

Scottish Borders Demographics Profile

April 2023

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Summary

The Scottish Borders is a medium-sized council area in terms of population size but in a much bigger geographical area than average for a Scottish Local Authority, giving it a unique set of challenges.

The population of Scottish Borders was 116,020 in 2021 and is increasing, but this varies at neighbourhood level. Parts of the main towns, particularly Hawick, are continuing to suffer population loss.

The Scottish Borders tends to suffer particular population loss in the 16-24 age group as school leavers find opportunities outside the region. The 45-64 age group make up a larger share of the population than is average for Scotland.

The 65-74 age group is growing the fastest and the over 75s age group is also increasing rapidly. This will have important resource implications for the next 15-20 years.

There are expected to be fewer children by 2028 than at present. The numbers of pensioners will continue to increase, as the older working-age population reaches retirement age.

Overall, the Scottish Borders is considered to have a more demographically fragile population than the Scottish average, due to its combination of population loss in certain areas and its rapidly ageing population throughout the region. This creates a higher proportion of older people who are financially and physically dependent on an unequal number of working-age people.

Male and female life expectancy has improved since 2001 but is starting to level off as the number of excess deaths from Covid-19 begin to have an impact on the long-term trends. Female life expectancy is higher than male life expectancy, but male has improved quicker than female to reduce the gap.

The number of births has been steadily declining in the Scottish Borders since 2001 due to demographic trends towards smaller, later families and a smaller proportion of women being of childbearing age.

The number of marriages and civil partnerships taking place in the Scottish Borders had already been falling due to demographic trends and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. 606 ceremonies were registered in the region in 2021.

The five leading causes of death account for around 35-36% of deaths, with a wide range of causes accounting for the remaining 65%. The leading causes of death in Borders men and women are: coronary heart disease, dementia, stroke and lung cancer. Also amongst the biggest causes of death are prostate cancer in men and respiratory disease in women.

Since Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, there has been an upsurge in the movement of people in and out of the region. More people arrived than left, indicating that the Scottish Borders is a moderately attractive place to live and work.

The number of households in the Scottish Borders is increasing slightly, in line with the Scottish average.

There is a trend away from larger traditional family household types to smaller, single adult or older-couple households. This will become more noticeable in ten years' time and could impact the housing market, particularly supported or assisted housing.

The 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2020) shows that 6% (9) of the 143 neighbourhoods (datazones) in the Scottish Borders are within the 20% most deprived in Scotland, and are known as "SIMD Quintile 1". These neighbourhoods are located in Burnfoot and other parts of Hawick, Langlee (Galashiels) and Bannerfield (Selkirk). "SIMD Quintile 1" is often quoted as a unit of deprivation when measuring the "deprivation gap", e.g. in educational attainment and child poverty measures.

Key to symbols used in this chapter

The following symbols are a quick-access guide to whether a demographic measure is in good health, or whether it has challenges, or whether it is merely a statement of fact with no judgement possible.

Red – Circle – Challenging / not in good state	
Amber (Yellow) - Triangle – Needs monitoring / near danger	
Green – Diamond – Doing well – keep it up	
Blue – Square – Informative only	

Scottish Borders Population Profile

Source: NRS [Scottish Borders Council Area Profile](#)

■ Current Population Estimates in Scottish Borders

On 30 June 2021, the population of Scottish Borders was 116,020. This is an increase of 0.7% from 115,240 in 2020. Over the same period, the population of Scotland increased by 0.3%.

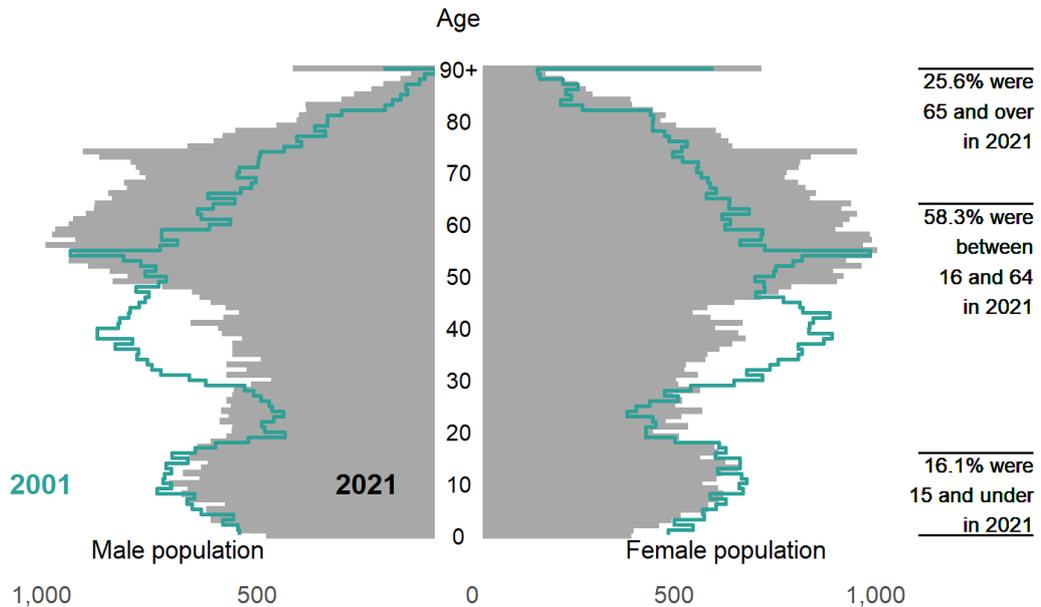
Scottish Borders Council Area has a fairly average number of people compared with the other 31 Scottish Local Authority areas, but in a much larger area than other Council areas. The majority of Council Areas, like Scottish Borders, saw a population increase.

Between 2001 and 2021, the population of Scottish Borders has increased by 8.5%. This is a faster than average percentage change out of the 32 council areas in Scotland, in the past 20 years. Over the same period, Scotland's population rose by 8.2%.

■ Population Change in the Scottish Borders 2001-2021

The spine chart below shows how the Scottish Borders population is distributed in terms of its age-sex profile, and how it has changed in the past ten years. The grey shaded area represents the age and sex distribution of the Scottish Borders population in 2021. The blue outline shows the distribution of the population ten years previously.

Scottish Borders
Population profile, 2001 and 2021



In terms of overall size, the 16 to 24 age group in the Scottish Borders was the smallest in 2021, with a population of 10,077. This is because of younger working age people leaving the region for work and education. Between 2001 and 2021, the 25 to 44 age group saw the largest percentage decrease (-22.9%).

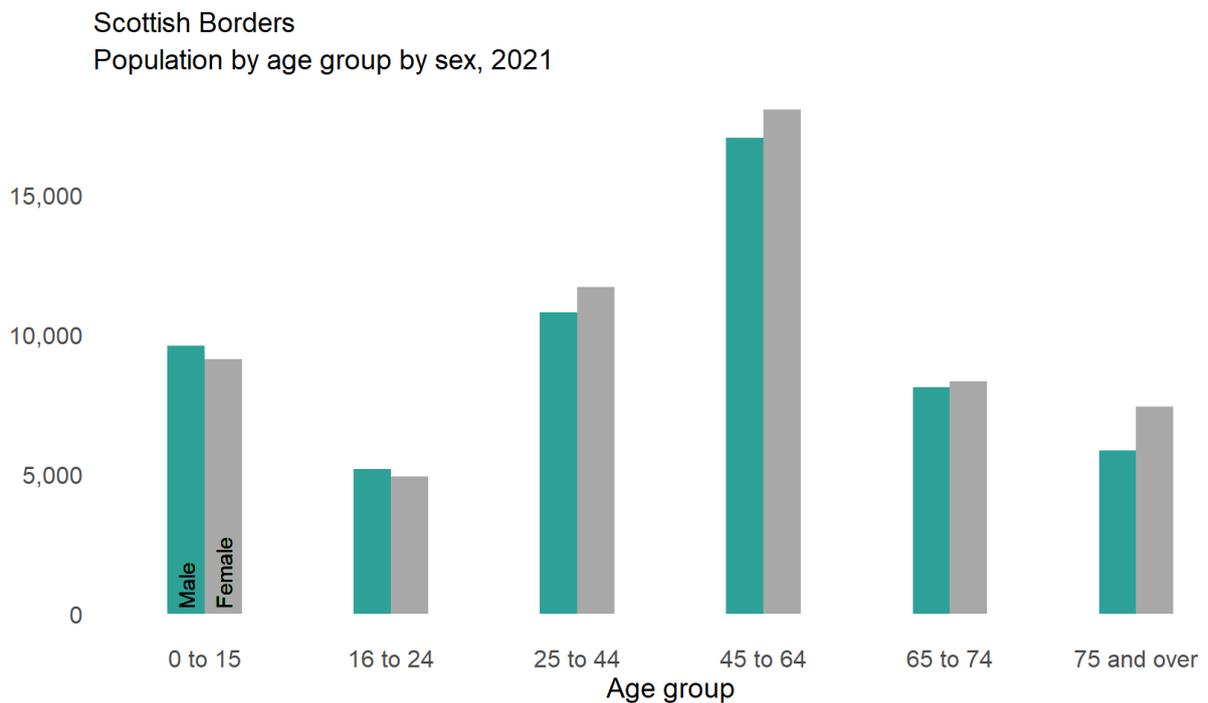
In contrast, the 45 to 64 age group was the largest, with a population of 35,080. This is probably due to people returning to the region in later life, or more people choosing the Scottish Borders for its quality of life in their later working ages.

