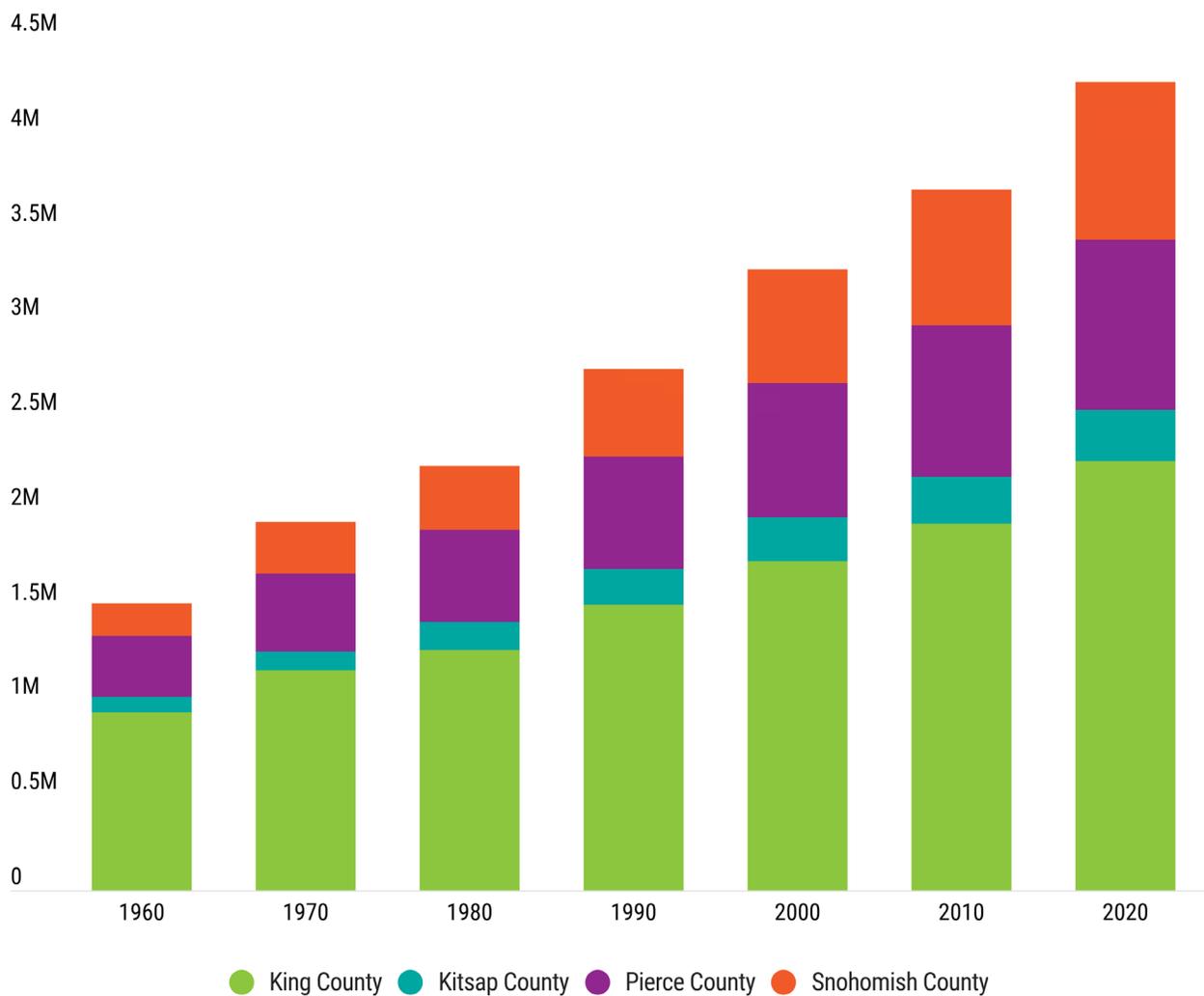




Population Change and Migration

The population of the four-county central Puget Sound region was estimated at 4,264,200 in 2020. The region has gained 2.8 million people since 1960. Over half of this increase (56%) can be attributed to net growth from people moving here.

