

Rural Iowa at a Glance

2022 Edition

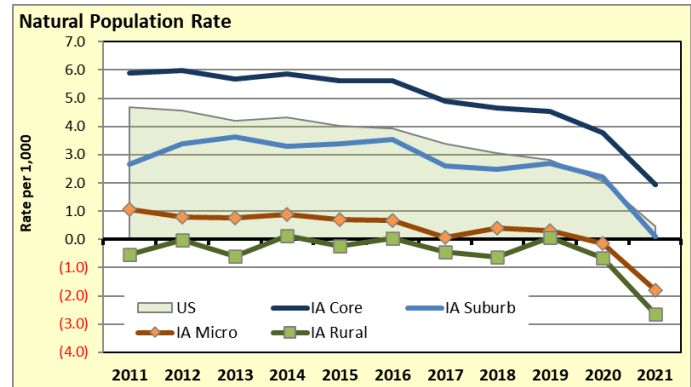
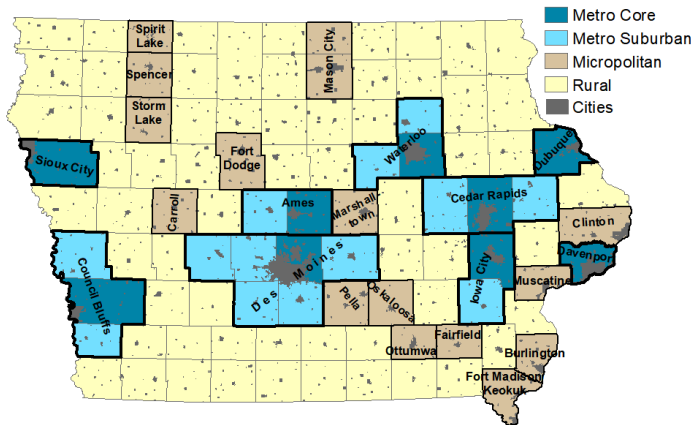
Population Trends



This publication summarizes current demographic trends in Iowa between 2011 and 2021. It is modeled after the United States Department of Agriculture's *Rural America at a Glance*. Indicators are taken from federal data sources at the county-level. *Metropolitan core* areas include central counties with an urban city over 50,000 people. *Metropolitan suburban* counties include the outlying suburbs of metro cities that are linked by commuting patterns. *Micropolitan* counties have an urban city of at least 10,000 people. *Rural* counties, technically called "non-core", have no urban city of 10,000 or more.

the past 10 years, but it leveled off during COVID and is now growing slightly faster than the rest of the nation.

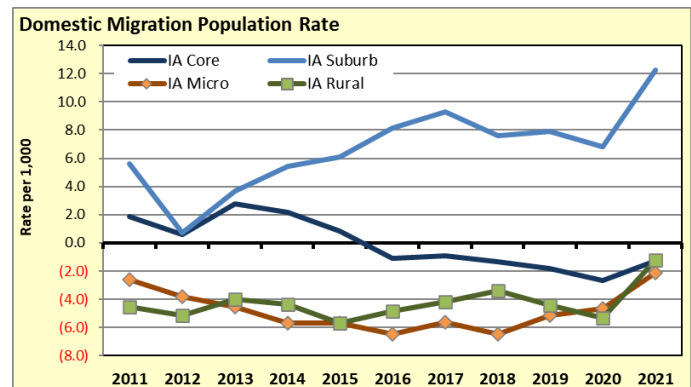
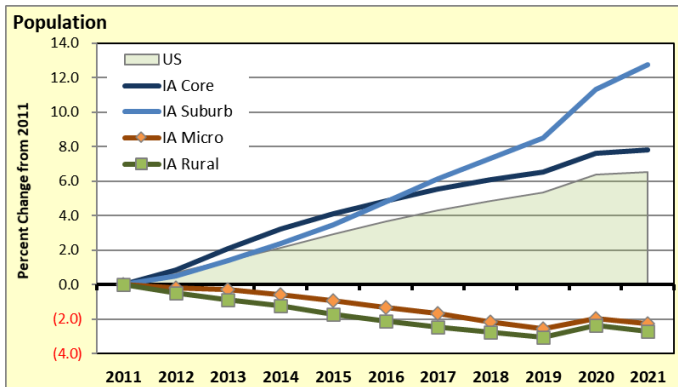
Natural Change



COVID-19 slowed natural gains across Iowa. Rural Iowa lost 2.7 people per 1,000 residents in 2021, where deaths exceeded births. Natural change was stable between 2011-2020, but is now losing people due to COVID. Micropolitan Iowa saw slow natural gains between 2011-2017, then went flat between 2018-2020. COVID resulted in natural losses of 1.8 people per 1,000 residents, where deaths exceeded births. Suburban metros saw fast natural gains over the past decade, but COVID slowed growth to zero, where deaths now equal births. Core metros experienced a baby boom until 2016, after which gains slowed down. COVID reduced natural gains, but births still exceed deaths for a 1.9 person gain per 1,000 residents.

