

# Mild growth, age structure shifts

## Alaska's population grew 0.3 percent from 2023 to 2024

By DAVID HOWELL

**A**laska's population grew 0.31 percent in 2024, topping 740,000 for the first time this decade. From a peak of just under 743,000 in 2016, the population had decreased through 2020 and then resumed growing slowly.

Alaska added 7,800 people over the last four years to reach 741,000 in July 2024, averaging 0.25 percent growth annually. The state continued to lose small numbers to net migration, but natural increase, or births minus deaths, easily made up for it.

Nearly all the gains have been in regions along the densely populated rail belt. Rural areas that grew steadily for decades are now losing population.

### Average population growth by region during this decade

The Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna Region grew at twice the average rate over the last four years, 0.51

percent per year, and the Gulf Coast was a close second at 0.49 percent. The Interior was the only other region to increase after 2020, growing 0.35 percent each year.

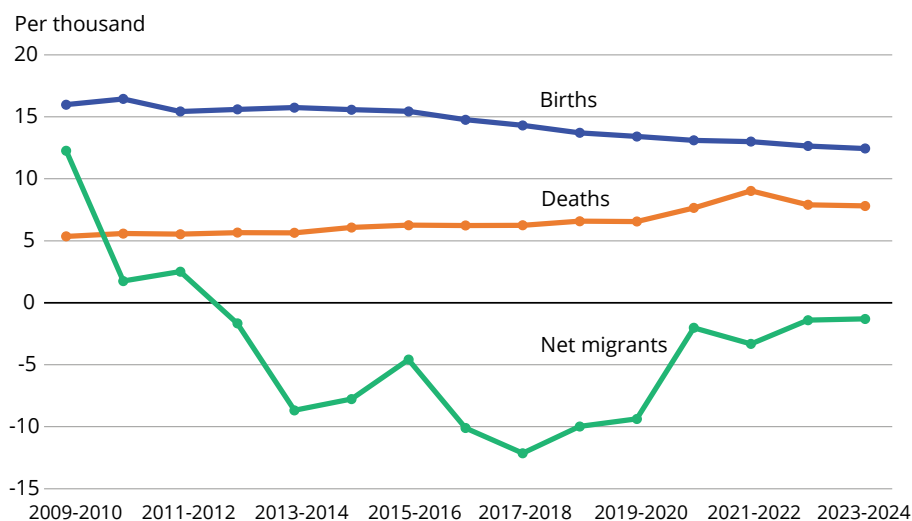
The Northern Region's decline has been the sharpest so far this decade at -1.06 percent annually, followed by the Southwest at -0.80 percent and Southeast at -0.55 percent. Declines are a new trend for the Northern and Southwest regions, which grew the fastest from 2005 to 2014.

### Births and deaths are stabilizing from previous decade's volatility

The three components of population change — births, deaths, and migration — have stabilized since the volatility of the 2010s, allowing the population to grow overall.

