

## Internal Migration

# Urban and rural migration

## Population change

Population change has been higher for main urban areas, and for rural and other areas, than for less populated centres. At the 2006 Census, minor urban areas and other urban areas had higher proportions of people who had moved between 2001 and 2006 compared with rural areas. Large proportions of movers living in rural areas had moved from urban areas, whereas movers living in main urban areas had mainly moved within these areas. Increasingly, there has been a large population exchange between main urban areas, and rural and other areas, and has resulted in net population gains to rural and other areas.

- Main urban area: Centres with populations of 30,000 or more.
- Secondary urban area: Centres with populations between 10,000 and 29,999.
- Minor urban area: Centres with populations of 1,000 or more not already classified as urban.
- Rural centre: Centres with populations of 300 to 999.
- Rural and other area: Area units that are not already included in an urban area or rural centre. It includes inlets, inland and oceanic waters.

## Population 1991–2006

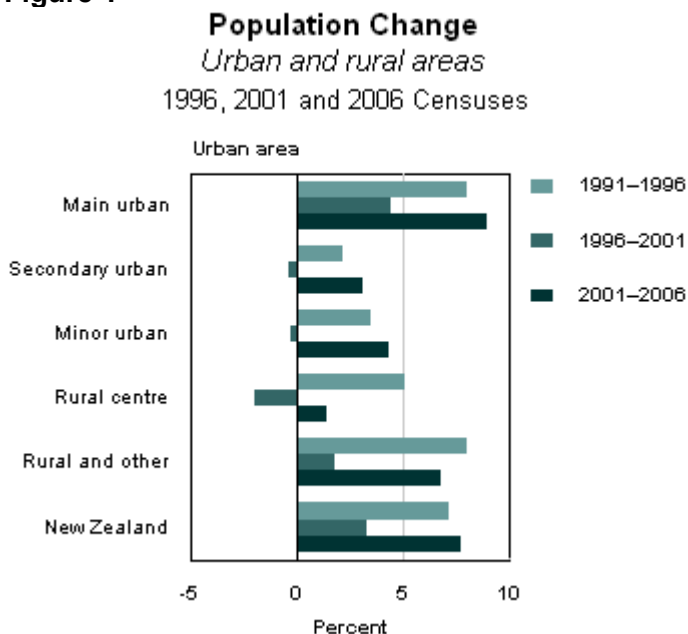
New Zealand has for a long time been known as a highly urbanised country. The proportion of New Zealand's resident population living in urban areas (main, secondary or minor urban areas) has remained about the same; it was 86 percent in 2006 and 85 percent in 1991. The proportion of people living in main urban areas has increased marginally from 70 percent in 1991 to 72 percent in 2006. This pattern was not repeated for the secondary and minor urban areas; the combined population of these areas declined from 16 percent in 1991 to 14 percent in 2006. Similarly, the population living in rural centres or rural areas comprised a slowly declining proportion of the population, from 15 percent in 1991 to 14 percent in 2006.

**Table 1**

| Population Distribution<br>By urban area<br>1991–2006 Censuses |                       |       |       |       |
|--|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Area of usual residence  | 1991                  | 1996  | 2001  | 2006  |
|  | Percent of population |       |       |       |
| Main urban   | 69.6                  | 70.2  | 71.0  | 71.8  |
| Secondary urban  | 6.9                   | 6.5   | 6.3   | 6.0   |
| Minor urban  | 9.0                   | 8.7   | 8.4   | 8.1   |
| Rural centre   | 2.3                   | 2.3   | 2.1   | 2.0   |
| Rural and other  | 12.2                  | 12.3  | 12.1  | 12.0  |
| New Zealand  | 100.0                 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

For each of the periods 1991–1996, 1996–2001 and 2001–2006, the population increase for the combined 16 main urban areas of New Zealand has been higher than the overall population increase for the country. Between the 2001 and 2006 Censuses the increase of population in main urban areas was 9 percent compared with not quite 8 percent overall for the country. Other urban and rural area categories generally had lower population increases or declines. Rural and other areas had a population increase that was higher than the national average during 1991–1996, but in 1996–2001 and 2001–2006 recorded increases that were lower than the national averages for these periods.

