Jersey's Population

Policy Centre Jersey
Knowledge Centre

Policy Centre Jersey

Published: 25 September 2026
Website: https://www.policy.je
Email: info@policy.je

Contents

INTRODUCTION 2
LONG-TERM TRENDS 2
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS – AGE, SEX AND HOUSEHOLD TYPE 5
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS – PLACE OF BIRTH AND NATIONALITY 6
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS – RELIGION 7
POPULATION POLICY 7
FURTHER INFORMATION 10

Introduction

The Island of Jersey, with an area of 118 square kilometres, currently has a population of about 104,500, and since 1950 has experienced periods of rapid 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 for much of the subsequent period. 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.

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 reliably 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 5,000, 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 but by using the churches as a reference point a population of around 6,000 can be estimated.

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. Since then, 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.
- From 2011 the figures include the estimated "undercount".

3. 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 1939 when the population was 51,080.
- In 1951 the population was 57,310, almost exactly the same as the figure 100 years earlier. Between 1951 and 2018 the [population grew continually to reach 103,290. Since then, the population has increased very slightly to 104,490 in 2025.

Population growth has been driven primarily by net immigration rather than by natural growth. Table 2 shows the official estimates for population change in recent years from the report Population, published on 24 September 2026, together with the official estimates for the annual figures to 2011 from the report Jersey's Resident Population 2011.

Table 2 Jersey's population growth, 2000-2025

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	600
2010	97,100	1,000	270	700
2011	97,900	700	330	400
2012	98,560	660	340	320
2013	99,300	740	280	460
2014	100,060	760	270	490
2015	101,210	1,150	240	910
2016	102,240	1,030	180	850
2017	102,730	490	130	360
2018	103,290	560	110	430
2019	103,280	-10	90	-100
2020	103,490	210	110	100
2021	103,190	-300	80	-380
2022	103,300	110	-100	200
2023	104,030	730	-120	730
2024	104,500	470	-160	550
2025	104,490	-20	-200	180
Total		16,090	3,880	12,000

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

The table shows that from 2000 to 2025 natural growth averaged 155 a year while net immigration averaged 481 a year. The total population was stable between 2018 and 2022, marking a significant change from the ten previous years when population growth averaged about 800 a year. The population was estimated at 103,290 in 2018 and 103,300 in 2022. The population increased significantly in 2023 and modestly in 2024, and was virtually unchanged in 2025.

Population trends in Jersey over the long term have been broadly similar to 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.

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, which accounted for 59% of the total population in 2021.

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 No	Male %	Female No	Female %	Total No	Total %
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 than 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 60 and over from 7.4% in 1821 to 14.7% in 1921, 20.6% in 2011 and 24.6% in 2021.

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 pensioners	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 pensioners.

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 report Population, published by Statistics Jersey on 23 September 2026, provides some new analysis. It estimated that the number of people born in Europe (other than Jersey and the UK) has fallen steadily from 16,890 in December 2017 to 16,520 in December 2021 and 15,240 in December 2025. By contrast, the number born outside Europe increased over the same period from 1,630 to 3,480 and 5,590.

The census asked people to identify which ethnic category they felt best described themselves. Of Jersey residents, 44% 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.

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 Jersey Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Report 2025. 39% of adults regarded themselves as having a religion, 49% said they did not have a religion and 11% were not sure. More women (41%) than men (37%) 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.

An earlier survey, conducted in 2015 reported that of those who had a religion 97% specified Christian, comprising 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.

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 which local people are either 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 is illustrated in Table 5. The figures are taken from the report Population projections 2025 to 2080, published on 25 February 2026. The table takes as its starting point the 2024 population, estimated at the time as being 105,540, and a dependency ratio of 52.5%. It shows the implications for the total size of the population and the dependency ratio in 2040 with alternative migration assumptions.

Table 5 Population of Jersey in 2040 on alternative migration assumptions

Annual net migration	Dependency ratio	Population in 2040	Increase in population from 2024
+800	58.0%	112,580	6.7%
+600	59.4%	109,150	3.4%
+400	60.9%	105,720	0.2%
+200	62.5%	102,290	-3.1%
Net nil	64.2%	98,960	-6.2%

The table shows that with net nil migration the population would fall by 6.2% by 2040, and the dependency ratio would increase significantly to 64.2%. Net migration of 800 a year would result in a 6.7% increase in the population by 2040 but with a still significant rise in the dependency ratio. The key factor is the ageing population. Even with net nil migration the number of people aged 65 and over is estimated to increase from 20,600 in 2024 to 27,930 in 2040.

There is a general wish in Jersey, expressed very strongly by some, for a population policy that would allow little or no 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 productive activity within the resident population.
- More responsive controls.

Annual updates have subsequently been published -

Common Population Policy Annual report 2023
Common Population Policy Annual Report 2024
Common Population Policy Annual Report 2025

Further information

The Jersey Heritage website includes a page which gives links to all the official census and population statistics.

The website https://boleat.com includes a page Jersey Population which provides access to papers analysing various aspects of Jersey's population.

Two Policy Centre Policy Briefs provide more detailed information –

Population policy – covering population policy in detail.

Ageing population – covering trends in the age structure of the population and the implications of the ageing population.