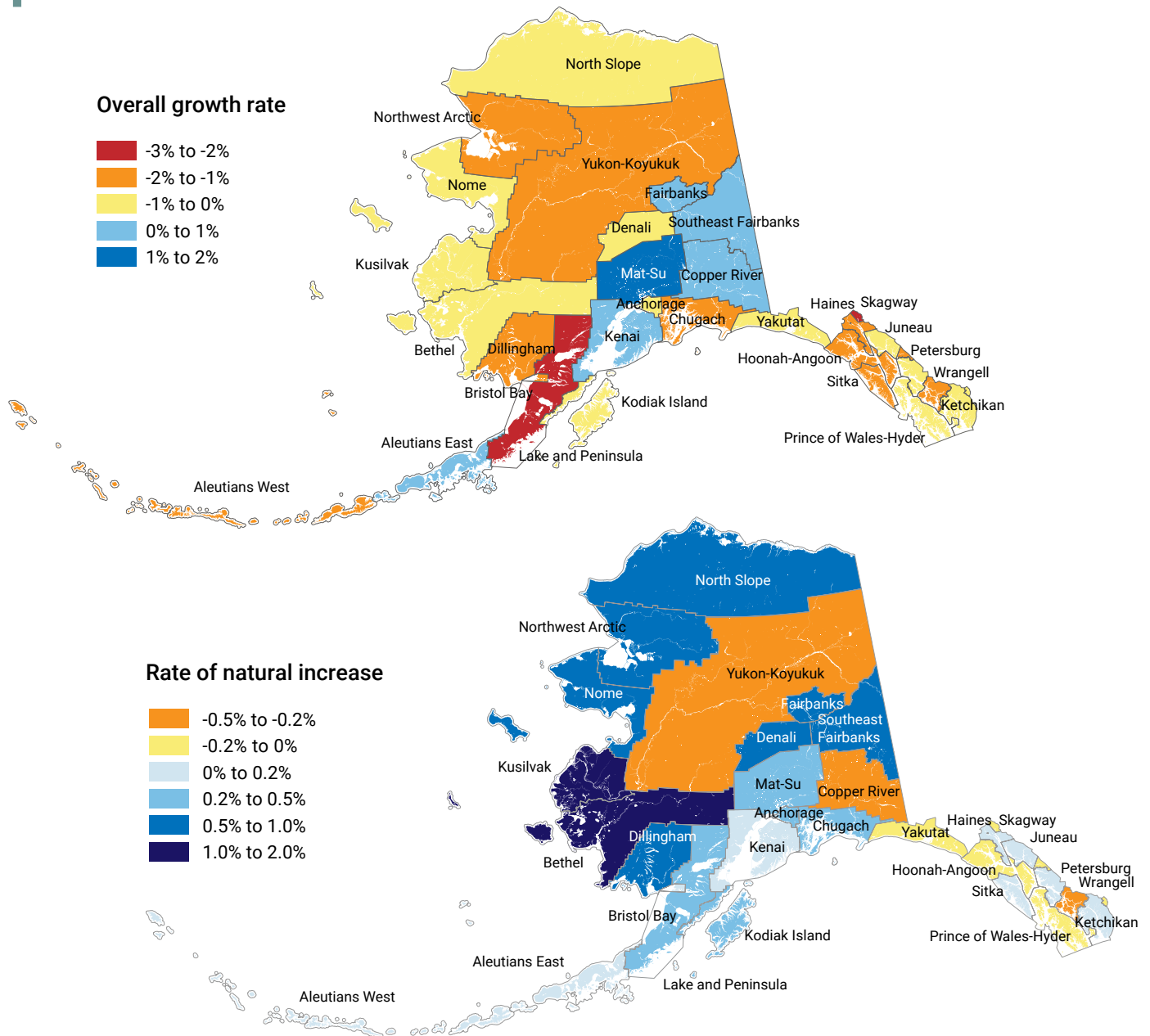
After fertility rates began a steady decline in 2015, the number of births fell rapidly during the latter half of the decade. Net migration losses deepened

### Yearly births, deaths, and net migrants per 1,000 Alaskans



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## Average yearly growth, natural increase rates by area, 2020 to 2024



**Note:** The growth rates shown for Haines are from 2021-2024. Haines' 2020 data are excluded because its population was significantly undercounted during the census.

**Source:** Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

enough late in the decade to cause overall population decline for the first time since the 1980s.

Fertility has leveled off since 2020, and while deaths are still rising, the distinct spike during the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided.

Net migration, or in-movers minus out-movers, has

remained negative, but the net losses haven't fallen below -0.4 percent a year this decade.

While net migration losses have been small over the last few years, the total migration flows into and out of Alaska each year have remained large, which is the historical norm. In a given year, over 10 percent of Alaska's population is moving into or out

of the state. Alaska's gross migration flow from 2023 to 2024 was the largest in over a decade, with 92,000 people moving either in or out.

## Births, deaths, and migration by region

Not all regions' components of change stabilized after the 2010s.

Natural increase declined everywhere from 2020 to 2024 but it changed the most in Southeast. The Southeast Region has averaged a yearly natural increase of just 54 people so far this decade, down from 339 in the 2010s.

The Gulf Coast's natural increase has dwindled from 482 per year to 195.

Net migration has also been a mix of ups and downs around the state in recent years. The inflow has increased for all the growing regions while declining regions' net losses have deepened.

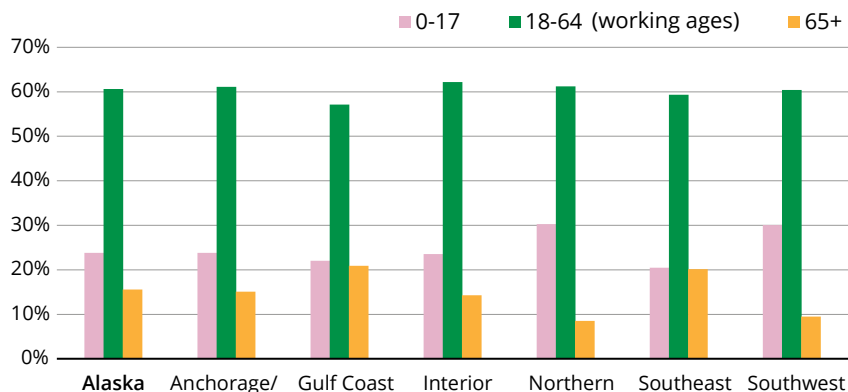
The Anchorage/Mat-Su Region netted 2,100 more movers per year from 2020-2024 than during the previous decade. The Gulf Coast's rate swung from a net loss to a gain. In the 2010s, the Gulf Coast lost 183 people to net migration each year on average, but it gained 212 every year after 2020.