**Figure 1**



## Movers and non-movers

New Zealand has a highly mobile population. Increasingly, people have a different residence compared with where they were living five years ago at the previous census. At the 2006 Census, 49 percent of the resident population, who were resident in NZ at the previous census, were living at the same residence, but the remaining (51 percent) were living at a different residence from five years previously. Historically, both the number and proportion of residents who lived elsewhere five years ago has always exceeded the proportion of residents who lived at the same residence. In 2006, however, this trend had reversed.

**Table 2**

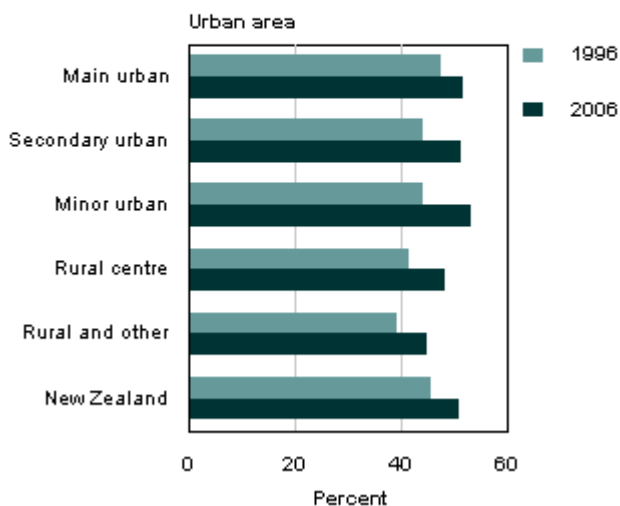
| <b>Population Distribution</b><br>By usual residence five years ago<br>1991–2006 Censuses |                       |       |       |       |
|---|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Usual residence five years ago  | 1991                  | 1996  | 2001  | 2006  |
|   | Percent of population |       |       |       |
| Same usual residence  | 44.4                  | 41.4  | 40.8  | 37.1  |
| Elsewhere in NZ   | 38.9                  | 35.0  | 36.4  | 38.3  |
| Moved from overseas   | 4.7                   | 6.0   | 6.4   | 8.5   |
| Not born  | 8.2                   | 7.7   | 7.2   | 6.8   |
| Residual <sup>(1)</sup>   | 3.8                   | 9.8   | 9.2   | 9.3   |
| All residents   | 100.0                 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

(1) Includes no fixed abode, urban area and NZ not further defined, and not stated.

At the 2006 Census, people living in minor urban areas were more mobile than people living in main, secondary or rural areas; 53 percent of the population living in minor urban areas had been living at a different residence at the time of the previous census in 2001. This was a significant increase from 44 percent at the 1996 Census.

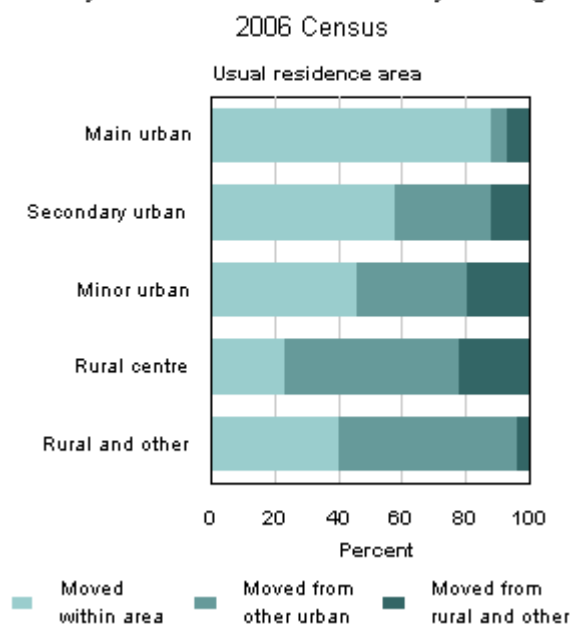
**Figure 2**  
**Proportion of Population Living Elsewhere**  
**in New Zealand Five Years Ago**

*Urban and rural areas*  
1996 and 2006 Censuses



Among residents of main urban areas in 2006 who had changed residence, almost 90 percent had moved within or between main urban areas, and only about 10 percent had moved from other urban areas or from rural areas. Conversely, much larger proportions of movers living in rural centres or other rural areas had moved from urban areas (49 percent in rural centres and 61 percent in rural and other areas). Overall, the lesser populated areas (that is, minor or rural areas with populations of 10,000 or less) had higher proportions of people having moved from other area categories.

