss (18,100) was not Southland but Auckland.

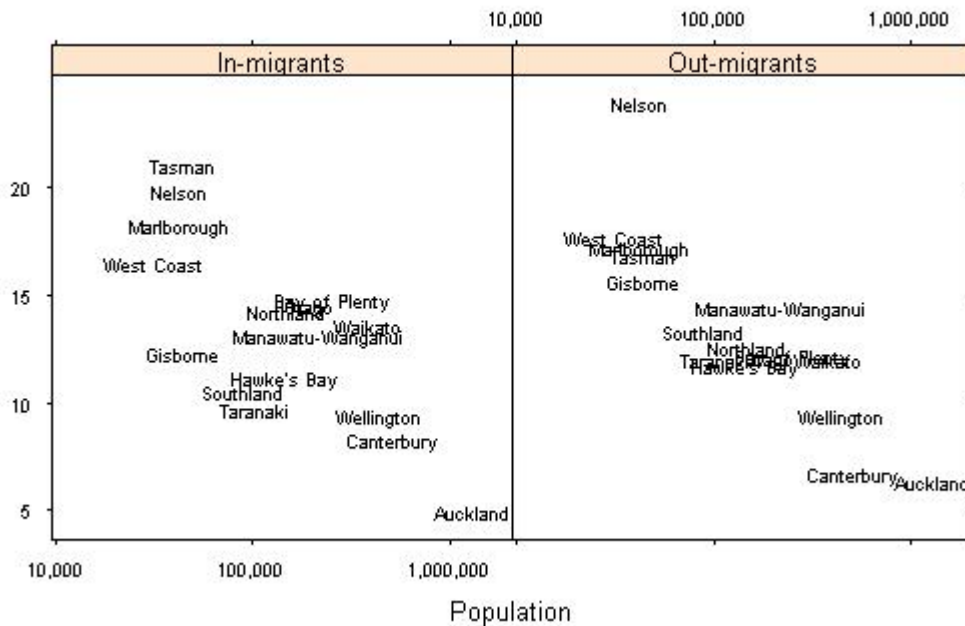
The fact that Auckland has the largest migration flows is perhaps not surprising, since Auckland has by far the largest population of any region (1.3 million in 2006). Measuring migrants as a percent of total population gives a better sense of people's propensity to move into or out of a region. Figure 2 shows migration flows as percentages of regional populations. The region with the greatest proportional losses to internal migration in 2001–2006 was Nelson, followed by Gisborne.

Figure 2
Internal Migrants as Percent of Population
By region
1981–2006 Censuses



Inspection of figure 2 suggests that large regions such as Auckland and Canterbury tend to have smaller migration flows, relative to population size, than small regions such as the West Coast and Nelson. Figure 3 showing migration rates versus population size, makes this relationship explicit.

Figure 3
Migrants as Percent of Population Versus Population Size
2006



The same relationship between population size and migration exists among countries. Just as small regions, such as Nelson or Tasman, have higher migration rates, so do small countries, such as New Zealand.

Information sources

1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006 Censuses of Population and Dwellings.

Technical notes

All data for this page were derived from the 1981–2006 Censuses—specifically the questions on usual residence at the time of the census and five years before the census. The question on previous residence was not administered to children aged 0–4, and all children aged 0–4 are defined here as non-migrants. Since this page focuses on internal migration, people who were overseas five years before the census are excluded from the migration totals.

The proportion of respondents for whom data on previous residence are missing or incomplete has been rising from census to census, and reached 8 percent in 2006. Omitting these people from the calculations understates actual migration flows, since some of these people will have migrated. The approach taken here has been to assume that (i) people who did not give any response had the same distribution by previous residence (including residence overseas) as other people living in their region, and (ii) people who stated that they were in New Zealand but did not clearly specify a region had the same distribution by previous residence as other people living in their region whose previous residence was in New Zealand. Because of these adjustments, the numbers cited in this page may differ from those cited elsewhere, though the differences should be small.

The regional populations in the figures 2 and 3 include children aged 0–4, people overseas five years earlier, and all other usual residents.

The labels in the figure 3 are centered horizontally on population sizes.

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. Numbers of Internal Migrants by Region, 1981–2006 Censuses
2. Internal Migrants as Percent of Regional Populations, 1981–2006 Censuses
3. Usually Resident Population by Region, 1981–2006 Censuses