Despite the tapering-off of the over-60s age groups caused by mortality, there is an increasing tendency for people to live longer than ten years previously, as shown by the grey shaded area not tapering off as much as the blue line in the chart. The 65 to 74 age group saw the largest percentage increase (+52.8%) between 2001 and 2021.

The increasing proportion of over 75s is the most significant feature of the Scottish Borders population, and indeed throughout Scotland, which will have widespread resource implications for the next 15-20 years.

The bar chart below summarises the age-sex distribution of the Scottish Borders population in 2021 from a different point of view. It shows that:

- Slightly more boys than girls are born in the Scottish Borders, in line with the national average.
- In 2021, more females than males lived in Scottish Borders in 4 out of 6 age groups. This may be because slightly more working-age men than women tend to leave the region in search of work and also because female life expectancy is higher than male life expectancy. This is the same throughout Scotland and means that women slightly outnumber men in the overall population.

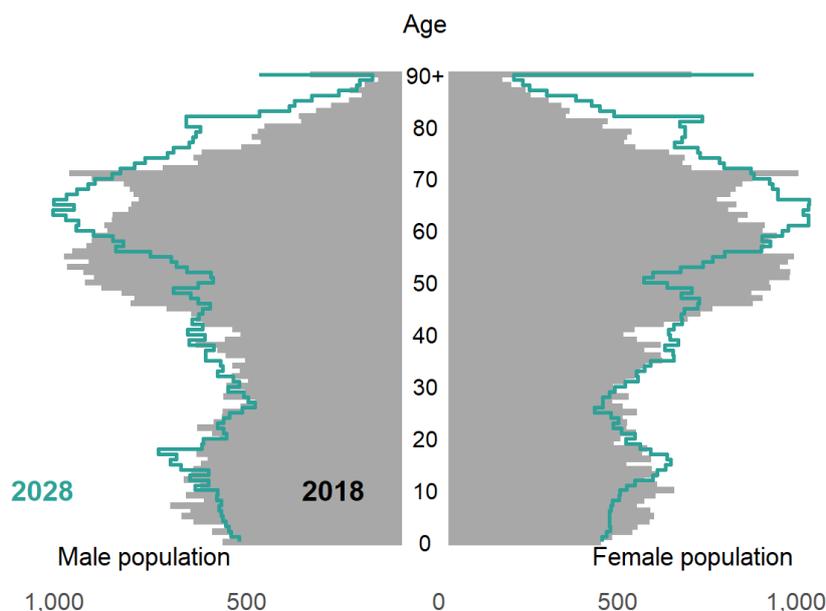


■ Scottish Borders Population projection

Between 2018 and 2028, the population of Scottish Borders is projected to increase from 115,270 to 116,435. This is an increase of 1.0%, which compares to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole. Scottish Borders will still be the 17th-largest region in Scotland, in terms of population size.

The spine chart below shows the age-sex population distribution in 2018 (shaded area) and the projected population estimates for ten years into the future (blue line).

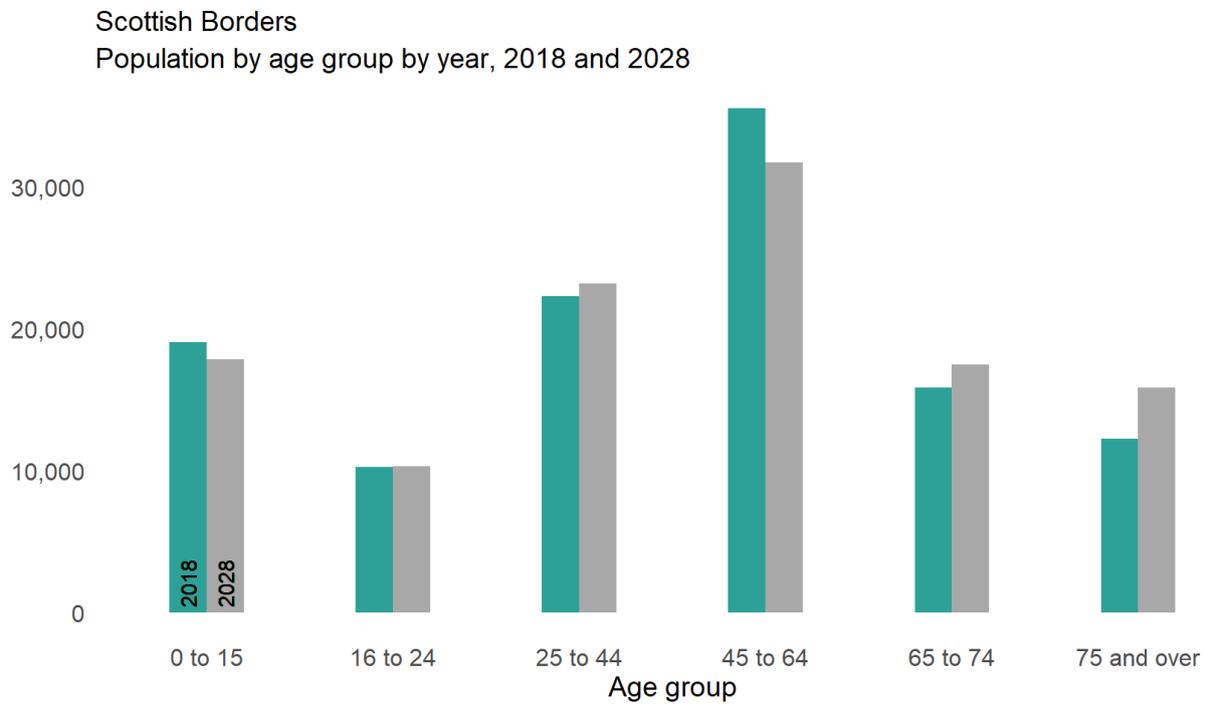
Scottish Borders
Projected population profile, 2018 and 2028



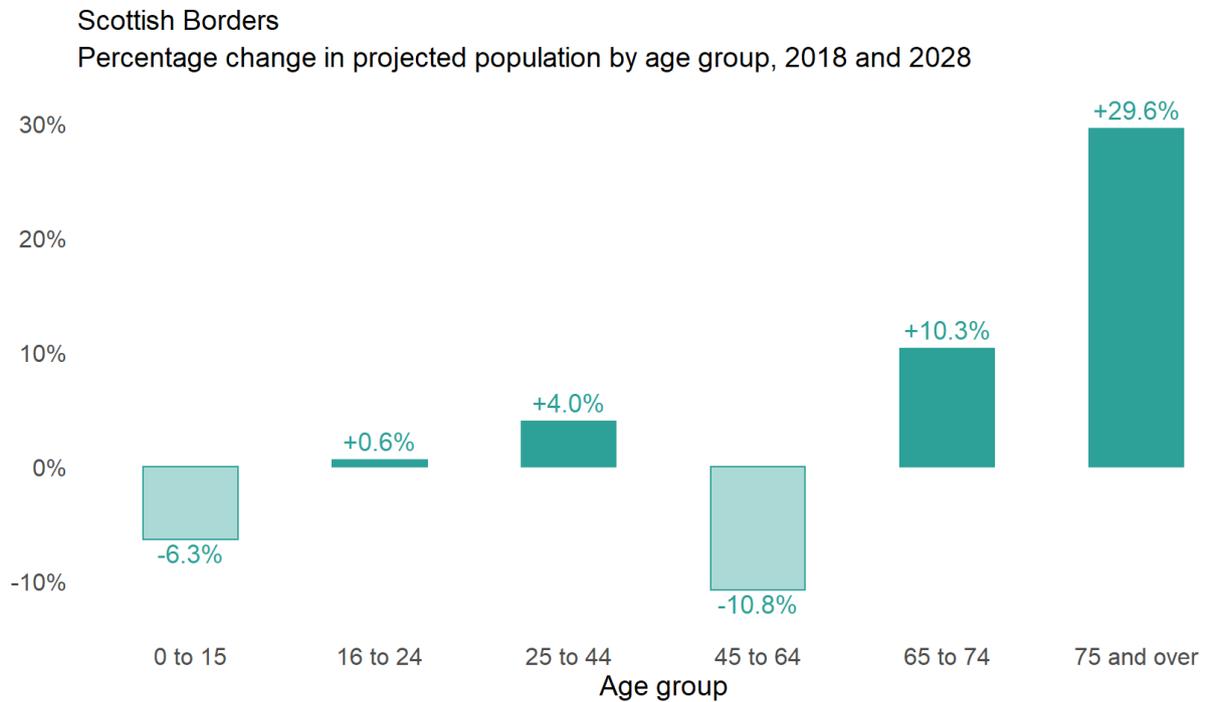
The blue lines in the chart show that:

- There will be even more people aged over 60 than present in ten years' time and more very elderly people aged over 85
- There was a slight increase in the number of births around 2008 which is currently showing up as mini-boom in primary school age children. In ten years' time there will be a mini-boom in the number of school leavers, which will present an opportunity to the economic planning of the region to offer this cohort an incentive to stay in the region
- There is expected to be a dip in the number of births, as more of the population passes childbearing age. This will work its way through the population and have implications for early years places, school places and the future generations of adults.

