

Metro Chicago shrinks again

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Greg Hinz on Politics

For the third year in a row, the population of metropolitan Chicago has dropped, and though the number of people is small, the trend is causing angst among local officials.

According to new estimates released today by the U.S. Census Bureau, total population of the tristate Chicago area slipped about 13,000—a bit over a tenth of a percentage point—to 9,533,044 in the year ended June 30. Chicago was the only metro among the nation's top 10 to shrink, although the growth in peer metros New York and Los Angeles was minimal, about 46,000 and 25,000, respectively.

The actual decline was concentrated in Cook County, which lost about 20,000 residents. But according to demographers at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Cook is just returning to the slow decline that pretty much halted during the subprime mortgage recession, in which migration nationally slowed to a crawl.

The real thing that's changed is that outer counties such as Will and McHenry aren't growing nearly as fast as they did in prior decades, combined with a sharp reduction in immigration to the Chicago area, according to Elizabeth Schuh, principal policy analyst at CMAP, which represents the seven Illinois counties in the region but not those in northwest Indiana or southeast Wisconsin. "Almost all of the counties except Kendall are losing," says Schuh, who's had a few days to study the data.

As has been the case in recent years, the decline has a clear economic aspect.

According to a new study by Schuh and CMAP's Aseel Tineh, the population drop since 2006 among native-born residents is exclusively concentrated among those who earn less than \$75,000 a year and, in the case of the foreign-born, less than \$25,000. But the region has gained more than 350,000 residents since 2006 who earn at least \$75,000 year, she says. (Those figures are not adjusted for inflation.)

Slow employment growth in many sectors likely is the reason, she says. "Our job growth is just lower than (in) other regions," for middle-skilled positions in fields such as manufacturing and administration that require some post-high school education but not a college degree. But among the college-educated, the region continues to grow.

Another finding: While immigration from Latin America has tailed off, more people are arriving from Asia, boosting the Asian-born population here by an estimated 60,000 since 2010.

The report's bottom line: "Continued population loss is a worrisome trend. While the region appears to be gaining high-income residents, this increase is not offsetting losses due to stagnant immigration and domestic outmigration of low- and moderate-income residents."

Look for the candidates for governor to grab on to this one quite quickly.