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Recent Population Changes in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area

Summary: A look at the new U.S. Census Bureau population estimates. From July 2016 to July 2017 population fell in the Pittsburgh metropolitan statistical area (MSA), Allegheny County, and the City of Pittsburgh.

Based on the Census population estimates as of July 1, 2017, the seven-county Pittsburgh MSA had 2,333,367 people (making it the 26th largest MSA in the U.S.). Over half of the MSA's population, 1,223,048, is based in Allegheny County and one-quarter of the county's population, 302,407, resides in the City of Pittsburgh.

Population estimates from July 2016 and July 2017 in the Pittsburgh MSA show a drop of 8,169 people, or 0.3 percent. The MSA was one of 11 in the nation with July 2017 population counts between 2 million and 2.5 million. Of that group nine MSAs gained population, including Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Kansas City. Besides Pittsburgh the only MSA in the group that lost population was Cleveland where there was a slight drop of 0.1 percent to just over 2 million people.

Meanwhile, population declined in six of seven counties in the Pittsburgh MSA, with Fayette and Armstrong posting losses of 0.7 percent, the largest percentage drops in the MSA. Allegheny County's population count declined by 4,505, or 0.4 percent from 1,227,553 in July 2016. Butler County was the only county of the seven with a gain in population, rising from 186,207 to 187,108, or 0.5 percent.

The largest municipality in Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, lost 2,610 residents over the year ending in July 2017. But it is worth noting that the 2016 estimate for the city was revised upward in the latest data. Due to this upward revision to 305,017, the fall to the 2017 estimate of 302,407 made the year-over-year loss appreciably greater than it otherwise would have been.

As of this writing population estimates for the Pittsburgh MSA and Allegheny County have not been revised as was the case for Pittsburgh. But the trend from the 2010 Census through seven years of population estimates for the county and city seems clear—there were year-over-year increases until 2013 followed by year-over-year decreases for the county since then, and for the city with the exception of 2016. In terms of numbers of people, the latest population declines in Allegheny County and the city were larger than any of the other counties in the MSA.

With two years to go until the next official Census, what are the longer term demographic trends that might have an effect on the size and makeup of the local population? Two previous Institute studies are informative.

A decade ago an Institute report (2007-03) examined the components of Allegheny County's population changes—natural increase (births minus deaths) along with net migration (net domestic migration plus net international migration)—from the 2000 Census forward. Deaths outpaced births in the county from 2000 to 2007 by 11,585. International migration was a positive 14,334 while domestic migration was a negative 59,753, resulting in a negative net migration of 45,419. Along with statistical anomalies for demographic events that cannot be accounted for—what the Census Bureau refers to as a residual—there was an actual total drop of 62,456 in the county's population.

Replicating that study by comparing 2017 estimates to 2010 Census figures shows deaths continued to exceed births—but in this time period by only 3,264 and quite smaller than the 2000 to 2007 figure. The international migration over the period was 24,646, which was 10,000 greater than it was between 2000 and 2007. With domestic migration a negative 20,888, the resulting net migration was a positive 3,758. Factoring in the residual resulted in an overall decrease of 290 in Allegheny County's population over the seven year period.

In a 2016 *Policy Brief* (Vol. 16, No. 24) we examined the population changes by age distribution of the City of Pittsburgh's population. From the 2010 Census to the 2016 estimate the city gained in the age groups 20-34, 55-64 and 85 and over. The 20-34 age group accounted for over 30 percent of the total city population in both years, well above national averages for this age range. This is due in large part to the numbers of college and university students in the city.

The number of people in the 35-54 age group and the 0-19 age group fell from 2010 to 2016 and their share of total city population likewise fell. That strongly indicated that people in prime working years, likely with school age children, were leaving the city. Since that *Brief* there was a state Supreme Court decision upholding an arbitration award on police residency may have already had impact on these age groups.

In a bit of better news regarding population, the recent population losses in the county and the city are a small fraction of the declines from the 1990 through 2010 Census years. Nonetheless, the pace of natural increase and changing age distribution will hold important implications for the social and economic structure of the county and city in the years ahead.

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