The bar chart below shows the same information from a different perspective. It shows that there will be fewer children by 2028 than now, a slight increase in the number of younger working-age people, a slight decrease in the number of older working-age people and an increase in the number of pensioners, particularly those over 75.



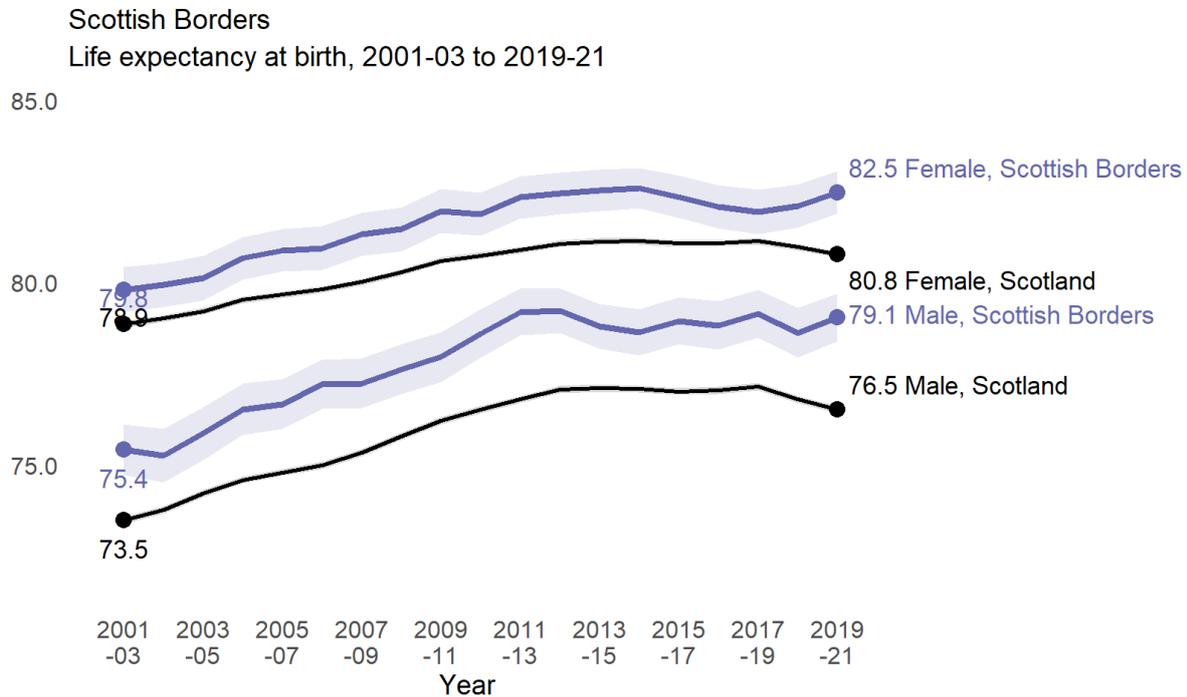
The bar chart below shows another view, focusing on population change. The paler bars show the age groups where there will be a population loss and the darker bars show the age bands which are expected to increase in population by 2028.



There is also a large increase in the over 75s, which will increase by nearly 30% between 2018 and 2028. Numbers of older working age people will decline the most, leaving a gap in the workforce, unless more younger working age people return to the region to work. There will also be a drop in the number of children in the region which could impact the viability of some marginal rural schools.

◆ Life Expectancy

Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB) is the standard indicator used to measure the average number of years a person born in the given year can be expected to live. Male and Female LEB is measured separately, due to the difference in life expectancy between males and females.

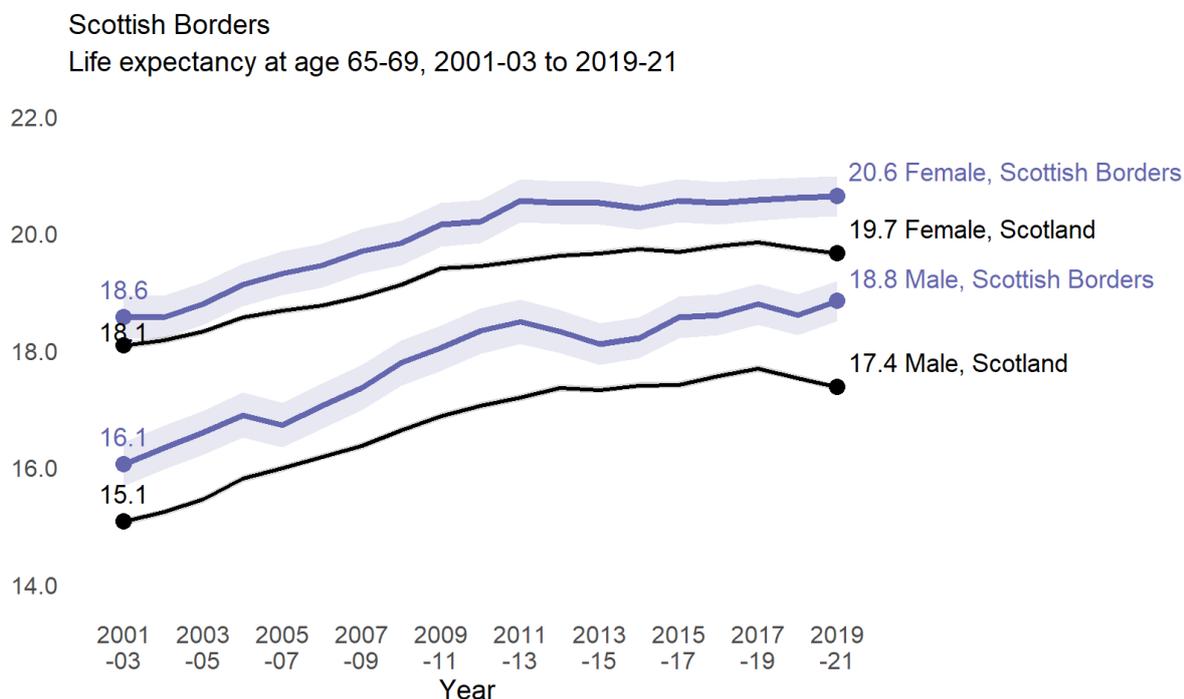


The chart above shows that male and female life expectancy has generally improved in Scotland and in Scottish Borders since 2001. Life Expectancy is better in the Scottish Borders than on average for Scotland. The average Life Expectancy at Birth, averaged over the 2019-2021 three-year period, is currently 79.1 years for males and 82.5 years for females. This is better than 76.5 years for males and 80.8 years on average for Scotland in the same period.

Male Life Expectancy is improving quicker than female Life Expectancy, yet the rate of improvement in both males and females has started to level off. These figures partially pre-date the Covid pandemic, which has had a significant effect on the number of additional deaths, and therefore life expectancy, in 2020 and 2021.

Life Expectancy figures are calculated using trends from the previous five years, so the additional death toll during the pandemic is likely to cause an unusually negative trend in Life Expectancy until 2025.

Life Expectancy for people aged 65-69 is a measure of how many additional years a person aged 65-69 in the given year is expected to live. Again, the life expectancy for females is significantly higher than that of males, due to the number of gender-specific life-limiting health conditions, such as cancers, that are diagnosed in the over 65 age group, which affect more men.



The above timeline shows that 65 – 69 year olds have been living increasingly longer in the past ten years, more so in the Scottish Borders than on average for Scotland. Current figures show that women in this age group are expected to live a further 20.6 years in the Scottish Borders, and men an additional 18.8 years. This is better than the Scottish averages of 19.7 years and 17.4 years respectively.

