

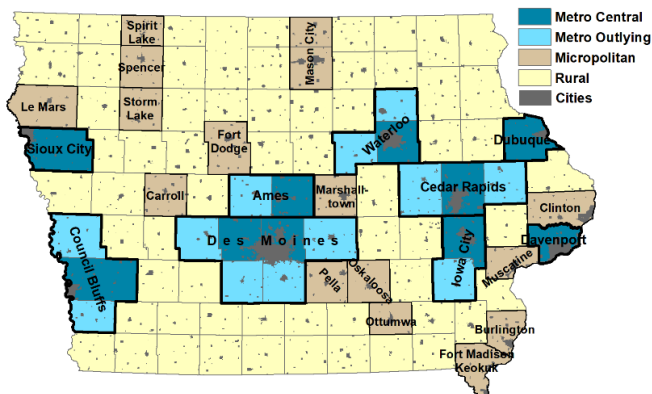
Rural Iowa at a Glance

2024 Edition

Population Trends



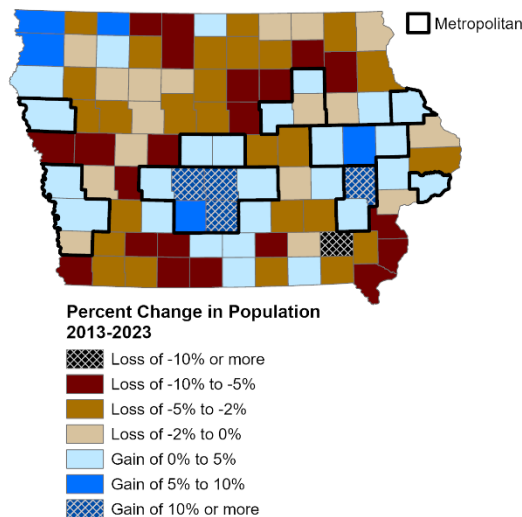
This publication summarizes current demographic trends in Iowa between 2013 and 2023. It is modeled after the United States Department of Agriculture's *Rural America at a Glance*. Indicators are taken from federal data sources at the county-level. *Metropolitan central* areas include counties with an 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.



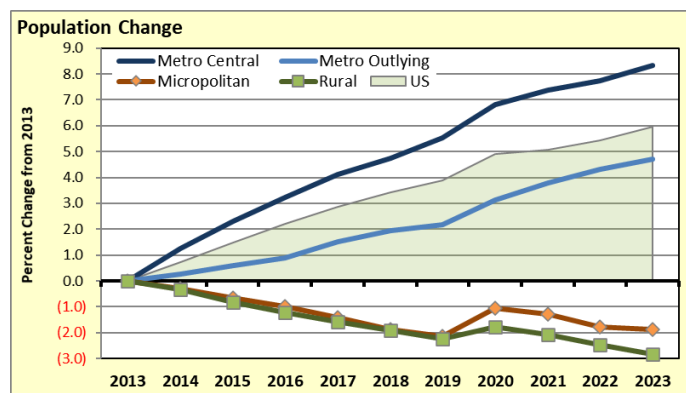
Population

The Des Moines metro saw fast growth, with Dallas County's population booming by 48%, followed by Warren and Polk counties at 16.5% and 11.6%.

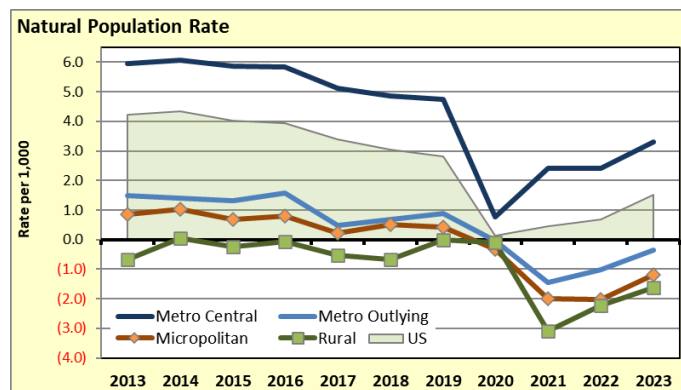
Johnson County in the Iowa City metro grew by 12.3%. Other sizable population gains occurred in the Cedar Rapids metro, the Iowa Great Lakes region, and the northwest corner of the state in Lyon and Sioux counties. By contrast, sharp declines occurred in much of northern, west-central, and southern Iowa. In particular, Jefferson County (Fairfield) shrank by 12.4%, and Adams (Corning) and Fremont (Sidney) counties fell by 8.8% since 2013.