The Northern and Southwest regions' rates dropped the most. The Northern Region averaged -140 for annual net migration in the 2010s and -517 thereafter. Southwest's net losses doubled, from -375 a year to -772.

## Alaska's changing age structure

As mentioned in [last month's issue of Trends](#), the senior population of Alaska has grown rapidly since 2010 and will continue to increase in the near term. While growth in seniors around the country has made many headlines, other less obvious demographic changes hold major implications for the state's future age structure.

## Age structure by Alaska region, 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Fertility rates have leveled off since 2020, and while deaths are still rising, the COVID spike has subsided.

The millennial generation, born between 1981 and 1996, is starting to reach middle age and aging out of their prime child-bearing years. Even if fertility rates remain stable — that is, the average number of children per woman during her lifetime — the number of births will continue to decline.

Those effects are starting to show in the numbers of school-age children.

## Declines in the youngest groups signal shifts for the school ages

Fewer children have been born in Alaska since 2020, which is now noticeable in the preschool population. The 0-4 age group is 4,200 smaller than it was in 2020, dropping from 48,000 to 44,000 in 2024.

As these kids start school, the number of 5-to-17-year-olds will fall because larger cohorts will age into adulthood and smaller cohorts will replace them.

Declines among the youngest ages span the state and are especially prominent in the Northern and Southwest regions. The Northern Region's youngest age group has decreased 15 percent since 2020, followed by Southeast at -14 percent and Southwest at -10 percent. The other regions' declines ranged from -7 to -8 percent.

The Northern and Southwest decreases stand out

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# POPULATION

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because those regions maintained higher birth rates longer than the state as a whole. (The birth rate is the number of babies born each year per 1,000 people.) Unless birth rates rebound, the number of young children in these areas will continue to decline.

The school-age population has grown about 1 percent since 2020, but all at the older ages. The 5-9 population decreased by 1,300 over that time.

Because the 0-4 group is 8,400 children smaller than the 13-17 group, the school-age numbers will decline even more in the coming years unless Alaska's migration patterns shift.

Half of the state's six regions' school-age populations have decreased over the last four years. Southeast's 5-to-17 group fell by 4 percent and Northern and Southwest by 3 percent. The number of kids in the Gulf Coast grew 3 percent and 2 percent in Anchorage/Mat-Su.

## The working-age population decreases vary across the state

As noted in [a previous Trends article](#), the working-age population (18 to 64) has been shrinking for a long time. In the last four years, Alaska's working-age count fell by 9,600 people, or -2 percent.

All regions have lost working-age people over that period, but the declines have been more dramatic in some. Southeast has lost 3,000 (-7 percent) since 2020 and the Northern and Southwest regions have lost 5 percent. The Gulf Coast's working-age decline was also larger than Alaska's average at -3 percent (-1,400).

Military buildups in the early 2020s buffered the loss of working-age people in the Interior Region, which was -1 percent in four years — a decline of slightly less than 1,000 people. Anchorage/Mat-Su lost about the same percentage (-2,000 people).

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## EMPLOYER RESOURCES

### Rapid Response services mitigate the impacts of layoffs

Many Alaska employers, like those nationally, have faced a host of obstacles over the past few years with temporary or permanent business closures, worker layoffs, and worker shortages.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development Rapid Response team's mission is to provide proactive customized strategies, support, and assistance to businesses, communities, families, and individuals to avoid or minimize the impact of job loss and closures.

The team is focused on assisting businesses with the retention of their workers by providing alternatives to layoffs through the exploration of layoff-aversion strategies. In the event of a layoff, Rapid Response ensures services are available to affected workers to assist in their transition to new employment as quickly as possible.

Working with the Rapid Response team before a

layoff can connect your business and employees with information, services, and programs geared toward continued employment or rapid reemployment to help through this difficult time, including:

- Incumbent worker training
- Job search assistance
- Resume preparation and interviewing skills workshops
- Local labor market information
- Education and training opportunities
- Unemployment insurance

Visit <https://jobs.alaska.gov/rr/> for more on Rapid Response, e-mail [dol.rrteam@alaska.gov](mailto:dol.rrteam@alaska.gov), or contact your local Alaska Job Center by going to <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices/index.html>.

*Employer Resources is written by the Employment and Training Services Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.*