The trend is continuing at a slower pace but still in a positive direction in Scottish Borders. In Scotland, the trend has been levelling off or even decreasing. There will be a lingering after-effect from the Covid pandemic, before the figures once again recover to pre-pandemic levels.

■ Births

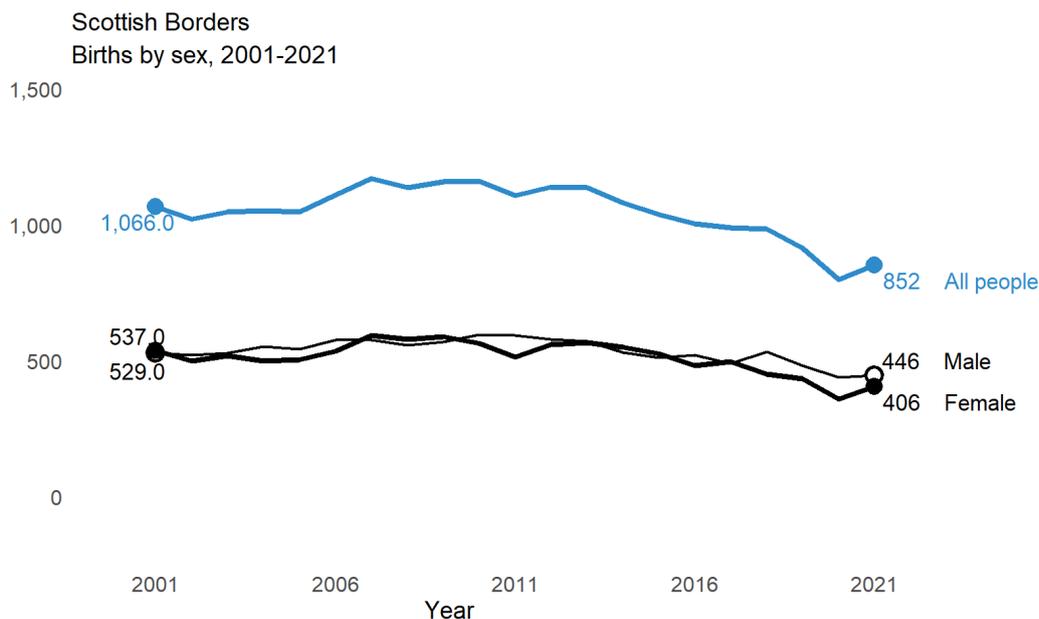
Births and deaths are the two key components of natural population change. All births, including the age of the mother and the birth weight of the baby, are recorded by National Records of Scotland.

The number of babies born each year in the Scottish Borders has been steadily declining since 2001, which has stifled population growth. Recently, this trend looks like it is beginning to improve somewhat. In 2021, there were 852 births in Scottish Borders. This is an increase of 6.6% from 799 births in 2020. Of these 852 births, 406 (47.7%) were female and 446 (52.3%) were male.

Standardised rates are used when comparing populations in different areas, to allow for any natural advantages or disadvantages in those areas that would make the comparison less fair. In Scottish Borders, the standardised birth rate increased from 10.0 per 1,000 population in 2020 to 10.1 in 2021. In comparison, the rate in Scotland overall increased from 8.6 to 8.7. This means that Scottish Borders currently has a reasonably vibrant and improving birth rate, despite the relatively larger numbers of older people in the region who are past childbearing age, compared with other areas that may have a more youthful population.

In 2021, the most common age group of mothers in Scottish Borders was 30 to 34 (306 births), the same as in 2001.

The least common age group of mothers in Scottish Borders in 2021 was 0 to 19 (22 births). In 2001, the least common age group was the 40 and over age group. This shows that teenage pregnancy is relatively less common and has reduced in the past 20 years.

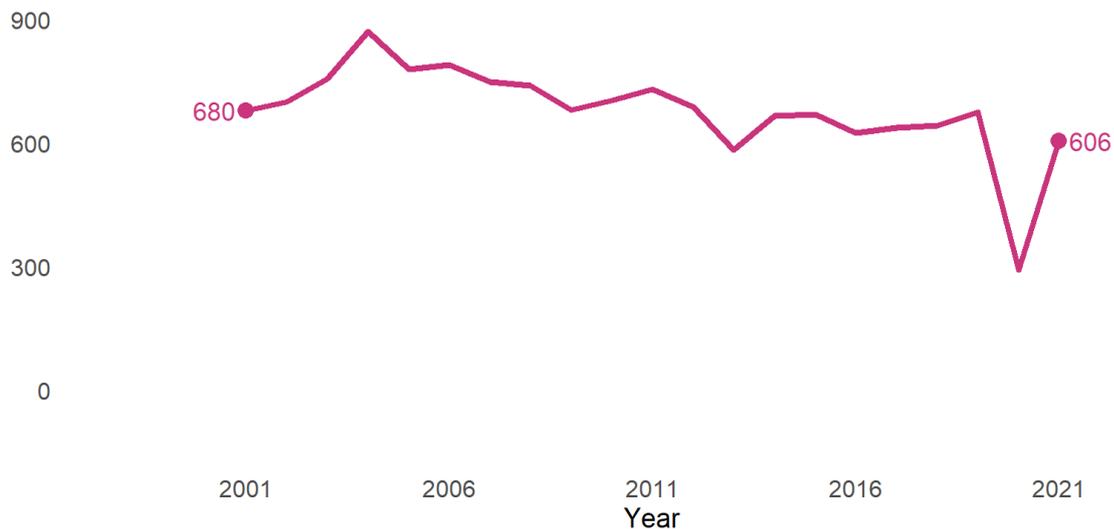


■ Marriages and Civil Partnerships

The Civil Registration of births, marriages and deaths has been carried out by the General Register Office for Scotland since 1855; prior to this, the records were kept by the Parish registers. Although almost half of children in the UK are now born to unmarried couples, marriage is still a useful demographic marker which reflects changes in a society's culture and social attitudes. Marriage and Civil Partnership are taken as a single figure and the number of Civil Partnerships is relatively small.

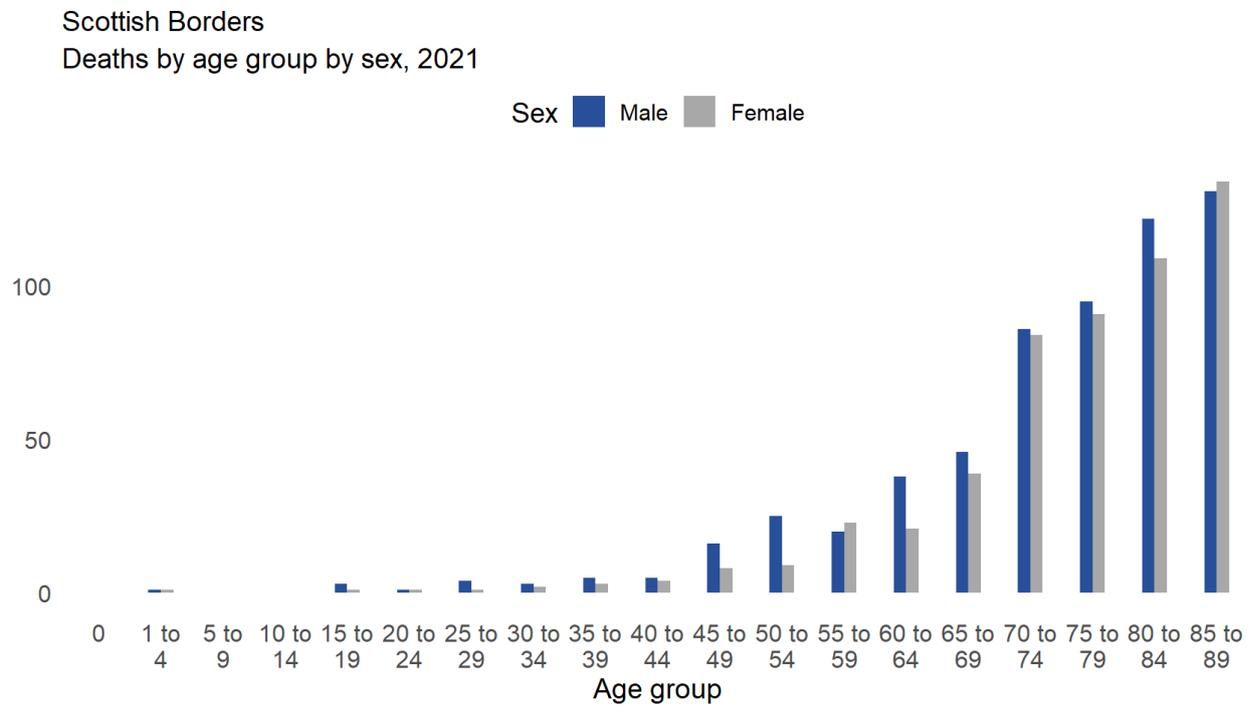
In 2021, 606 marriages or Civil Partnerships were registered in Scottish Borders. This is a 107.5% increase from 292 in 2020, which was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby gatherings were banned or restricted for much of the year. All other Local Authority areas showed a similar disrupted pattern of marriage in 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the number of marriages had been steadily falling, and this trend will probably continue following the pandemic recovery.