Population of the Central Puget Sound: Decennial, 1960–2020

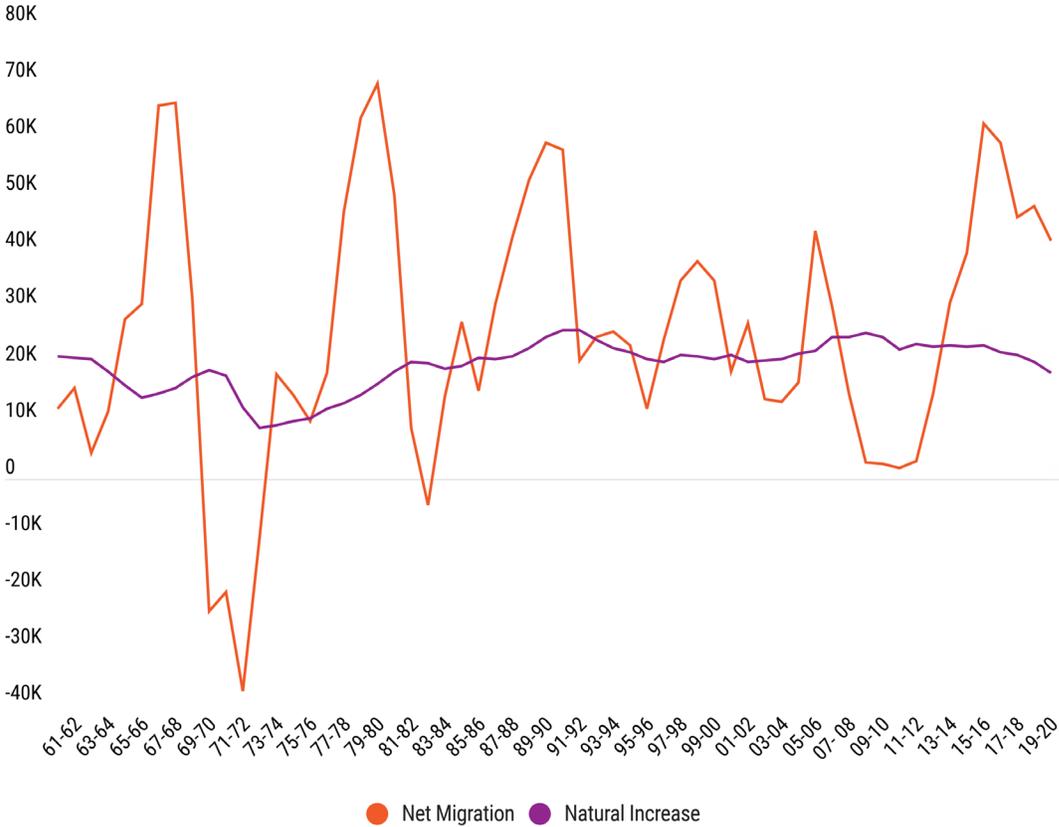


Components of Population Change and Migration

In-migration, fueled by a strong job market, was a bigger driver of population growth from 2010 to 2020 than in any other decade. The region experienced similarly robust peak levels of net migration during the late sixties and late seventies/early eighties.

Population change is a function of two components: **natural increase** (births minus deaths) and **net migration** (people moving into an area minus people moving out). Since 1960, a net million and a half people have migrated to the region, according to estimates by the state Office of Financial Management (OFM). Net migration has contributed 56% of the region’s total population growth. Natural increase has added 1.2 million people and accounted for 44% of the growth.

Annual Population Change by Component, Central Puget Sound Region, 1960–2020



Components of Change by County

Net migration is the primary driver behind population growth trends in the region. While growth from natural increase remains relatively stable from year to year, net migration is far more volatile, rising and falling in response to the strength of job opportunities and attractions in central Puget Sound relative to other places.

King County has experienced large shifts in migration over the years. In the first decade of the millennium, just 39% of the county's growth was from new transplants. But that trend reversed from 2010 to 2020, with 63% of the growth coming from people moving into the county.

