

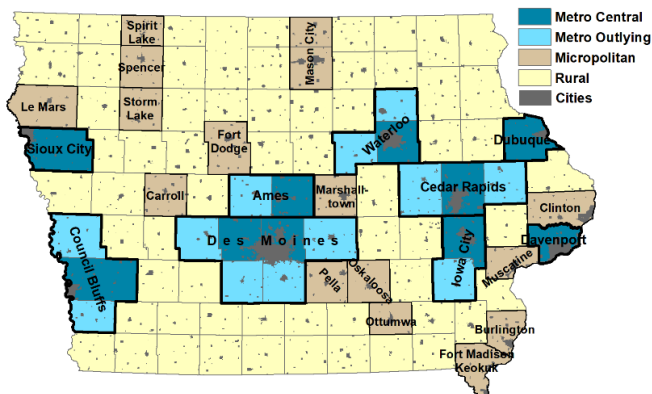
Rural Iowa at a Glance

2023 Edition

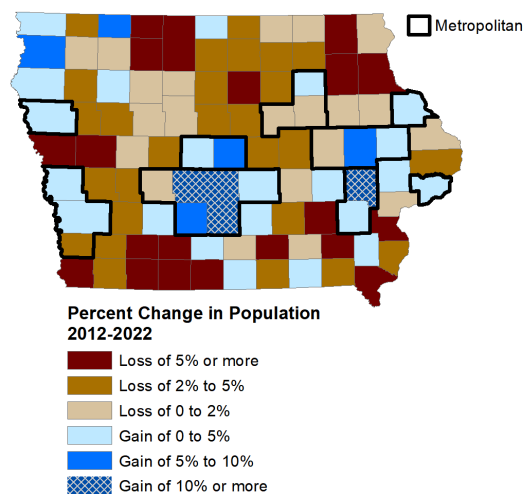
Population Trends



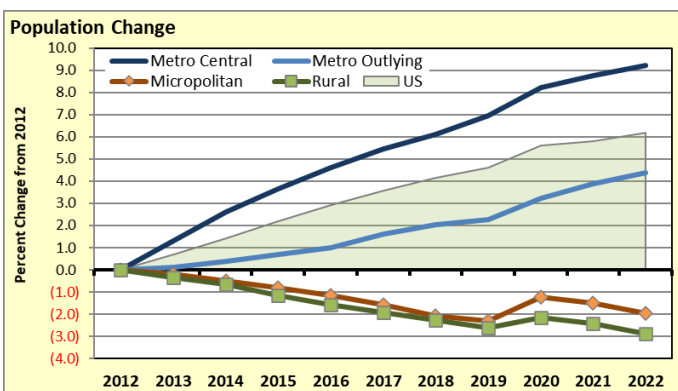
This publication summarizes current demographic trends in Iowa between 2012 and 2022. It is modeled after the United States Department of Agriculture's *Rural America at a Glance*. Indicators are taken from federal data sources at the county-level. *Metropolitan central* areas include counties with an urban city over 50,000 people. *Metropolitan outlying* areas include the suburban counties 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.



Looking at the county map, we see the fastest population gains since 2012 in the Des Moines, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and Ames metros; and also in Sioux County (Sioux Center) and the Iowa Great Lakes region in the northwest. By contrast, sharp declines occurred in much of northern, west-central, and southwest Iowa.