Scottish Borders
Number of marriages, 2001-2021



■ Deaths

Births and deaths are the two key components of natural population change. All deaths, by age and cause, are recorded by National Records of Scotland.



The graph above shows the number of deaths by age and sex that were recorded in 2021. The risk of dying obviously increases with age, particularly in the over 70s. There are slightly more male than female deaths in almost all age groups up to the age of 85.

■ Causes of death

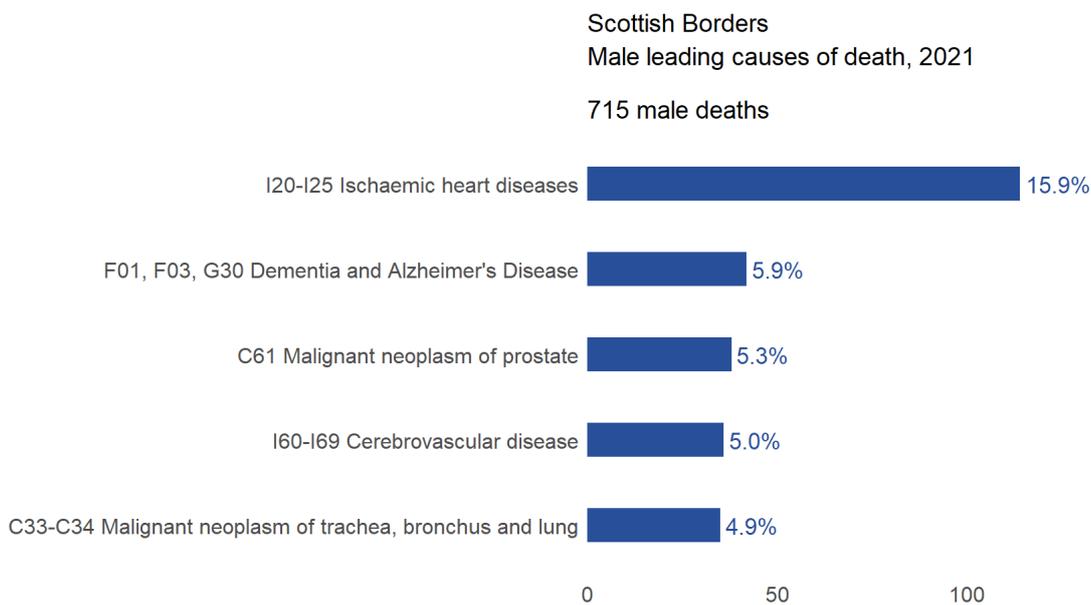
The chart below shows all male deaths in 2021 by percentage cause.

These 5 leading causes of death account for around 35% of male deaths, with a wide range of causes accounting for the remaining 65%.

In Scottish Borders, the leading cause of death for males in 2021 was Ischaemic heart diseases (15.9% of all male deaths), followed by Dementia and Alzheimer's (5.9%).

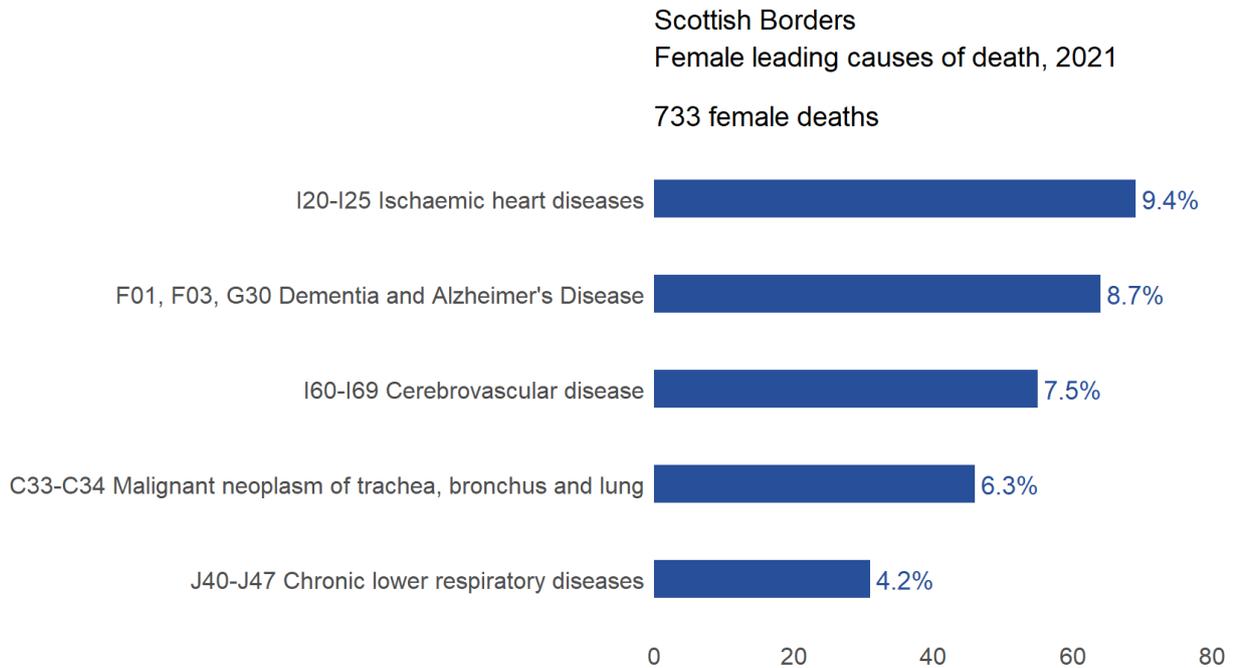
In Scotland overall, the leading cause of death for males was also Ischaemic heart diseases (13.7%), followed by Dementia and Alzheimer's (6.2%).

If all cancers were grouped together, they would be the leading cause of death in males and females.



In Scottish Borders, the leading cause of death for females in 2021 was Ischaemic heart diseases (9.4% of all female deaths), followed by Dementia and Alzheimer’s (8.7%), then CVD (Stroke), lung cancer and respiratory disease. These five leading causes of death account of 36.1% of all female deaths.

In Scotland overall, the leading cause of death for females was Dementia and Alzheimer’s (12.8%), followed by Ischaemic heart diseases (8.5%).



■ Migration

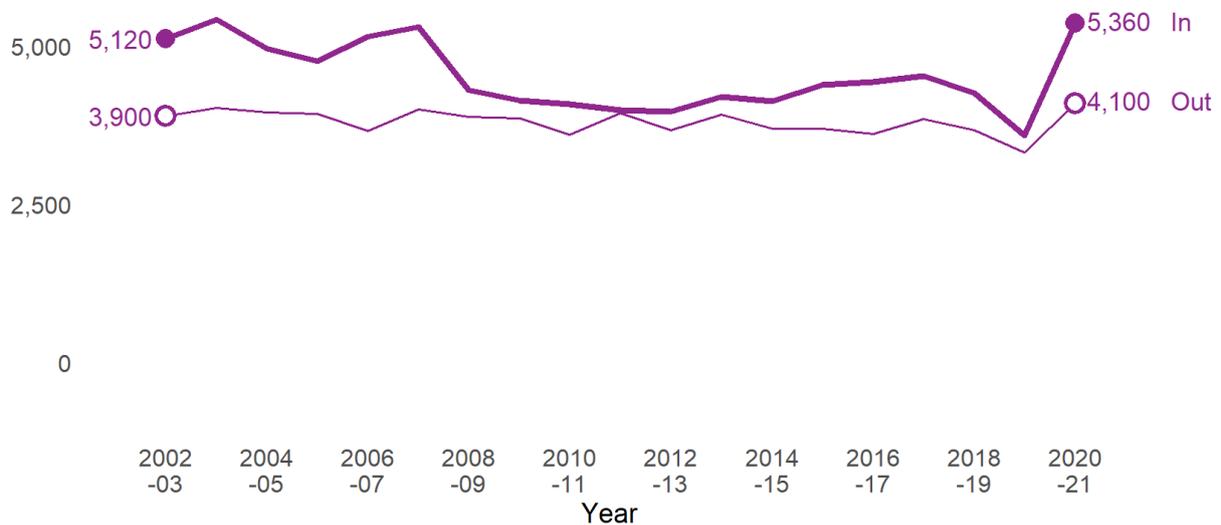
Migration is the third component of population change, the others being Births and Deaths, and is the most variable and difficult to measure out of the three. It is also the component that can be most easily influenced by public policy to produce a desired change to population growth.

