

Jersey Studies

JERSEY'S POPULATION

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I. Introduction

The Island of Jersey, 118 square kilometres, currently has a population of about 103,000, and since 1950 has experienced a rapid rate of population growth. The size of Jersey's population and immigration have been on the political agenda in the Island for well over 100 years. This is not surprising, as there have been high rates of migration into and out of the Island.

Jersey's population growth has been variable – very rapid growth in the first half of the 19th century, decline then recovery from 1850 to 1950, and rapid growth subsequently. Immigration has played a significant part in population growth, but large-scale emigration, particularly of young men, has also been an almost permanent feature.

This paper sets out the key data on Jersey's population and discusses the evolution of population policy.

II. Long-term trends

Long term trends in Jersey's population are analysed in the book *Jersey's population – a history*, on which this section is based. The earliest estimates of the population of Jersey come from historians and inevitably have a significant margin of error. Human occupation of Jersey first occurred during glacial times, with the earliest reliable dated human occupation going back around 250,000 years. It has been estimated that between 4,000 and 3,000 BC the population was between 2,000 and 4,000, based on between 10 and 20 separate communities each with a population of between 200 and 250. The population then seems to have declined to about 500 in 2000 BC. There are then no estimates until 1050 when using the churches as a reference point suggests a population of around 6,000.

The first substantive "census" in Jersey was the 1331 Extente, sometimes referred to as the Jersey Domesday Book. This suggests that there were around 2,000 houses in the Island, which implies a population of 10,000-12,000. The Black Death in 1348-49 had a devastating effect and by the early 15th century the population may have fallen to 4,000-5,000. Subsequent estimates suggest a population of 7,000 in 1541, 16,200 in 1685 and 20,000 in 1788.

The first formal census was conducted in 1821, and subsequently censuses have taken place every ten years, and for a period every five years, with the exception of 1941. Table 1 shows the figures from each of the decennial censuses, and also an estimate of the population in mid-1939. The table shows the percentage increases, calculated over a ten-year period, for the "headline" total population figures from each census. However, the percentages are misleading because of significant changes in definitions (particularly from 1981 when resident population was recorded rather than census night population) and one-off factors. The figures in the final column attempt to correct for these factors so that the percentage increases are on a more comparable basis. It will be seen that the corrected figures show a smoother trend than the uncorrected figures.

Table 1 Population of Jersey, 1821-2021

Year	Population	Increase %	Corrected increase %
1821	28,600		
1831	36,582	27.9	27.9
1841	47,544	30.0	24.5
1851	57,020	19.9	19.9
1861	55,613	-2.5	-2.5
1871	56,627	1.8	-1.8
1881	52,445	-7.4	-4.0
1891	54,518	4.0	4.0
1901	52,576	-3.6	-3.6
1911	51,898	-1.3	-1.3
1921	49,701	-4.2	-10.3
1931	50,462	1.5	6.6
1939	51,080	1.5	1.5
1951	57,310	10.2	10.2
1961	59,489	3.8	12.6
1971	69,329	16.5	16.5
1981	76,050	9.7	5.2
1991	84,082	10.6	10.6
2001	87,186	3.7	3.7
2011	97,857	12.2	10.2
2021	103,267	5.5	5.5

Notes:

1. The percentage increases to 1939 and 1951 are calculated at a ten-yearly rate to be comparable with the other data.
2. There are four significant discontinuities in the series -
 - The 1821 and 1831 censuses excluded the military population, seamen ashore and people on board vessels adjacent to the Island. From 1841 these groups were included although with some variations.
 - Up to 1951 the figures included visitors.
 - From 1981 resident population rather than census night population was recorded.
 - In 2011 the figure included for the first time the estimated “undercount”.
4. In two of the years the figures are distorted by special factors -
 - In 1871 many refugees were present as a consequence of the Franco-Prussian War.
 - In 1921 the census took place on the night of 19/20 June instead of the originally planned date of 24 April. There were 4,875 visitors recorded in 1921 as against 1,940 in 1931, suggesting that the 1921 figure was inflated by about 3,000. The 1931 census report suggested a 6.6% increase in the resident population between 1921 and 1931.

Four distinct periods of population change can be identified -

- Very rapid growth between 1821 and 1851 when the population more than doubled from 28,600 to 57,020. This was during the boom period for the Jersey economy, cod fishing and related industries playing a major part. The population increase was largely explained by immigration, mainly from England but also from Scotland, Ireland and France.
- A sharp decline to 52,445 in 1881 reflecting an economic slump in Jersey precipitated by the decline of the cod fishing and related maritime industries.
- A fairly stable population until 1931 when the population was estimated at 51,080.
- In 1951 the population was 57,310, almost exactly the same as the figure 100 years earlier. The period since then has been one of continual growth such that the population is currently estimated at around 103,000.