**Figure 3**  
**Distribution of Movers**  
*By urban and rural area five years ago*



## Internal migration flows

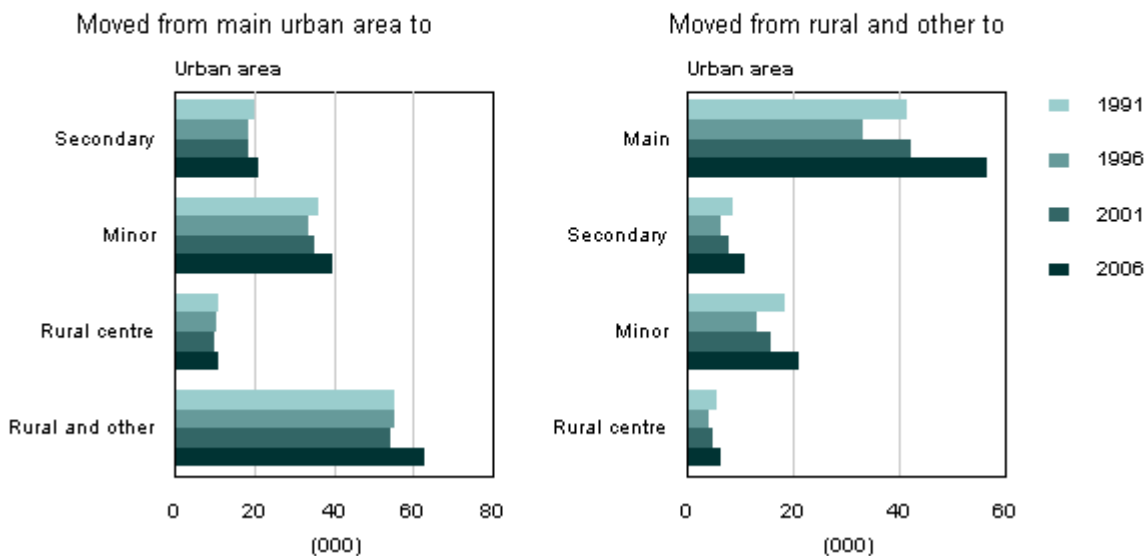
The number of people moving in and out of urban and rural areas varies markedly across the different types of area categories. The largest flows of people between the area types were those who had moved between main urban areas and rural areas. In 2006, 47 percent of people who had moved out of main urban areas had moved to rural and other areas (62,700 people), whereas 45 percent had moved from main urban to secondary or minor urban areas, and 8 percent had moved to rural centres.

The increase in number of people who had moved out of main urban areas was partly compensated by an increase in the number of people who had moved from rural and other areas to main urban areas. During each of the four five-year periods between 1991 and 2006, around 60 percent of people who moved out of rural and other areas moved to main urban areas and just 7 percent moved to rural centres.

**Figure 4**

### Population Flows Between Urban and Rural Areas

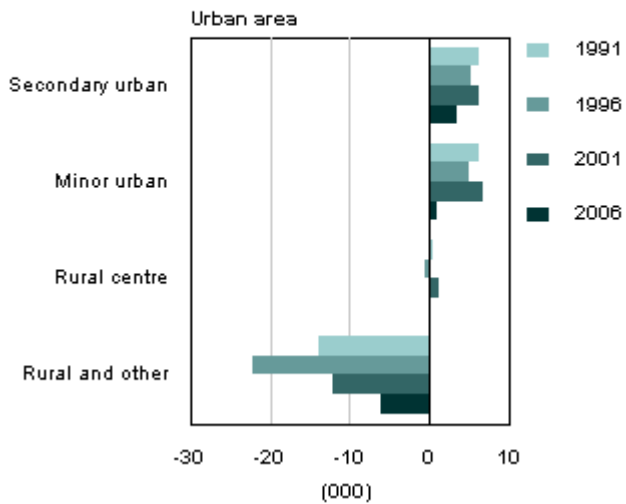
*By usual residence five years ago*  
1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