In the period 2020-21, an estimated 5,360 arrived in the Scottish Borders from elsewhere in Scotland, elsewhere in the UK and elsewhere in the world. This is a 49.3% increase from 3,590 in the period 2019-20. An estimated 4,100 people left the Scottish Borders during the same period, which is a 23.5% increase from 3,320 in 2019-20.

Net migration is the difference between the number of people who arrive and the number of people who leave. A positive number means that more people are arriving in the region than leaving. A negative number means that more people are leaving than arriving. Scottish Borders currently has a net immigration of 1,270 people in 2020-21. This is an increase in net immigration from 2019-20.

Immigration and emigration are often closely associated with the economic conditions in the region during that year. Highland Council Area currently has the highest net immigration and Aberdeen City currently has the highest net emigration out of Scotland's 32 Local Authority areas. Scottish Borders' net immigration indicates that it is a moderately attractive region for people to want to come to, in order to live and work here.

Scottish Borders
Total in and out migration, 2002-03 to 2020-21*



Household Estimates

In 2021, the number of households in Scottish Borders was 55,296. This is a 0.9% increase from 54,796 households in 2020 and represents an increase from 47,452 households in 2001.

In comparison, the number of households in Scotland overall increased by 0.8% in the past year, showing that the rate of growth in Scottish Borders is around average or a little above.

Scottish Borders had the 17th-highest number of households in 2021, out of the 32 Council areas. This matches its population size compared with other Council areas – only in a much larger geographical area than most other Council areas. This means that the density of housing in Scottish Borders is lower overall than most other Council Areas, but this varies at neighbourhood level. Housing patterns in the region exhibit a clustered pattern, with some high-density housing in the Borders towns, a network of scattered small villages and large swathes of the rural region with very few dwellings.

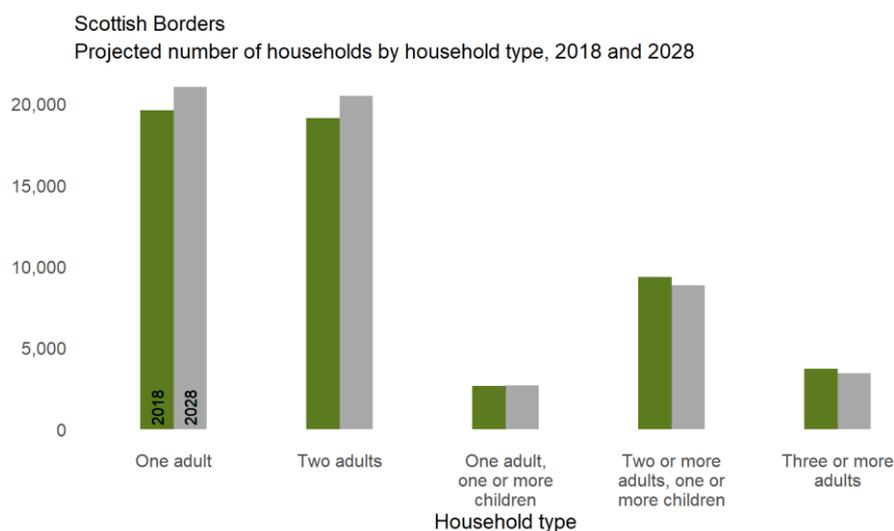
▲ Household Projections

Between 2018 and 2028, the number of households in Scottish Borders is projected to increase from 54,413 to 56,443. This is a 3.7% increase, which compares to a projected increase of 4.9% for Scotland as a whole.

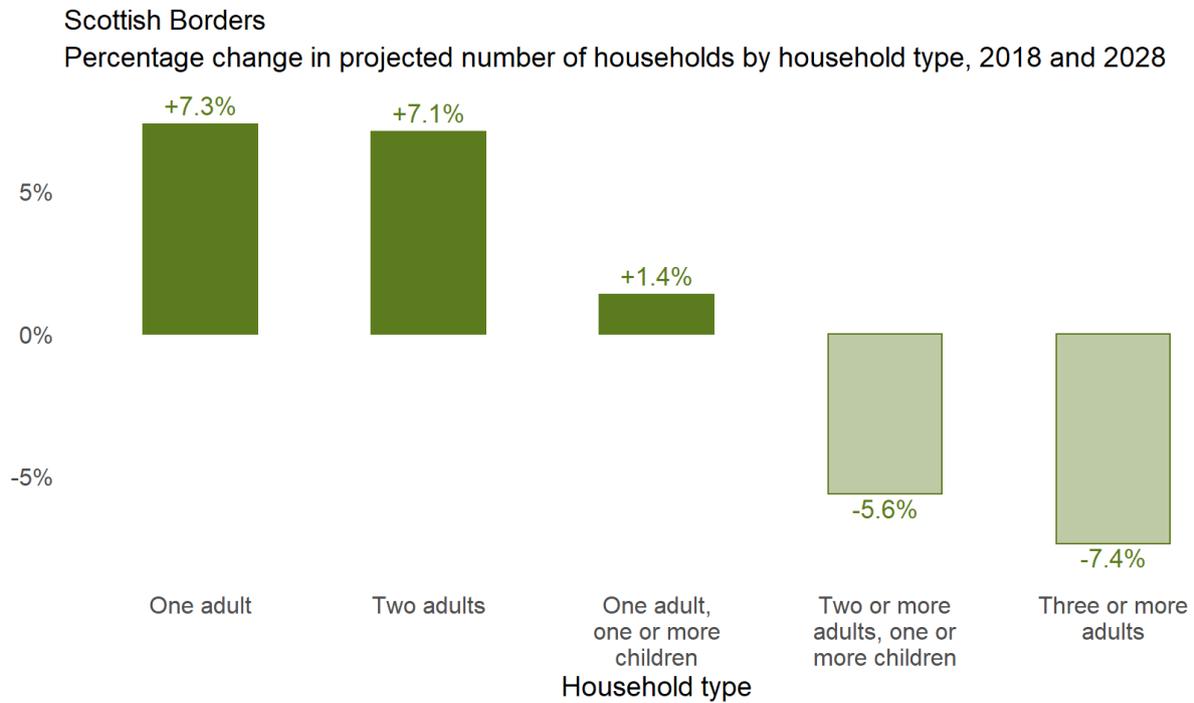
Scottish Borders is projected to have the 16th highest number of households in 2028, out of all 32 council areas in Scotland. Between 2018 and 2028, 8 councils are projected to see a decrease in the number of households and 24 councils are projected to see an increase.

Scottish Borders is projected to have the 18th highest percentage change in household numbers out of the 32 council areas in Scotland.

The bar chart below shows that the trend towards fewer traditional family household types and more smaller household types is projected to continue. In 2028, the household type “One adult” is projected to increase and remain the most common household type (37.3%). The household type “One adult, one or more children” is projected to remain the same and the least common household type (4.7%) in Scottish Borders. The proportion of traditional family households is projected to slightly decrease.



The chart below shows that the move away from the traditional and larger household types towards the smaller household types is projected to be noticeable in ten years' time. Increasing demographic trends of later marriage, more people staying single, family breakup and ageing households has an impact on the type of housing that will be needed in the next ten years. There will be a general need for more housing, and particularly more assisted housing, as household units become smaller and older.



Depopulation Index

The Depopulation Index is a measure to show whether population loss has got worse or better in relation to the year 2000.