Snohomish County also had about 63% of its growth from migration this decade, up from 45% in the 2000 to 2010 period. Over the last six decades, Snohomish is the only county in the region that has experienced more migration than natural growth in every decade. People moving into Kitsap County made up 59% of the population's increase. Pierce County added nearly the same total population as Snohomish, but its in-migration rate of 53% was the lowest in the region.

| County | Item | 1960–1970 | 1970–1980 | 1980–1990 | 1990–2000 | 2000–2010 | 2010–2020 | % Share by Component 2010-2020 | 1960–2020 | % Share by Component 1960-2020 |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| King | Net Migration | 119,700 | 55,700 | 140,200 | 120,000 | 75,500 | 208,300 | 63.2% | 719,400 | 54.3% |
| | Natural Increase | 104,700 | 54,900 | 97,200 | 109,700 | 118,700 | 121,200 | 36.8% | 606,300 | 45.7% |
| | Total Population Change | 224,400 | 110,500 | 237,400 | 229,700 | 194,200 | 329,600 | | 1,325,800 | |
| Kitsap | Net Migration | 9,800 | 36,400 | 25,900 | 24,400 | 7,700 | 12,500 | 59.2% | 116,800 | 62.1% |
| | Natural Increase | 7,700 | 9,000 | 16,600 | 17,800 | 11,400 | 8,600 | 40.8% | 71,200 | 37.9% |
| | Total Population Change | 17,600 | 45,400 | 42,600 | 42,200 | 19,200 | 21,100 | | 188,000 | |
| Pierce | Net Migration | 46,600 | 33,800 | 44,100 | 62,100 | 42,400 | 55,500 | 52.6% | 284,600 | 49.1% |
| | Natural Increase | 44,200 | 39,500 | 56,400 | 52,500 | 52,000 | 50,000 | 47.4% | 294,500 | 50.9% |
| | Total Population Change | 90,800 | 73,300 | 100,500 | 114,600 | 94,400 | 105,500 | | 579,100 | |
| Snohomish | Net Migration | 68,200 | 48,700 | 86,900 | 92,300 | 59,500 | 73,200 | 62.5% | 428,900 | 65.2% |
| | Natural Increase | 24,900 | 23,700 | 41,000 | 48,100 | 47,800 | 43,900 | 37.5% | 229,400 | 34.8% |
| | Total Population Change | 93,000 | 72,500 | 127,900 | 140,400 | 107,300 | 117,200 | | 658,300 | |
| Region | Net Migration | 244,200 | 174,700 | 297,200 | 298,900 | 185,200 | 349,500 | 61.0% | 1,549,700 | 56.3% |
| | Natural Increase | 181,500 | 127,100 | 211,300 | 228,100 | 229,900 | 223,700 | 39.0% | 1,201,500 | 43.7% |
| | Total Population Change | 425,700 | 301,800 | 508,400 | 527,000 | 415,100 | 573,300 | | 2,751,200 | |

From 2010 to 2020, the number of people coming into the region (349,500) greatly surpassed earlier decades. By contrast, the years 2000 to 2010 were the only decade where population grew more from natural increase than from new people settling here. The impact of two recessions cooled migration both at the beginning and end of the decade.