Natural Change



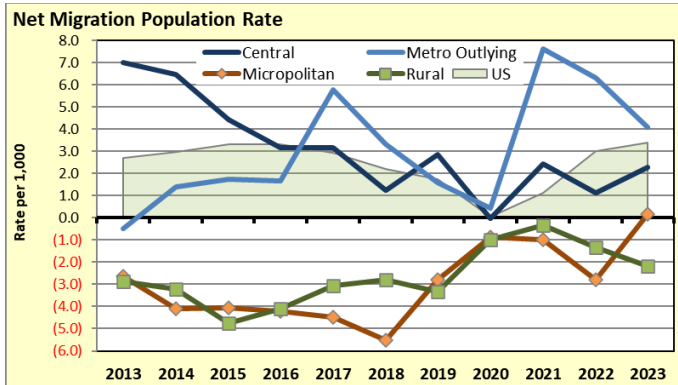
Rural Iowa continues to shrink after COVID-19, while metros are growing at a fast rate. Rural Iowa contains 23.1% of the state's population, and micropolitans are home to 14.9% of our residents. Both areas have continued to lose people since 2013, despite slower losses during COVID. Outlying metro counties 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.



Fewer deaths and more births have increased natural change, but it is still below pre-COVID levels. Rural Iowa lost 1.6 people per 1,000 residents in 2023, where deaths exceeded births. Natural change was stable between 2013-2020, but COVID sharply increased deaths, causing natural losses of 3.1 deaths per 1,000. Micropolitan Iowa saw slow natural gains between 2013-2019, but COVID caused natural losses. By contrast, central metros experienced a baby boom until COVID hit in 2020. Since then, more births and fewer deaths rebounded natural gains by 3.3 people per 1,000 in Iowa's largest counties. Counties that are shrinking fastest due to natural population loss are Ringgold (Mt. Ayr),

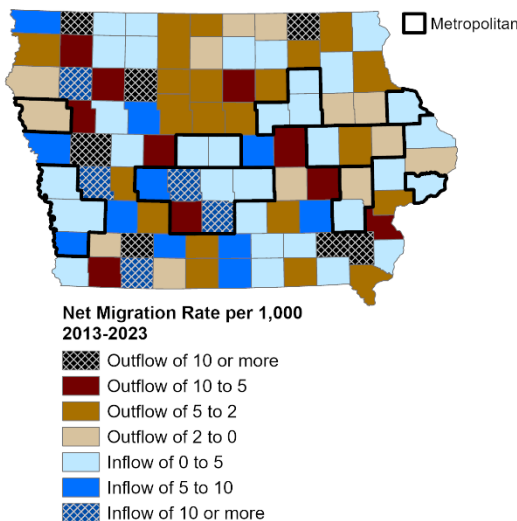
Monona (Onawa), Hardin (Iowa Falls), and Montgomery (Red Oak) – having 6 or more deaths than births per 1,000 people. By contrast, there is a baby boom in Dallas (Des Moines metro), Davis (Bloomfield), Sioux (Orange City), and Buena Vista (Storm Lake) counties, posting 6 more births than deaths. To summarize, 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 COVID-19. More people moving into micropolitans in 2023. Metros attract migrants. 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 to rural Iowa, losing 2.2 people per 1,000 residents. Micropolitans saw a large jump in net in-migration from last year, rising from an out-flow of 2.8 people in 2022 to a small inflow in 2023. This was caused by sizable international migration into Marshall County (Marshalltown); and sizable domestic migration into Marion County (Pella). Outlying metros saw slower in-migration, falling from a high of 7.6 per 1,000 in 2021 down to 4.1 in 2023 – mostly due to the movement of people away from and then into larger cities during COVID. Central metros experienced a net in-migration of 2.3 new people per 1,000 residents. In short, persistent and sizable out-migration has returned to non-metro Iowa following COVID.