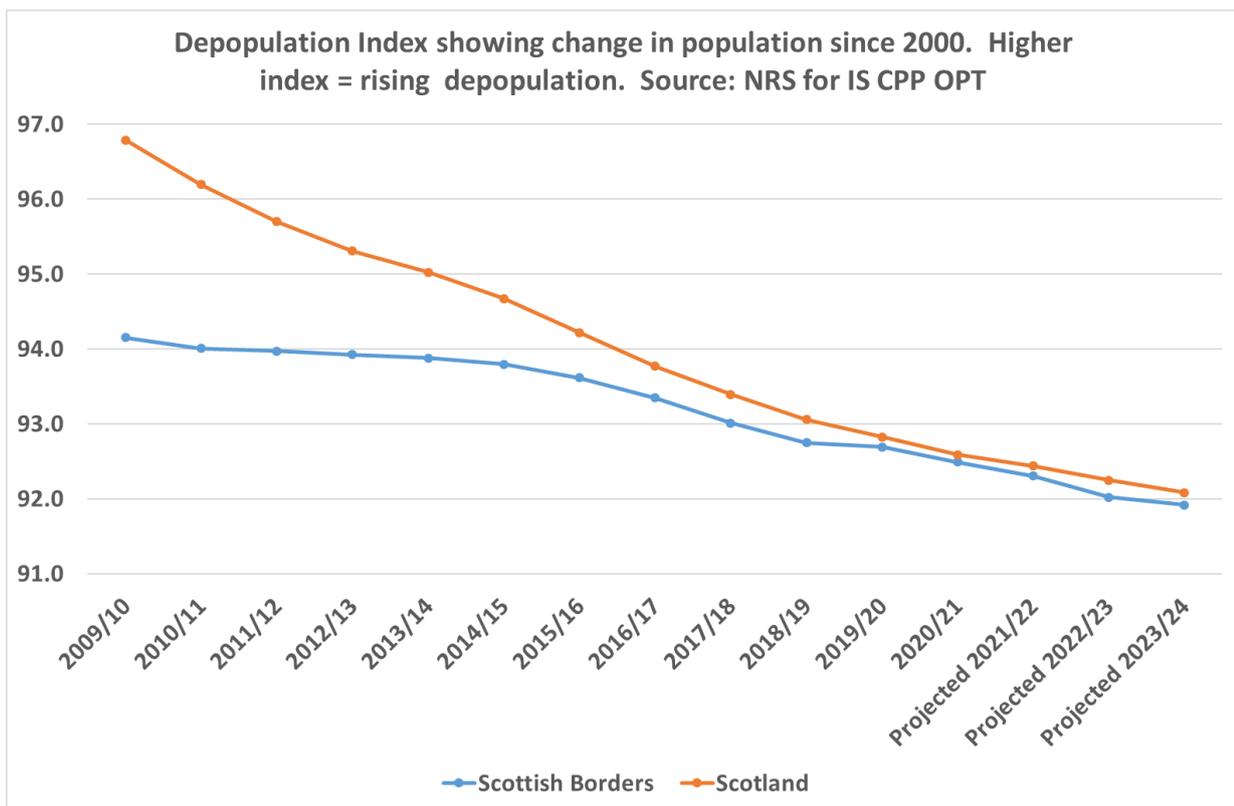
The Depopulation Index was devised by the Improvement Service for their [Improvement Service CPP Outcomes Online Profiling Tool](#), which uses Official Statistics to profile current and future demographic trends, for Scottish areas and communities.

The Depopulation Index figure was set to 100 in year 2000. The index rises if the area shows population loss and, conversely, falls below 100 if the area's population has increased. It is expressed as an index to give a visual indicator of how an area's population is changing over time.

◆ Depopulation Index in the Scottish Borders

Improvement Service figures show that the population has increased since 2000 in all except four of Scotland's 32 Local Authority areas. The two Council areas with the fastest population increase are East Lothian and City Of Edinburgh, which may be having some impact on Scottish Borders.

The chart below shows that the population of Scottish Borders has been increasing slowly since 2009/10 and increasing more rapidly in Scotland as a whole. The two lines have now come together, and Scottish Borders is showing a rate of population increase which is close to the Scottish average.

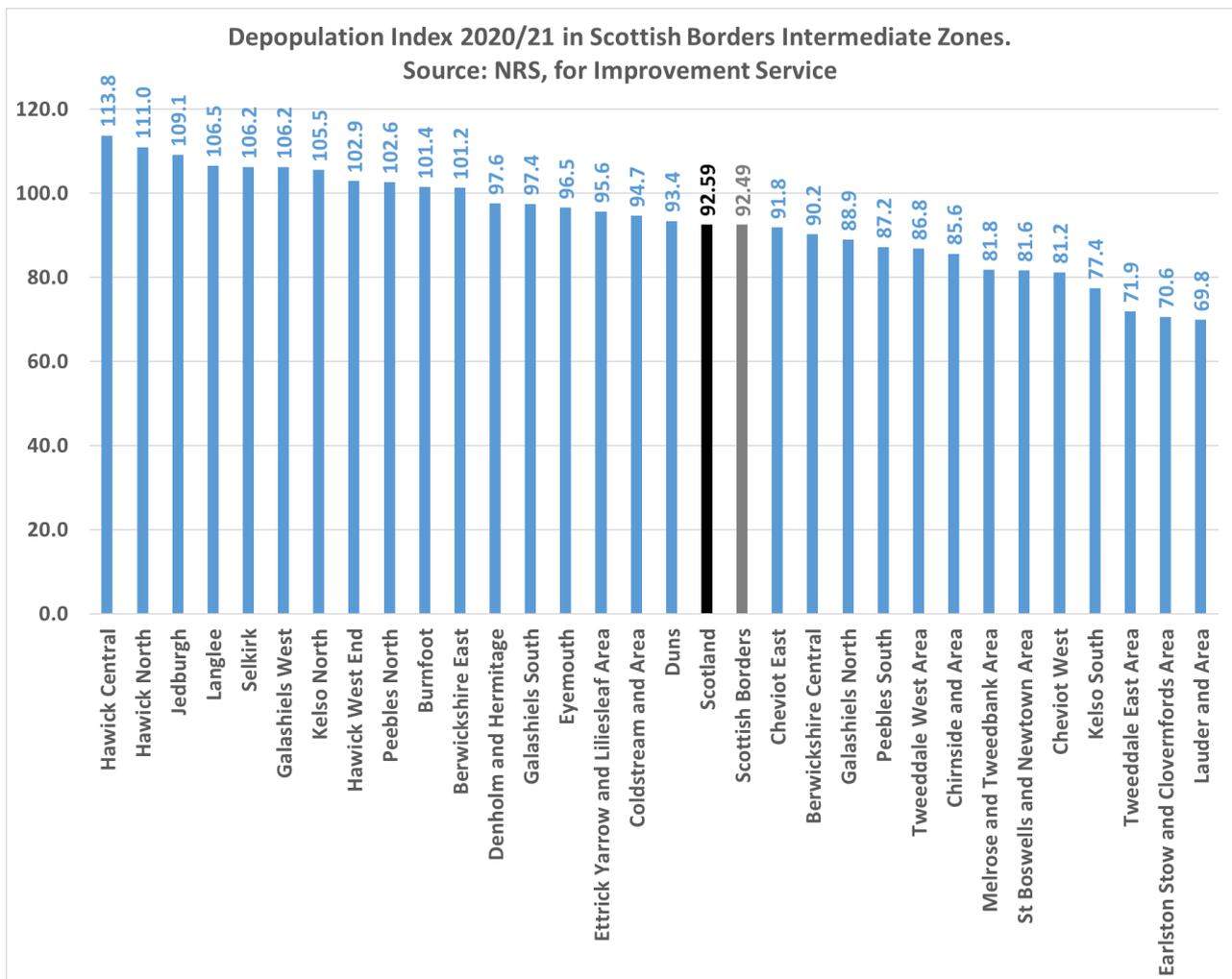


▲ Depopulation Index in Scottish Borders Communities

The chart below shows which Scottish Borders Intermediate Zones have suffered depopulation since 2000 and which have grown in terms of population size.

Eleven of the region’s Intermediate Zones have experienced an overall loss of population, six have experienced a below-average increase and 13 have enjoyed an above-average increase. The Intermediate Zones with the greatest population growth are in the rural parts of the Central Borders such as Lauder, Earlston, Stow and Clovenfords, or in Tweeddale.

The Intermediate Zones with the largest population loss are in the main towns, particularly in Hawick, Galashiels, Jedburgh and Selkirk. All are town-centred areas, except East Berwickshire. The biggest concern is Hawick, which has been losing population since the decline of the textiles industry, despite regeneration efforts to stop the population drain.