Population growth in recent years has been driven primarily by net immigration rather than by natural growth, the excess of births over deaths. Table 2 shows the estimates for population change in recent years based on the official [Jersey Resident Population 2019 Estimate](#), but corrected to be compatible with the 2021 census.

Table 2 Jersey’s Population growth, 2001-2020

End-Year	Population	Increase	Natural increase	Net migration
2000	88,400			
2001	88,900	500	190	300
2002	89,300	400	90	300
2003	89,600	300	250	0
2004	90,100	500	220	300
2005	91,000	900	220	700
2006	92,300	1,300	190	1,100
2007	94,000	1,700	320	1,400
2008	95,400	1,400	300	1,100
2009	96,200	800	250	500
2010	97,100	900	270	700
2011	97,700	600	390	200
2012	98,200	500	360	200
2013	98,800	600	300	200
2014	99,400	600	310	200
2015	101,400	1,000	220	800
2016	102,300	900	200	700
2017	103,100	800	130	700
2018	103,800	700	100	600
2019	104,200	600	90	500
2020	103,300	-900	130	-1,100
Total		14,100	4,530	9,400

Note: the figures have been individually rounded so subtotals may not add up to totals.

The table shows in the 10 years to 2020 natural growth averaged 220 a year while net immigration averaged 300 a year. There has been a significant decline in the natural growth in recent years from a peak of 390 in 2011 to just 90 in 2019, although with an increase to 130

in 2020. The significant reduction in the population in 2020 is attributed to Covid and Brexit, which resulted in net emigration of 1,100.

Population trends in Jersey over the long term have been in line with the position in England and also Guernsey. Jersey's population has grown substantially less than England's in the whole of the period since 1821 but growth has been more rapid since 1951.

III. Population characteristics - age, sex and household type

The decennial census provides the only comprehensive analysis of the makeup of the population.

The population of Jersey is heavily concentrated in three of the southern parishes - St Helier, St Saviour and St Brelade. Between them, these three parishes accounted for 59% of the total population in 2021, the remaining nine parishes accounting for 41%. There is a more detailed breakdown of the distribution between the parishes in the paper on Jersey's parishes.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the population by age and sex.

Table 3 Population of Jersey, analysed by age and sex, 2021

Age group	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Under 20	10,449	20.5	10,159	19.4	20,608	20.0
20-39	12,866	25.2	12,589	24.1	25,455	24.6
40-59	15,863	31.1	15,898	30.4	31,761	30.8
60-79	9,644	18.9	10,480	20.1	20,124	19.5
80+	2,181	4.3	3,138	6.0	5,319	5.2
Total	51,003	100.0	52,264	100.0	103,267	100.0

The table shows that there were marginally more females and males, this largely being accounted for by the 80 and over category where women outnumbered men by 44%. There has been a steady increase in the population aged over 60 from 7.4% in 1821 to 14.7% in 1921, 20.6% in 2011 and 24.7% in 2021. A key population variable is the dependency ratio, defined as the ratio of those outside working age (16 to 64) to those of working age. The ratio was 52%, a significant increase on the figure of 46% in 2011.

The 2021 census estimated that there were 44,583 households. Table 4 shows the breakdown.

Table 4 Household types, 2021

Composition	Number	Percentage
Single adults	8,603	19.3
Adult couples	6,884	15.4
Single parents	3,686	8.3
Couples with children	11,501	25.8
Pensioner couples	5,466	12.3
Single pensioner	5,463	12.3
Other	2,980	6.7
Total	44,583	100.0

The table shows that 40% of households had just one adult and 25% comprised one or more pensioner.

IV. Population characteristics – place of birth and nationality

In 2021 exactly half the population (50%) was born in Jersey, 29% in the British Isles other than Jersey, 8% in Portugal (largely the island of Madeira), 3% in Poland and 11% elsewhere. Between 1981 and 2021 the proportion born in Jersey fell from 53% to 50%, the proportion born elsewhere in the British Isles fell from 37% to 29%, the proportion born in Portugal increased from 3% to 8% and the proportion born elsewhere increased from 7% to 14%, much of this latter figure representing immigration from Poland.

The Census asked people to identify which ethnic character category they felt best described themselves. 44% of Jersey residents considered their ethnicity to be Jersey while 31% considered themselves to be British. 9% considered themselves to be Portuguese or Madeiran, a higher figure than those actually born in Portugal or Madeira, reflecting that people identify with the ethnicity of their parents to some extent.