Overall, the main urban areas gained population through internal migration from both secondary and minor urban areas, but in 2006 these net gains had reduced to just 4,600 from 13,300 in 2001. The net loss in population to main urban areas from rural areas was 6,000 in 2006. This compared with net losses to main urban areas of 22,700 in 1996 and 10,900 in 2001 from moves between main urban and rural areas (that is, rural centre, and rural and other area combined).

**Figure 5**  
**Net Population Gain or Loss to Main Urban Area**

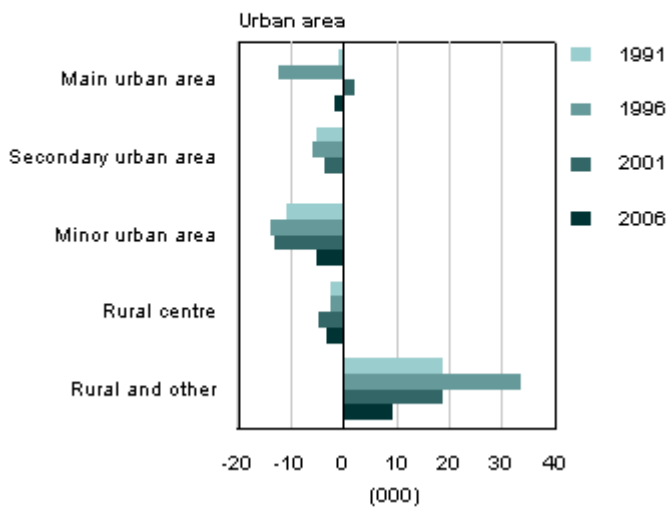
*By usual residence five years ago*  
 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses



As indicated by the graph below, the overall net population gain or loss to each of the urban area categories through internal migration between 2001 and 2006 resulted in net losses to main (1,400) and minor urban areas (5,000), and to rural centres (3,200). These net losses have been offset by a small net gain to secondary urban areas (200) and a significant net gain to rural and other areas (9,300). However, in 2006, the net losses and gains to the urban and rural areas were much reduced compared with 10 years ago. Between 1991 and 1996, urban areas and rural centres had net internal migration losses that compensated a significant net gain of 33,700 to rural and other areas.

**Figure 6**  
**Net Population Gain or Loss from Internal Migration**

*By usual residence five years ago*  
 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses