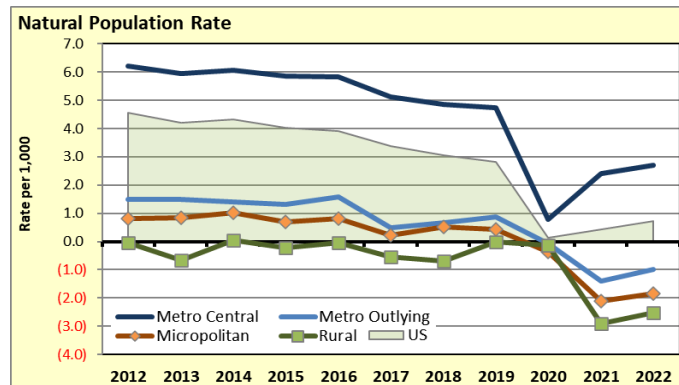


Population



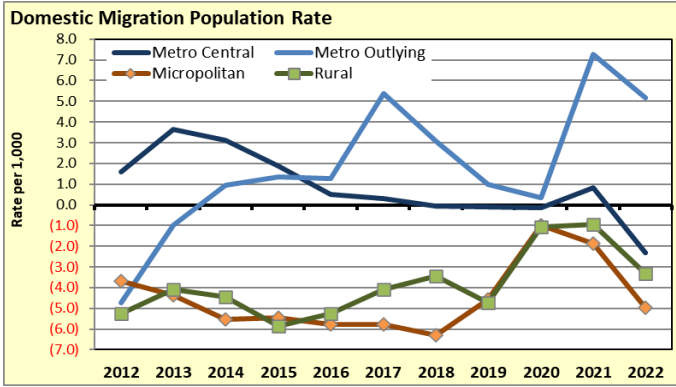
Rural Iowa continues to shrink after COVID-19, while metros continue to grow at a fast rate. Rural Iowa contains 23.2% of the state's population; and micropolitans are home to 14.9% of our residents. Both areas have continued to lose people since 2012, despite slower losses during COVID. Outlying metro counties hold 8.8% of the population and have grown over the past decade, even during the pandemic. Iowa's central metros contain the majority of the state's population at 53%. The urban core has boomed over the past 10 years, even during COVID, surpassing the U.S. growth rate. In short, COVID only temporarily slowed persistent rural population decline.

Natural Change



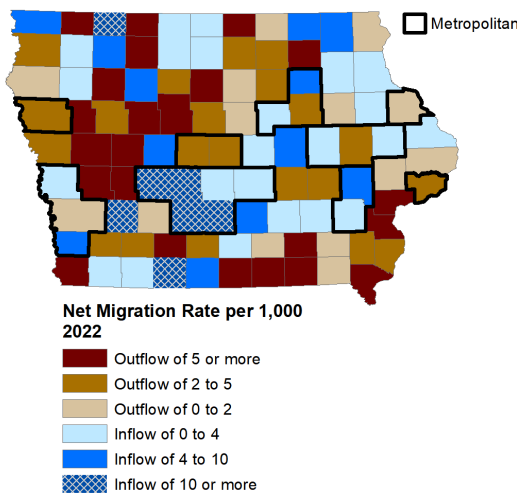
COVID-19 and related deaths continue to slow natural gains across Iowa. Only central metros have rebounded. Rural Iowa lost 2.5 people per 1,000 residents in 2022, where deaths exceeded births. Natural change was stable between 2012-2020, but COVID sharply increased deaths, causing natural losses. Micropolitan Iowa saw slow natural gains between 2012-2019, but fell to a natural loss of 1.8 people per 1,000 residents, again due to COVID. By contrast, central metros experienced a baby boom until COVID hit in 2020, after which gains slowed. More births and fewer deaths rebounded natural gains by 2.7 people per 1,000 in Iowa's largest counties. To summarize, COVID created a demographic hole in non-metro Iowa, where sizable deaths have not been offset by increased births, causing populations to fall.

Net Migration



Rural out-migration resumes following a lull during COVID-19. Outlying metros see rapid in-migration, while people left central metros. After a decade of sizable out-migration in rural and micropolitan areas, COVID stopped this outflow as people did not move. Post-pandemic, however, out-migration has returned. Micropolitans lost 5 people per 1,000 population and rural areas lost 3.3 per 1,000. For the first time in a decade, central metros experienced net out-migration, with many leaving to suburbs and exurbs. On the other hand, outlying metros saw massive in-migration since COVID, gaining 5.2 new residents per 1,000, as many people relocated to these rapidly growing communities. In short, persistent and sizable out-migration has returned to non-metro Iowa. COVID did not reverse out-migration, but only temporarily slowed it down.

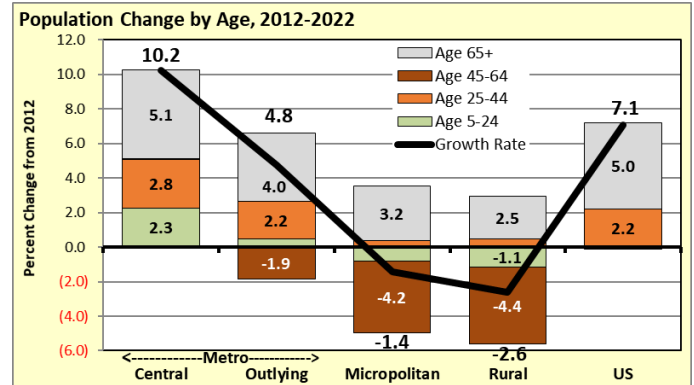
However, some rural counties did see net in-migration, despite overall population losses, as shown on the map. For example, although northeast Iowa shrank, it also posted strong rates of net in-migration. A similar pattern is found in southwest Iowa, with several counties seeing sizable net in-migration despite falling populations, notably in Cass (Atlantic) and Ringgold (Mt. Ayr) counties.