V. Population characteristics – religion

The Church of England is the “established” religion in Jersey, the Dean of Jersey technically being a member of the States Assembly, although with no vote. In practice Jersey is a secular society in which all religions are welcome.

The most recent data on religion is from *The Jersey Annual Social Survey 2015*. 54% of adults regarded themselves as having a religion, 39% said they did not have a religion and 7% were not sure. More women (58%) than men (50%) said they had a religion. Having a religion was strongly correlated with age, the proportion rising steadily from 37% in the 16-34 age group to 78% in the 65+ age group.

Of those who had a religion 97% specified Christian, divided between Catholic (43%), Anglican (44%) and other (13%). Those born in Poland or Portugal/Madeira were 100% Catholic. Of those born in Jersey 52% were Anglican and 34% Catholic.

Other religions stated were Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh.

VI. Population policy

As in many other jurisdictions the size of the population and immigration are politically important issues. This is particularly the case for Jersey given the very high rate of population growth in the post-War period. A series of measures has been implemented designed to constrain the population growth, principally by imposing restrictions on the ability to work and to buy or rent property in Jersey by those without an existing residential qualification. The current legal requirements are set out in the [Control of Housing and Work \(Jersey\) Law 2012](#).

It is fair to say that Jersey has struggled to develop a coherent population policy. For many years there were “targets” for the total size of the population or for population growth. However, there are no policy instruments capable of meeting such targets, given that Jersey has no control over the number of births and deaths, emigration or the number of people returning to the Island with residential qualifications, and that the Island needs to attract immigrants to do the jobs for which local people either are not qualified to do or choose not to do. These factors apply in many other developed nations, but are particularly sensitive in a small island. Policy has moved away from numerical targets, with a recognition of the need to ensure that the economy is supported in the face of an ageing population. The issues are well described in a paper prepared for a debate in the States Assembly in March 2021 [Developing a common population policy](#).

The trade-off between the rate of net immigration and the needs of the economy are illustrated in Table 5, taken from the March 2021 report. The table takes as its starting point the 2015 population of 102,700 and a dependency ratio of 50%, and shows the implications for the total size of the population and the dependency ratio in 2035 with alternative migration assumptions.

Table 5 Population of Jersey in 2035 on alternative migration assumptions

Annual net migration	Dependency ratio	Population in 2035	Increase in population from 2015
No migration	74%	104,100	1%
Net nil	71%	105,500	3%
325	68%	113,100	10%
700	65%	121,800	19%
1,000	63%	128,800	25%
1,500	60%	140,400	37%
2,000	57%	152,000	48%

The table shows that with no migration or net nil migration the population would increase only slowly until 2035, but the dependency ratio would increase by nearly half to over 70%. Net migration of 1,000 a year would result in a 25% increase in the population by 2035 but with the dependency ratio rising to 63%. Even an increase in net migration to 2,000 a year

would result in a significant increase in the dependency ratio. The key factor is simply the ageing population. Even with net nil migration the number of people over 65 is estimated to increase from 16,700 in 2015 to 27,600 in 2035.

There is a general wish in Jersey, expressed very strongly by some, for a population policy that would allow no or only a small growth in the size of the population. However, the inevitable consequence of any such policy, assuming it could be successfully implemented, would be significant labour shortages and an increasing tax burden on a reducing working population.

In February 2022 the States Assembly endorsed a [common population policy](#) which aims “to achieve a stable population position for Jersey, where reliance on inward migration has been significantly reduced in the longer term ” This is based on two principles -

The population of Jersey lives on a small island and an ever-growing population would put more and more pressure on finite land resources. As such, the government will take action to reduce the need to grow the population further through net inward migration whenever this is feasible. The long-term aim of the population policy should be to achieve a sustainable rate of population change, to ensure that current generations do not pass on a growing problem to future generations while ensuring that Jersey remains open for business.

Within the long-term aim of reducing reliance on continued inward migration, the Government will always face new challenges and there may be situations in which the long-term aim of reducing the need for net inward migration will need to be paused or even reversed in order to address specific challenges from time to time. Notwithstanding any such temporary challenges, the underlying principle and vision remains a long-term reduction in reliance on net inward migration.

Three specific actions were mentioned in this report -

- Improving the quality and quantity of data and making better use of that data.
- Encouraging and enhancing productivity activity within the resident population.
- More responsive controls.

Further information

The website <https://boleat.com> includes a page [Jersey Population](#) which provides access to all the census reports and other relevant data on Jersey's population.