▲ Demographic fragility index

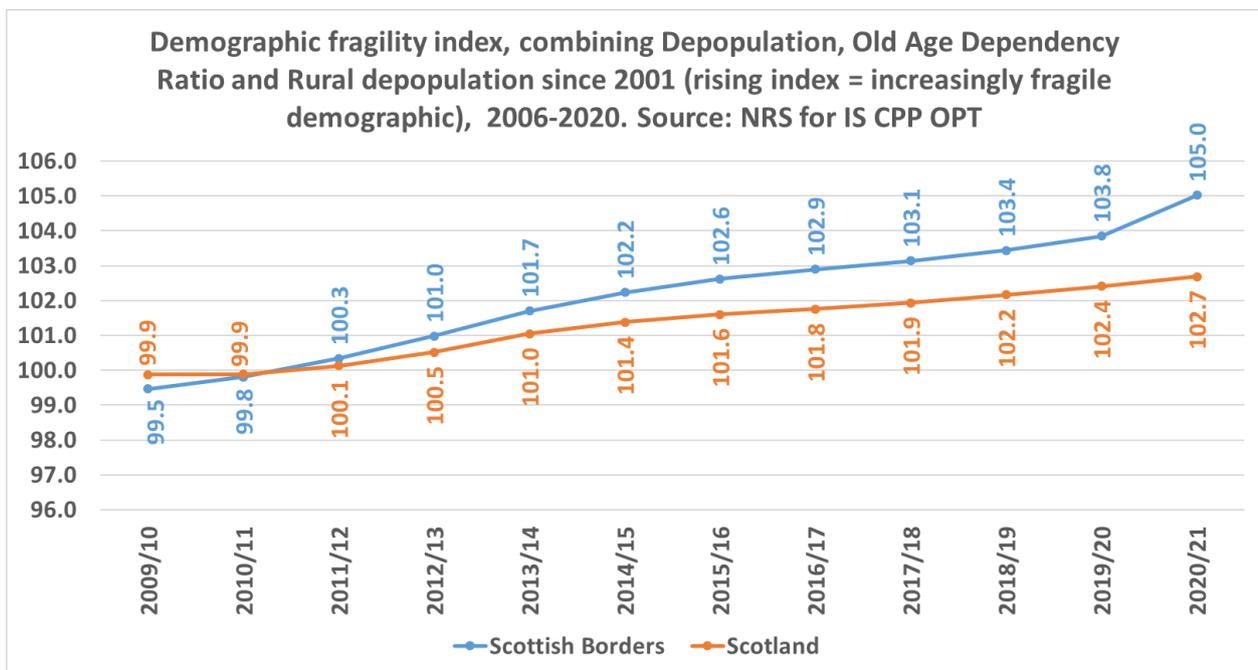
The Improvement Service used NRS population estimates to devise an experimental measure for their [Improvement Service CPP Outcomes Online Profiling Tool](#), to examine “demographic fragility.” This is a combined index of 3 indicators:

- Depopulation - the inverse of population growth
- Old Age Dependency Ratio - the ratio of older people 65 plus to working aged people 16-64.
- Rural depopulation – changes in the proportion of the population living in a rural or remote rural area.

The index is set at 100 in the year 2000. From there, a rising index indicates an increasingly fragile demographic.

When the 32 Council Areas were examined together, only four of them had a Demographic Fragility Index of under 100: these were in Scotland’s largest cities (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen) and East Lothian. All other parts of Scotland have a rising Fragility Index, meaning that most parts of the country are at risk of population loss due to ageing, emigration and rural isolation. Scottish Borders is one of these, although not as severely affected as most of its comparator rural Local Authority areas such as Dumfries and Galloway and Aberdeenshire.

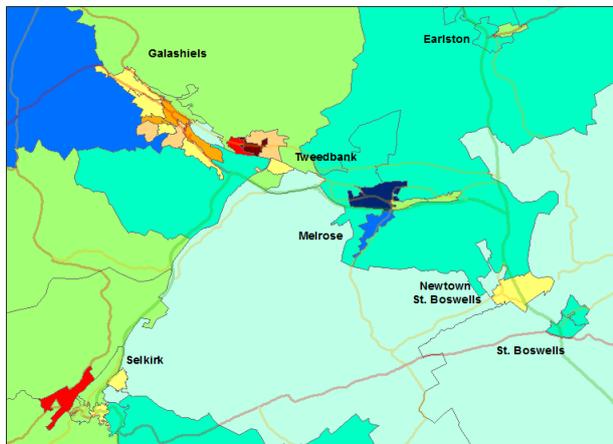
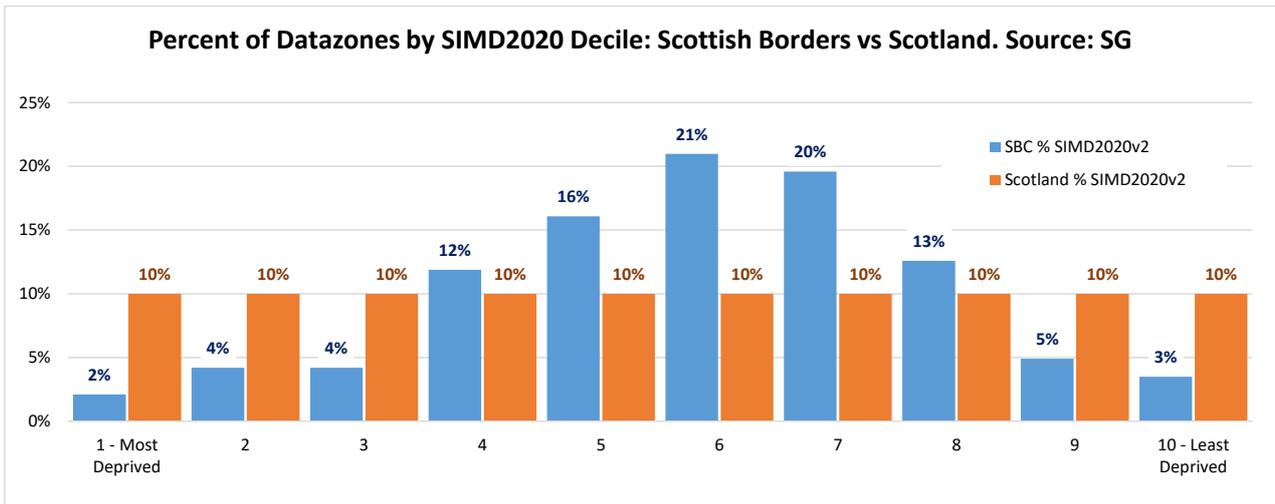
The timeline below shows how the “demographic fragility” of Scottish Borders has steadily increased since 2009/10 and is now at its highest level since the measure began. The measure for Scotland is also at its highest level and shows that there is an urgency to adopt policies that can counteract the effects of an ageing population and of population loss from rural regions like the Scottish Borders.



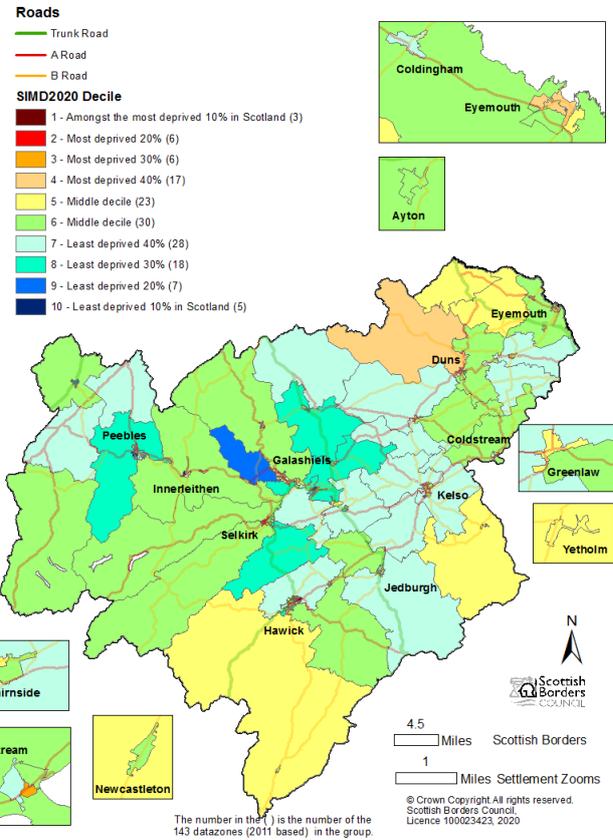
■ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the official tool for finding the most deprived areas in Scotland¹. The [SIMD2020](#) consists of over 30 indicators across 7 Domains: Employment, Income, Education, Health, Access, Crime and Housing.

The SIMD2020 shows that 6% (9) of the 143 data zones in the Scottish Borders are within the 20% most deprived of all of Scotland, known as “SIMD Quintile 1”. A further 17% (24) of the data zones in the Scottish Borders are amongst the 21-40% most deprived in Scotland (Quintile 2). The distribution of the 143 data zones in the Scottish Borders can be seen in the graph and map below.



SIMD2020 for Scottish Borders Data Zones



¹ <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/>

When specifically looking at the income and employment domain 9% of the Scottish Borders population is income deprived compared to 12% for Scotland. 8% of the Scottish Borders working age population is employment deprived compared to 9% for Scotland.

Within the domains of the SIMD the proportion of data zones that are in the 20% most deprived of Scotland varies.



9 (6%) of the 143 data zones in the Scottish Borders are part of the 20% most deprived of all of Scotland



8 (6%) of the 143 data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most income deprived data zones in Scotland.



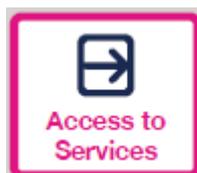
10 (7%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most employment deprived.



8 (6%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most education deprived.



9 (6%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most health deprived.



46 (32%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most geographically access deprived.



20 (14%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most crime deprived.



3 (2%) data zones in the Scottish Borders are in the 20% most housing deprived.