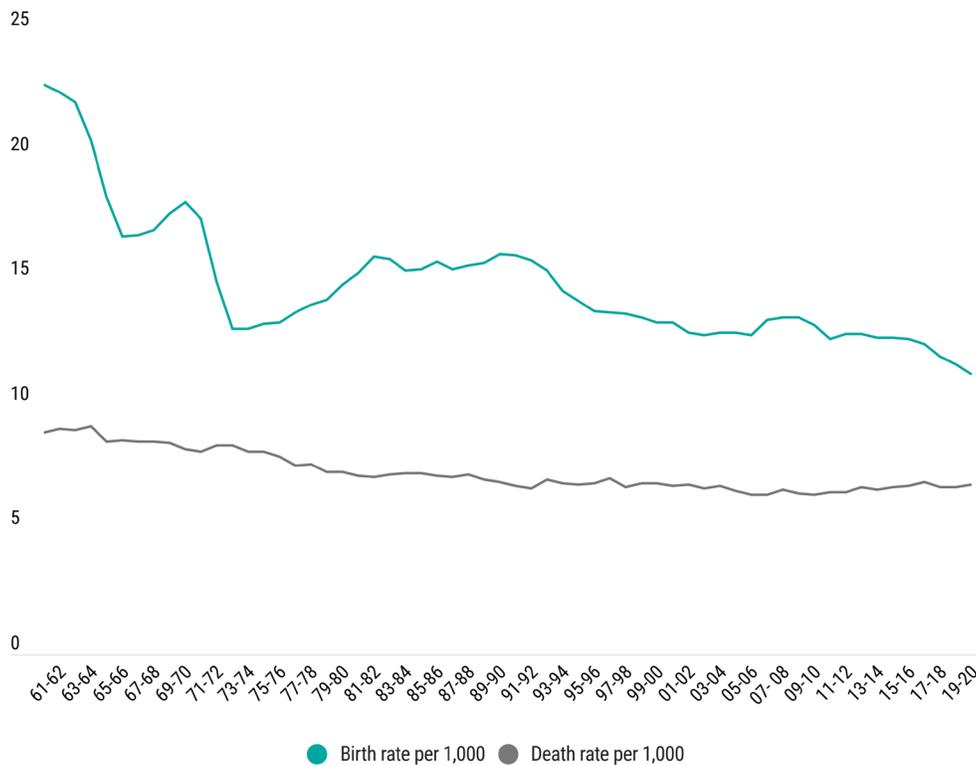
As the economy recovered in the 2010s, so did migration. From 2010 to 2015, it was close to the levels seen in the boom times of the late sixties and late seventies/early eighties. Since 2015 migration has dipped, although 2016 to 2020 still posted some of the highest in-migration numbers from the last 60 years.

During the last two decades, natural increase hovered between 20,000 and 26,000 new residents per year. This year, the natural increase was unusually low (18,700), the lowest it's been since 1980.

The rate of natural increase has been shrinking over time. Falling birth rates are likely part of the reason. The crude birth rate (number of births per 1,000 people) has trended downwards since the 1960s. This trend is also happening [nationally](#).

In addition, death rates, which had been dropping since the sixties, ticked up slightly this decade. With the region's population growing older, it seems likely that death rates will continue rising.

Birth and Death Rates per 1,000 Central Puget Sound Region, 1960–2020



Where People Are Moving From

Census Bureau data on county-to-county migration provides more detail about where people are moving from. The data come from the 2014–2018 American Community Survey, and the question asked was where the person lived one year prior to filling out the census questionnaire.

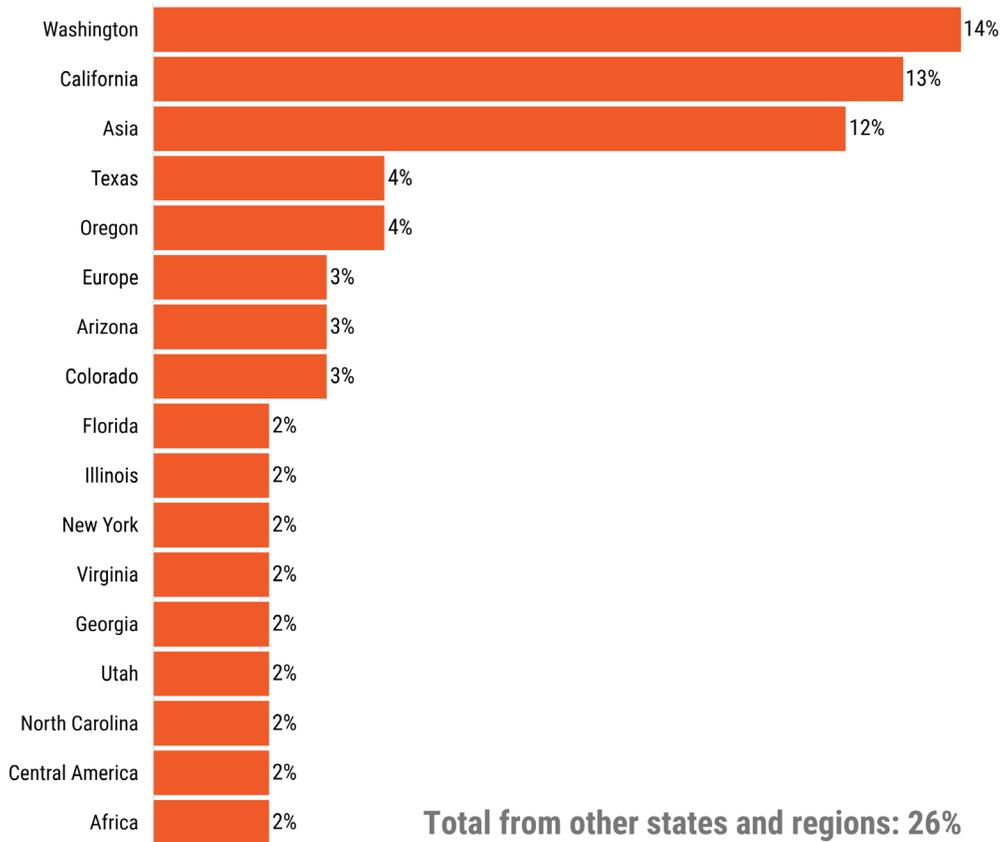
Over that five-year period, the highest number of transplants came from within Washington, with 14% of all movers to the central Puget Sound region arriving from the state’s other counties.

