

Chicagoland leads U.S. in population loss: Census Bureau

chicagobusiness.com/article/20170323/BLOGS02/170329938/chicagoland-leads-u-s-in-population-loss-census-says

Greg Hinz on
Politics



The population of metropolitan Chicago now has declined two years in a row, and the rate of decline is accelerating.

That's the grim news in new population estimates being released today by the U.S. Census Bureau, ones that certainly aren't good for the area but whose severity depends on whether the decline is the beginning of a trend or an aberration.

The estimates are that the three-state Chicago metropolitan area lost 19,570 people in the year ending last June 30, dipping to 9.513 million. That's bigger than the drop of 11,324 people the year before, according to the bureau.

The region did gain a little bit since the last census in 2010, moving from 9.461 million then. But the increase of .4 percent is a small fraction of the hike in the same period by large peer cities like Los Angeles (up 3.6 percent), New York (+2.8 percent) and San Francisco (+7.7 percent).

However, Chicago's decline last year and small rise over the past six years is roughly similar to that of other big Midwestern cities, lagging the Minneapolis/St. Paul area and Indianapolis, but ahead of Cleveland, Detroit and St. Louis. Even so, all of them did better than Chicago in the last year alone.

The metro area declines are heavily concentrated in Cook County, but show signs of spreading to outlying counties, too. For instance, the bureau estimates that DuPage County lost 3,000 people in the past two years, and that Will and Grundy Counties had small population losses last year.

The bureau did not break down the data by municipality, so it's impossible to tell for sure if the Cook County decline was in Chicago proper, suburban areas, or both.

One particularly stunning figure: net domestic migration, with an estimated 89,000 more people moving from the Chicago area to other portions of the country in the past year than those who moved in.

Liz Schuh, principal policy analyst for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, said the figures are "of concern for the region's continued economic success."

"Residents often choose to stay in or migrate to a region because of economic opportunity and quality of life," she added. While the region has recovered from the recession, and indeed has the largest workforce since recording began, "that recovery has lagged our peers."

Others suggested that the region, like much of the Rust Belt, eventually will return to slow-growth form after those who wanted to leave during the recession but couldn't do so for economic reasons finally are gone.

"My general impression is that domestic migration trends are reverting to historical trends," said University of New Hampshire demographer Kenneth Johnson.

Beyond that, "Natural increase is relatively stable, but note that it is at a low level historically," he added. Fertility remains low and mortality is starting to creep up in many areas, especially white areas. This might be a factor in the inner suburban counties like DuPage as well."

Local demographer Rob Paral agreed with the gist of that.

Over the decade as a whole, "We're flatlining. That's the trend that's going to remain in place unless something changes," Paral told me. The reasons range from the aging of the local population to a continuing loss of factory jobs.

But data also suggest that African-Americans are now leaving the region at a significantly faster rate than whites, Paral added. That suggests that rising crime rates and the loss of jobs on Chicago's South and West Sides are continuing to encourage residents to look elsewhere for a better life.

Municipal figures—what happened in Chicago and cities—should be available later this year.