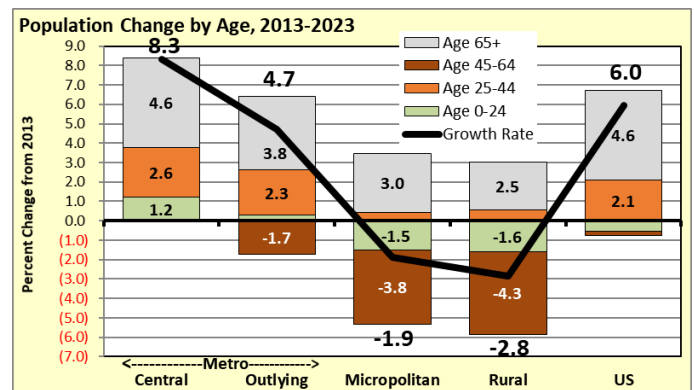
However, some rural counties did see sizable net in-migration, as shown on the map. For example, Cherokee, Shelby (Harlan), and Taylor (Bedford) counties all had net gains, with international in-migrants making up a large share in the last two counties. On the other hand, 7 rural counties saw 10 or more people leave



than move in. The worst out-migration occurred in Henry County (Mt. Pleasant), where 33 people left per 1,000 residents. Sizable out-migration also occurred in Howard (Cresco), Jefferson (Fairfield), Crawford (Denison), Osceola (Sibley), Adams (Corning), and Pocahontas 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 (4.3% loss); and smaller losses among school and college-age people under 25 years of age (1.6% 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 2.8% between 2013 and 2023. Micropolitan Iowa shows a similar trend, but shrank more slowly at 1.4% over the decade. By contrast, central metros grew by 8.3%, fueled by gains in seniors (4.6%), working adults age 25-44 (2.6%), and younger populations (1.2%). 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. For rural Iowa, this means fewer children in public schools which may lead to consolidation; and a fast shrinking pool of working-age adults that will lead to labor shortages.



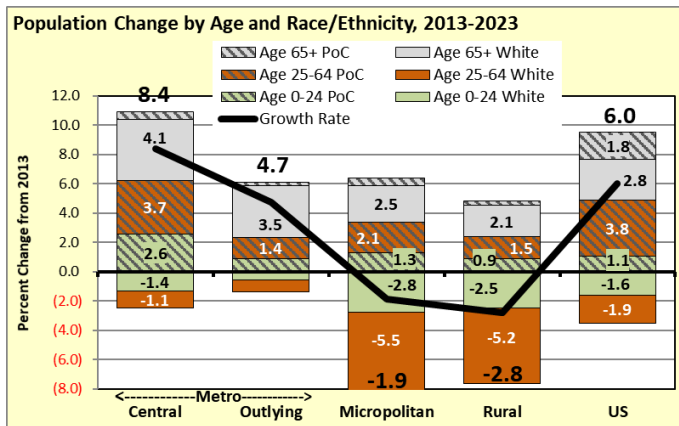
From the table below, we see that in 2023 central metros had larger shares of school age and younger working-age people than in other parts of Iowa. On the other hand, non-metro Iowa had much larger shares of senior citizens.

Population by Age in 2023

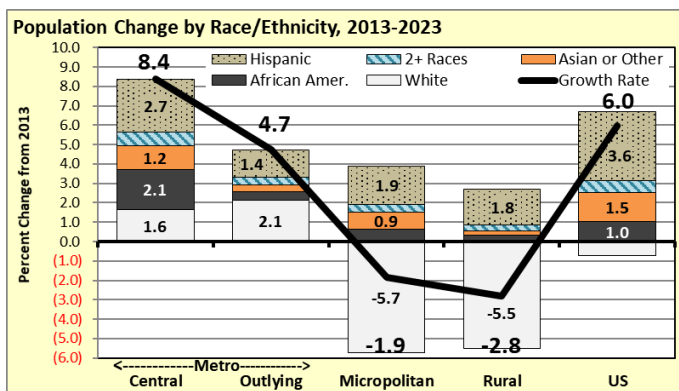
	Age 0-24	Age 25-44	Age 45-64	Age 65+
Metro Central	34.3%	27.0%	22.7%	16.0%
Metro Outlying	30.7%	24.0%	25.4%	19.9%
Micropolitan	31.2%	23.4%	24.4%	20.9%
Rural	30.9%	22.2%	24.5%	22.5%
U.S.	30.9%	26.9%	24.6%	17.7%

Except for senior citizens, all of Iowa's population gains are from people of color (PoC). In rural Iowa, the working-age population is both shrinking and diversifying at the same time. Rural whites age 25-64 fell by 5.2%, but this was offset by a 1.5% 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 3.7%, although workers of color grew.