A large percentage of the movers came from California, comprising 13% of the region’s incoming residents and totaling 29,400 people—the equivalent of adding another City of SeaTac.

The central Puget Sound region draws people from all over the world. As many people came from Asian countries as came from Texas, Oregon, and Arizona combined. European countries were a source of more new residents than Colorado.

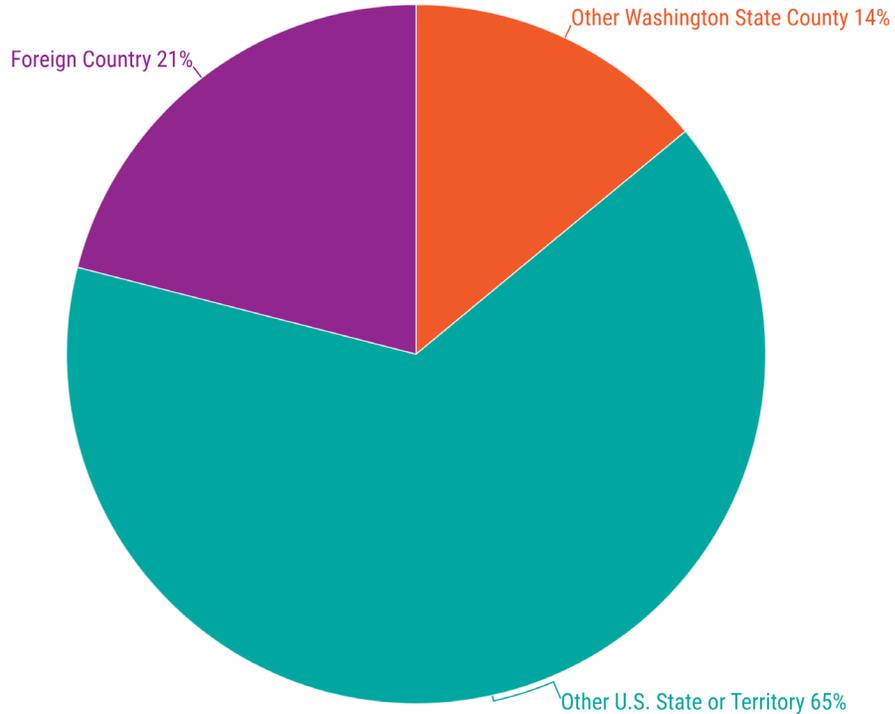
Place of Prior Year Residence

Census ACS 2014-2018



Place of Prior Year Residence

Census ACS 2014-2018



Population growth from 2010–2020 was nearly as much as 1960–1980 combined. Driven by a strong economy, migration made up a higher percentage of the region’s growth than it has in the last 60 years.

OFM’s 2021 population estimates will be released next summer and will show how much the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the region’s migration patterns and natural change.

Data sources:

Population, net migration, natural increase, birth, and death rates – Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2020 Components of April 1 Population Change, <https://www.ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/components-population-change>

Place of prior year residence – U.S. Census Bureau, County-to-County Migration Flows: 2014-2018 American Community Survey (Inflow), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2018/demo/geographic-mobility/county-to-county-migration-2014-2018.html>