Age Structure

Rural Iowa is losing youth and working age adults, while metros are gaining both. Seniors are a growing population across Iowa and the nation. Rural Iowa shrank over the past 10 years, with the majority of losses being people age 45-64 (4.4% loss); and smaller losses among school and college age people between 5 and 24 years (1.1% loss). This was offset by a gain in seniors over 65 years (2.5% gain) and a small uptick in those age 25-44. Adding together losses and gains, rural Iowa

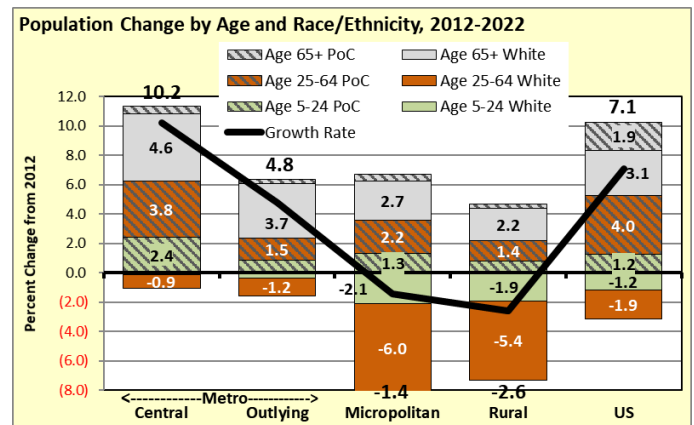
shrank by 2.6% between 2012 and 2022. Micropolitan Iowa shows a similar trend, but shrank more slowly at 1.4% over the decade. By contrast, central metros grew by 10.2%, fueled by gains in seniors (5.1%), younger working adults age 25-44 (2.8%), and the school age population (2.3%). Across Iowa and the U.S., we see rapid gains in those over 65 years as the Boomer generation ages. In short, the entire state is aging, but in different ways: non-metro Iowa is aging and shrinking, while metro Iowa is aging and growing.



From the table below, we see that in 2022 central metros had larger shares of school age and younger working age people than in other parts of Iowa. On the other hand, non-metro Iowa had a much larger share of senior citizens.

Population by Age in 2022

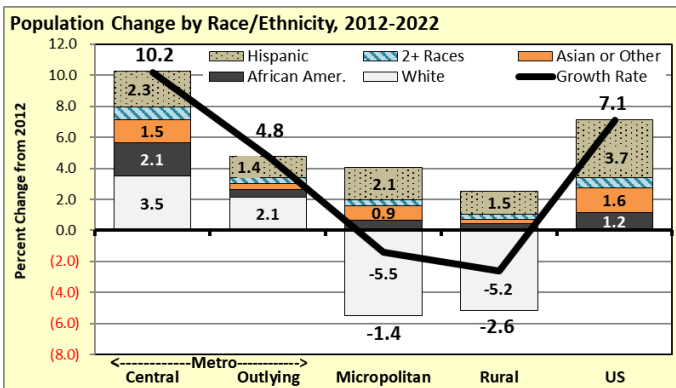
	Age 5-24	Age 25-44	Age 45-64	Age 65+
Metro Central	30.4%	28.6%	24.2%	16.8%
Metro Outlying	26.8%	25.3%	27.2%	20.7%
Micropolitan	27.2%	24.9%	26.2%	21.8%
Rural	26.7%	23.4%	26.3%	23.5%
U.S.	27.1%	28.3%	26.2%	18.4%



Nearly all of Iowa's population gains are from people of color (PoC), except for senior citizens. In rural Iowa, the working age population is both shrinking and diversifying at the same time. Rural whites age 25-64 fell by 5.4%, but this was offset by a 1.4% gain in rural people of color (non-white race or Hispanic) of the same age. Added together, rural Iowa's working age population shrank by 4%, although workers of color grew. The same trend is happening among rural Iowa's school age population of 5-24 year olds. White students fell by 1.9% while students