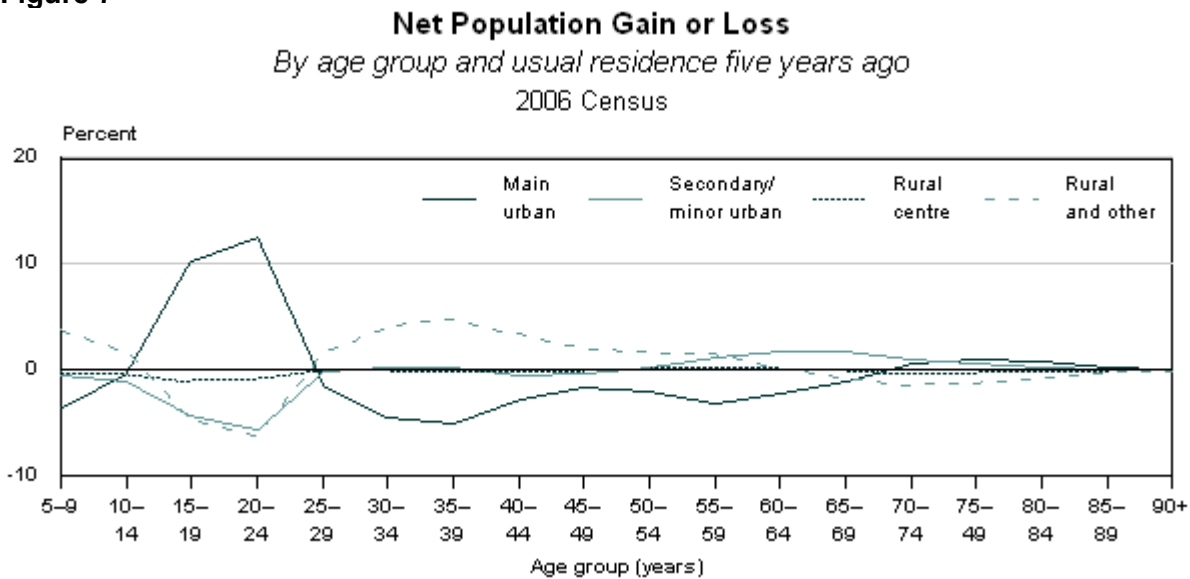


# Migration flow characteristics

## Age

Moving to highly populated areas of the country is often a common feature among young adults who are seeking tertiary education and the range of job opportunities that are not available in lesser populated areas. Between 2001 and 2006, there were net losses of 10,900 people aged 15–24 years and 4,900 aged 65 years and over to rural and other areas from moves between this area type and urban areas and rural centres. However, the rural and other area gained 19,500 people of ages between 25 and 64 years. By contrast, main urban areas had a net gain of 22,800 people aged 15–24 years and a net loss of 22,400 people aged 25–64 years from moves between main urban area and other urban (that is, secondary or minor urban areas), and rural areas.

**Figure 7**



## Ethnicity

Nearly all movers had moved within main urban areas (around 90 percent) at the 2006 Census. This proportion ranged from 84 percent of movers of Māori ethnicity to 97 percent of movers of Asian ethnicities. A much lower proportion of movers living in minor urban areas moved within this area, 54 percent of movers of Māori ethnicity and just 44 percent of movers of Asian ethnicities.

In contrast, among people living in rural areas who had moved between the 2001 and 2006 Censuses, just small proportions of these had moved within the rural areas. For example, 72 percent of movers of Pacific ethnicity who lived in rural and other areas had moved from urban areas to live in these areas. This compares with 57 percent of movers of European ethnicity, 61 percent of movers of Māori ethnicity, and 76 percent of movers of Asian ethnicity having moved from urban areas to live in rural and other areas.

**Table 3**

| <b>Distribution of Movers of European Ethnicity</b><br>By urban area five years ago<br>2006 Census |                       |                        |                            |             |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Usual residence area   | Moved within area     | Moved from other urban | Moved from rural and other | Area stated |
|  | Percent of population |                        |                            |             |
| Main urban   | 86.9                  | 6.3                    | 6.8                        | 100.0       |
| Secondary urban  | 57.8                  | 28.1                   | 14.1                       | 100.0       |
| Minor urban  | 46.4                  | 33.7                   | 19.9                       | 100.0       |
| Rural centre   | 24.8                  | 54.0                   | 21.2                       | 100.0       |
| Rural and other  | 38.6                  | 57.1                   | 4.3                        | 100.0       |

**Table 4**

| <b>Distribution of Movers of Māori Ethnicity</b><br>By urban area five years ago<br>2006 Census |                       |                        |                            |             |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Usual residence area  | Moved within area     | Moved from other urban | Moved from rural and other | Area stated |
|   | Percent of population |                        |                            |             |
| Main urban  | 83.8                  | 8.8                    | 7.5                        | 100.0       |
| Secondary urban   | 57.4                  | 31.7                   | 10.9                       | 100.0       |
| Minor urban   | 54.0                  | 29.1                   | 16.9                       | 100.0       |
| Rural centre  | 30.4                  | 50.8                   | 18.8                       | 100.0       |
| Rural and other   | 32.8                  | 61.3                   | 5.9                        | 100.0       |