The same trend is happening among rural Iowa's child and school age population under age 25. White youth fell by 2.5%, while students of color grew by 0.9%, resulting in an overall loss of 1.6%. Micropolitan Iowa shows a similar pattern, where youth and working-age adults are becoming more diverse due to declines in whites and gains in people of color. 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 1.1%, but workers of color grew by a rapid 3.7%. Statewide, the vast majority of senior citizens are white. In short, Iowa's future students and workforce will be much more diverse.



Persons of Color

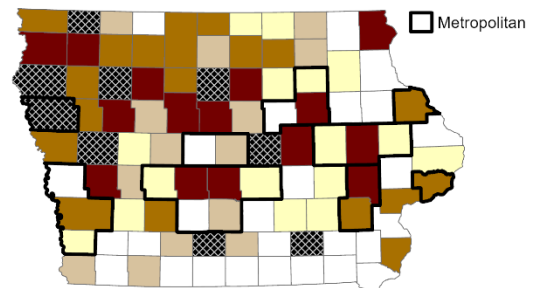


Minority growth avoided sizable population losses in non-metro Iowa.

In rural and micropolitan Iowa, populations would have shrunk by 5.5% to 5.7% if not for gains in people of color. In micropolitans, gains in Hispanics and other persons of color offset 70% of white losses, slowing overall population loss to only 1.9%. For rural Iowa, Hispanics offset 50% of white population losses, limiting shrinkage to only a 2.8% decline over the decade. By contrast, central metro populations boomed due to people of color, accounting for 80% of growth. Of the 8.4% growth rate since 2013, 6.8% was from persons of color and only 1.6% from whites. Central metros saw large gains across 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 the Des Moines, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and Sioux City

metros. However, it was non-metro Iowa that saw some of the fastest gains since 2013, driven largely by agricultural production and processing jobs. There was a 10 percentage point gain in Wright (Eagle Grove), Buena Vista (Storm Lake), and Wapello (Ottumwa) counties. Other fast gains occurred in Marshall (Marshalltown), Clarke (Osceola), Osceola (Sibley), Crawford (Denison), and Plymouth (Le Mars) counties.



Change in Percent Persons of Color 2013-2023

- 2% or less
- 2% to 2.5%
- 2.5% to 3%
- 3% to 4%
- 4% to 6%
- 6% or more

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. The most diverse counties tend to be located in non-metro Iowa. For example, nearly half of residents in Buena Vista (Storm Lake) county are people of color, the highest in the state; as are over one-third of residents in Crawford (Denison), Marshall (Marshalltown), and Woodbury (Sioux City) counties. Overall, Iowa is still far less diverse than the rest of the nation.

Population by Race and Ethnicity in 2023

	White	African American	Asian or other race	2 or more races	Hispanic
Metro Central	78.3%	6.6%	4.5%	2.4%	8.2%
Metro Outlying	93.1%	1.3%	1.0%	1.2%	3.4%
Micropolitan	83.8%	2.8%	2.6%	1.7%	9.2%
Rural	89.9%	1.1%	1.6%	1.2%	6.2%
U.S.	58.4%	12.6%	7.1%	2.4%	19.5%

Summary

Rural Iowa continues to lose population, driven by large out-migration (people leaving) and natural decline (more deaths than births). The hoped-for rural rebound due to COVID did not occur. Most people leaving rural areas are youth under 25 years of age, and experienced workers age 45-64. Despite a shrinking and aging population, rural Iowa is rapidly diversifying. In fact, gains in people of color avoided sizable population losses; and are the source of growth for children and working-age adults in rural Iowa. By contrast, metro populations continue to boom through fast in-migration and high birth rates, resulting in a younger population and workforce.

Prepared by David Peters, professor and extension rural sociologist.

For more information on data sources and methods, refer to <https://smalltowns.soc.iastate.edu/rural-iowa-at-a-glance>

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