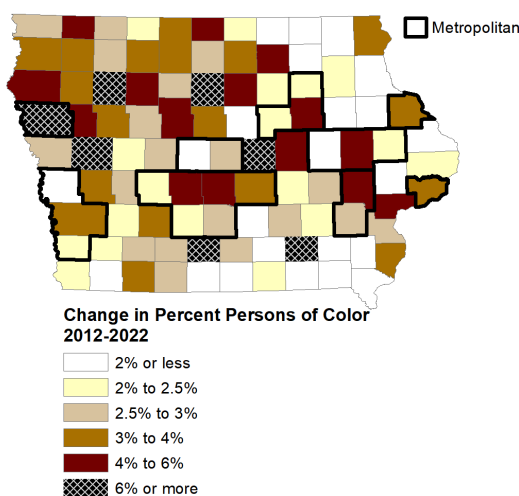
of color grew by 0.8%, resulting in an overall loss of 1.1%. Micropolitan Iowa shows a similar pattern, with large losses of whites and small gains in people of color for school age and working age residents. Even in the state's largest cities we see rapid diversification. In central metros, all gains in school age residents are from persons of color. For the working age population, whites age 25-64 fell by 0.9%, but workers of color grew by a rapid 3.8%. Statewide, the vast majority of senior citizens are white. In short, Iowa's future students and workers will be much more diverse.

Persons of Color



Minority growth avoided sizable population losses in rural Iowa. In rural and micropolitan Iowa, populations would have shrunk by 5.2% to 5.5% if not for gains in people of color. In micropolitans, gains in Hispanics and Asians offset three-quarters of the 5.5% loss in whites, slowing overall population loss to only 1.4%. For rural Iowa, Hispanics offset half the loss in the white population, limiting shrinkage to only 2.6% for the decade. By contrast, central metro populations boomed due to people of color, accounting for two-thirds of growth. Of the 10.2% growth rate since 2012, 6.7% was from persons of color and only 3.5% from whites. Central metros saw large gains all race groups, but in the rest of the state it was mostly Hispanic. In short, non-metro Iowa is both shrinking and diversifying at the same time, with people of color the only growing segment of the rural population.

Looking at specific counties, the percentage of people of color grew sizably in central counties of the Des Moines, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and Sioux City metros.



However, in non-metro Iowa that saw some of the fastest gains since 2012, driven largely by agricultural production and processing jobs. In north Iowa this includes Buena Vista (Storm Lake), Crawford (Denison), Marshall (Marshalltown), and Wright

(Eagle Grove) counties. In the south, fast gains occurred in Clarke (Osceola) and Wapello (Ottumwa) counties.

From the table below, central metros and micropolitans are the most diverse parts of the state, while outlying metros and rural Iowa are still overwhelming white, despite rapid gains in people of color.

Population by Race and Ethnicity in 2022

	White	African American	Asian or other race	2 or more races	Hispanic
Metro Central	79.1%	6.5%	4.5%	2.4%	7.5%
Metro Outlying	93.3%	1.2%	1.0%	1.2%	3.1%
Micropolitan	84.2%	2.8%	2.4%	1.7%	8.9%
Rural	90.5%	1.1%	1.6%	1.2%	5.7%
U.S.	59.6%	12.5%	7.0%	2.2%	18.7%

Summary

In micropolitan and rural Iowa – what we call non-metro Iowa – populations started shrinking again after a brief slow-down during COVID-19. Non-metros shrank as deaths far exceeded births, which means non-metros are unable to replace their populations without immigration. The problem is that more people are leaving than moving into non-metros, with rates of out-migration rising sharply. Non-metros continue to lose school age children and working age adults, the vast majority being white. The only growing segments of the non-metro population are people of color, but gains are not enough to offset losses in the white population. In fact, non-metro Iowa would have shrunk by 5% to 6%, but gains in minorities slowed losses to only 2% to 3%. In the future, people of color will be an important part of non-metro Iowa's future students, workers, and customers. This is especially true in counties with fast growing minority populations linked to the agriculture industry. In other rural communities, natural declines and out-migration will hamper future population and economic growth, which will likely result in further school consolidation and exacerbate existing rural workforce shortages. By contrast, metro populations boomed, fueled by natural increases in central metros and by in-migration in outlying metros. However, central metros saw net out-migration for the first time. The adult workforce and school age children are growing in metro Iowa, driven by rapid gains in people of color and no losses in the white population. In summary, the state of Iowa as a whole is both diversifying and aging at the same time. However, rural and micropolitan communities face the challenges of shrinking populations as people leave and death rates rise, while metro Iowa benefits from an expanding population base driven by in-migration and rising birth rates.

Acknowledgements

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