**Table 5**

| <b>Distribution of Movers of Pacific Ethnicity</b><br>By urban area five years ago<br>2006 Census |                       |                        |                            |             |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Usual residence area  | Moved within area     | Moved from other urban | Moved from rural and other | Area stated |
|   | Percent of population |                        |                            |             |
| Main urban  | 95.4                  | 2.7                    | 1.9                        | 100.0       |
| Secondary urban   | 57.9                  | 36.5                   | 5.6                        | 100.0       |
| Minor urban   | 45.2                  | 42.1                   | 12.7                       | 100.0       |
| Rural centre  | 19.4                  | 67.6                   | 13.1                       | 100.0       |
| Rural and other   | 25.0                  | 71.7                   | 3.3                        | 100.0       |

**Table 6**

| <b>Distribution of Movers of Asian Ethnicity</b><br>By urban area five years ago<br>2006 Census |                       |                        |                            |             |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Usual residence area  | Moved within area     | Moved from other urban | Moved from rural and other | Area stated |
|   | Percent of population |                        |                            |             |
| Main urban  | 96.5                  | 2.1                    | 1.3                        | 100.0       |
| Secondary urban   | 53.0                  | 39.4                   | 7.7                        | 100.0       |
| Minor urban   | 44.5                  | 46.0                   | 9.6                        | 100.0       |
| Rural centre  | 19.2                  | 67.3                   | 13.5                       | 100.0       |
| Rural and other   | 21.5                  | 76.3                   | 2.2                        | 100.0       |

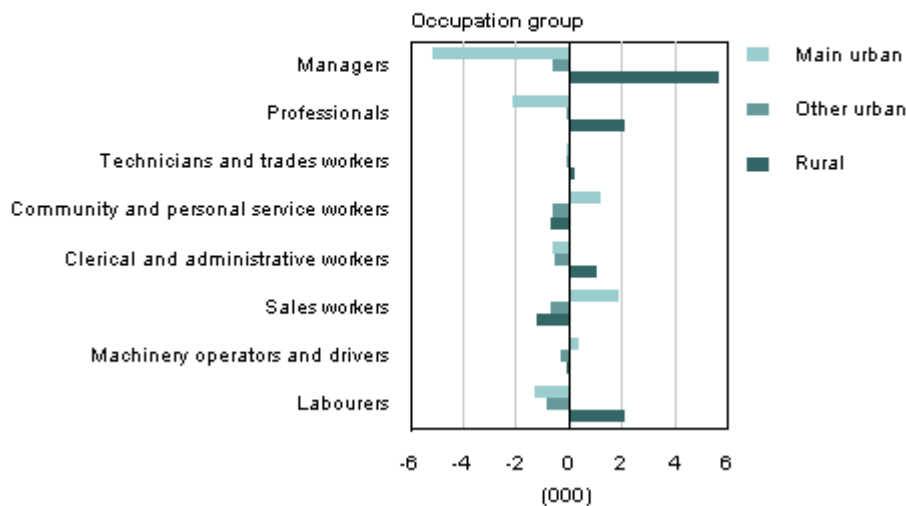
**Occupation**

Among occupation groups listed by the 2006 Census, main urban areas recorded a net loss of managers and professionals (7,100 in total), whereas rural areas had a net gain of 7,800 people in these occupation groups who had moved to live in the rural areas. However, main urban areas had net gains of community and personal service, and sales workers from other urban and rural areas (3,100). Rural areas also gained labourers (2,100) from urban areas.

**Figure 8**

**Net Population Gain or Loss**

*By occupation and usual residence five years ago*  
 2006 Census



## **Information sources**

1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Census 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, urban areas, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
2. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
3. Inter-censal population flows between urban area categories, by usual residence five years ago, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
4. Movers within and between urban areas by usual residence five years ago, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
5. Net population gain/loss by usual residence five years ago, between urban area categories, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
6. Internal migration flows by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
7. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census
8. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2001 Census
9. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 1996 Census
10. Census usual resident population count by usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 1991 Census
11. Movers within and between main urban areas, by usual residence five years ago, 2006 Census
12. Census usual resident population count by age group and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census
13. Census usual resident population count by ethnicity and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census
14. Movers by ethnicity and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses
15. Census usual resident count by age group, sex and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census
16. Census usual resident count by occupation and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census
17. Census usual resident count by age group, ethnicity and usual residence five years ago, urban areas, 2006 Census



[Urban and rural migration tables 1–17 \(Excel, 424 KB\)](#)