Population

Net Migration

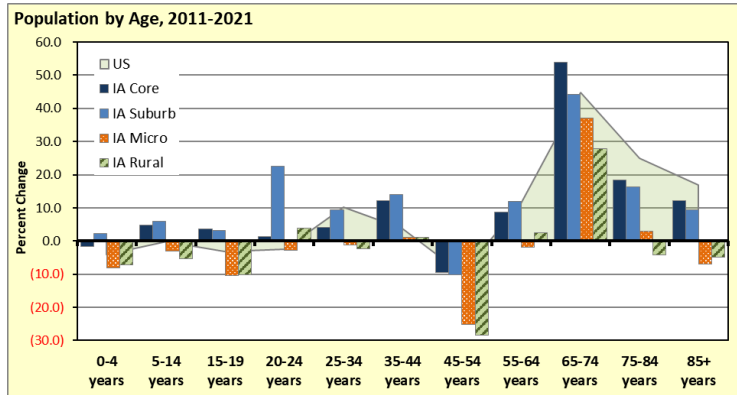


COVID-19 slowed population growth in metro cities, but accelerated it in suburbs. Rural Iowa continues to decline. Rural Iowa contains 23.7% of the state's population, and micropolitans are home to 14.7% of our residents. Both areas have continued to lose people since 2011, but losses stabilized during COVID. Metro suburban counties hold 12% of the population and have boomed over the past decade, even during COVID. Suburbs are growing much faster than the U.S. rate. Iowa's metro core contains the majority of the state's population at 49.5%. The urban core has grown fast over

COVID-19 slowed out-migration in rural Iowa and metro cities, but suburbs saw rapid in-migration. After a decade of sizable out-migration in rural and micropolitan areas, COVID stopped this outflow

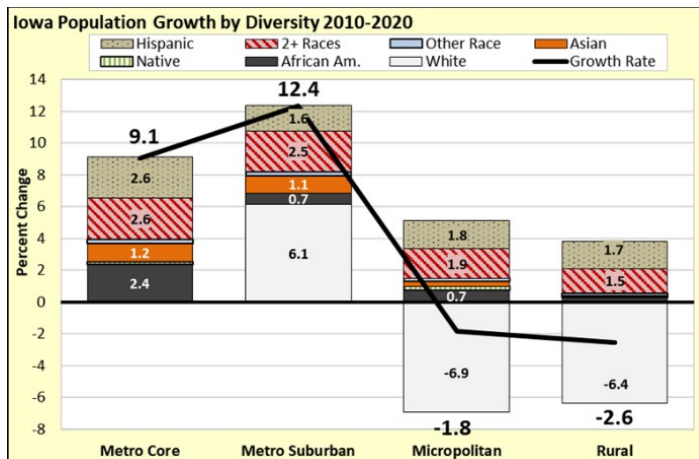
as people did not move. Out-migration rates fell from 4 to 6 per 1,000 people during the 2010s, to only 1.2 to 2.1 people in 2021. Out-migration also slowed in Iowa's metro cities. However, suburban metros saw massive in-migration during COVID, continuing a decade-long trend. Suburbs gained 12.3 per 1,000 in 2021 as many people relocated to these rapidly growing communities.

Age Structure



Metros gained children and younger workers, while rural areas lost them. Over the past decade, school age (e.g. K-12) children have declined in both rural and micropolitan areas (down 3-10%), but in metros school age children increased (up 3-6%). There were sharp gains in college age people 20-24 years old in suburban metros (up 23%) and small gains in rural areas (up 4%), but micropolitans experienced declines (down 3%). Among working age adults 25-44 years old, there were no gains in rural and micropolitan areas. However, metro core and suburban areas saw growth, especially among 35-44 year olds. Among older workers, non-metro Iowa lost nearly 30% of people age 45-54 years old, while metros saw smaller losses of 10%. Only metros had gains in 55-64 year olds. **Boom in seniors age 65-74 statewide, but elderly moving to metros.** There were fast gains in seniors age 65-74 years statewide due to Baby Boomers. The elder population 75 years and older also saw gains in metros, but posted losses in rural and micropolitan areas.

Persons of Color



Minority growth avoided sizable population losses in rural Iowa.

In non-metro Iowa, the white non-Hispanic population fell by 6.5% to 7.0% since 2010. Losses were offset by gains in Hispanics and those of multiple or other races, lessening the impact of population losses to only 2% and 3%. By contrast, in suburban Iowa the white population grew by 6.1%, as did people of multiple races, Hispanics, and Asians. As a result, suburban metro populations boomed by 12.4% over the past decade. In core metro counties the white population was stable, and the overall 9.1% population gain was entirely driven by people of color.

Summary

In micropolitan and rural Iowa – what we call non-metro Iowa – population losses have slowed due to fewer people migrating out of small towns and cities. However, rural areas shrank overall as deaths far exceed births. Rural Iowa continues to lose school-age children and working age adults. In metro cities, the population grew more slowly as natural gains fell and in-migration slowed. Suburbs, on the other hand, grew sizably due to massive in-migration as people moved into less populated areas outside cities. These population trends are likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic where deaths spiked, birth rates fell, and people did not move. Non-metro Iowa has rapidly diversified over the past decade. Rural and micropolitan areas would have shrunk by 7% over the past decade as the white population left. Gains in people of color offset those losses, so that small cities and towns only shrank by 2% since 2010. In the future, people of color will be an important part of non-metro Iowa's future students, workers, and customers. Natural declines and out-migration in non-metros will hamper future population and economic growth, which will likely result in further school consolidation and exacerbate existing rural workforce shortages.

Acknowledgements

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Data sources and methods can be found at <https://smalltowns.soc.iastate.edu/2022/10/14/rural-iowa-at-a-glance-2022/>

This work was supported by the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station. Iowa State University is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext.

