

**Recent Trends in  
Population, Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment  
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
1973 to 1999  
Second Edition  
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## Introduction

This report is an update of the initial report on trends in population, labor force, employment and unemployment in the CNMI. This report include the results of the 4th quarter 1999 Current Labor Force Survey in the CNMI. The fourth quarter, 1999, CLFS included Saipan, Rota, and Tinian making the results comparable to prior censuses; however, the survey did not collect data on education and wages. Hence, this report update trends in population, labor force, employment, and unemployment, but not wages in the CNMI.

Unlike the first report that had two sets of tables, this update only has one set of tables in Appendix A.

The format of the report remained the same—the report summarizes the trends in the body of the report and makes extensive references to tables in Appendix A.

Population in the CNMI from 1996 to 1999 were estimated based on the methodology described in Appendix B.

## Summary

The following summary highlights major trends and changes in the CNMI population, labor force, employment, and unemployment from 1973 to 1999.

### Population

- Population in the CNMI increased dramatically between 1980 and 1990 and continued to increase through 1999.
- Migration was the main reason for the drastic increase in the CNMI population during this period.
- Employment and business purposes were the main reasons for migrating into the CNMI—the majority of all migrants in the CNMI were temporary resident workers, business persons and their spouses and dependents. The migrant-worker population now outnumbers the local population. The vast majority of migrant-workers were non-US citizens who came from Asian countries, particularly, from the Philippines and China.
- The growth in the migrant-worker population has influenced the demographics of the overall CNMI population. From 1980 to 1999,
  - Age distribution shifted from a younger population to a working-middle-age population
  - Median age increased from 19.6 in 1980 to 27.4 years of age in 1995.
  - Birthplace of the population shifted from a majority born in the CNMI in 1980 to majority born outside of the CNMI in 1990 and after.
  - Citizenship of the population shifted from a majority US citizens in 1980 to a majority non-US citizens in 1990 and after.
  - Ethnic composition changed from a Chamorro majority in 1980 to Asian majority with Filipino becoming the largest single ethnic group by 1990 and after.

### Labor Force and Employment

- Drastic increases in economic activities during this period led to high labor force participation and employment in the CNMI. The local population entered the labor force in unprecedented numbers. Because of a relatively small population base, the economy began to rely on outside sources for manpower needs resulting in a large number of migrant-workers.
- The reliance on migrant labor resulted in shifts in the labor force.
  - From a minority in 1973, migrant workers increased drastically after 1980 becoming the majority of the total CNMI labor force by 1990.
  - From a minority in 1980, non-US citizens become the majority of the total CNMI work force by 1990.
  - The birthplace of the labor force shifted from a majority born in the CNMI to a majority born outside.
  - The ethnic composition of the labor force changed from a predominantly Chamorro in 1980 to predominantly Asians, with Filipinos being the largest single ethnic group in the labor force by 1990 and after.
  - By 1990 and after, migrant workers outnumbered local workers in all industries, except in “public administration” and “finance, insurance, and real estate”.

### Unemployment

- Unemployment rate was high in 1973 (12.6%), low in 1980 (2.4%) and 1990 (2.3%), but increased in 1995 to 7.3 percent and was estimated at 4.3 percent in 1999, fourth quarter.
  - Unemployment rate has been higher for the local work force compared to the migrant work

force. However, migrant-workers are becoming a significant proportion of the total unemployment—from about 10 percent in 1980 to about 44 percent of total unemployment in 1995 and estimated at about 24 percent in 1999, fourth quarter.

- Between 1980 and 1999, age distribution of the unemployment population has shifted higher.
- The birthplace of unemployed persons changed from 1980 to 1999—persons born outside have been increasing as a proportion of total unemployed.
- The citizenship composition of unemployed persons changed from mostly US citizens in 1980 to a significantly non-US citizens by 1995.
- The ethnic composition of unemployed persons in the CNMI became more Micronesians and Asians and relatively less Chamorros and Carolinians.

# Chapter 1. CNMI Population

## 1.0 Population

The total population in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) increased steadily from 8,290 (in 1958) to 16,780 (in 1980). The Commonwealth's population more than doubled between 1980 and 1990 to 43,345 persons, an annual growth rate of 9.5 percent. The population in the CNMI continued to grow at an annual rate of 5.6 percent from 1990 to 1995, reaching 58,846 persons in 1995. By 1999, the population was estimated at about 81,000 persons.

Since 1980, the vast majority (about 90%) of CNMI's total population has resided in Saipan. Saipan is the biggest island of the 14 Northern Mariana Islands and is where most of the economic activities take place. In the fourth quarter, calendar year 1999, Saipan's population was estimated at 73,000 persons while Rota's population was estimated at about 4,400 and Tinian's population at about 3,400. Table 1.0 below shows population trends in the CNMI by island from 1920 to 1999. Population estimates for 1996 to 1999 are explained in Appendix C.

The main reason for the dramatic growth in population in the CNMI was migration. The main reasons for migrating into the CNMI were for employment and business opportunities. As shown in this report, CNMI's overall population characteristics—age, ethnicity, citizenship, place of birth, gender—have changed dramatically because of the large increase in the migrant population in the Commonwealth.

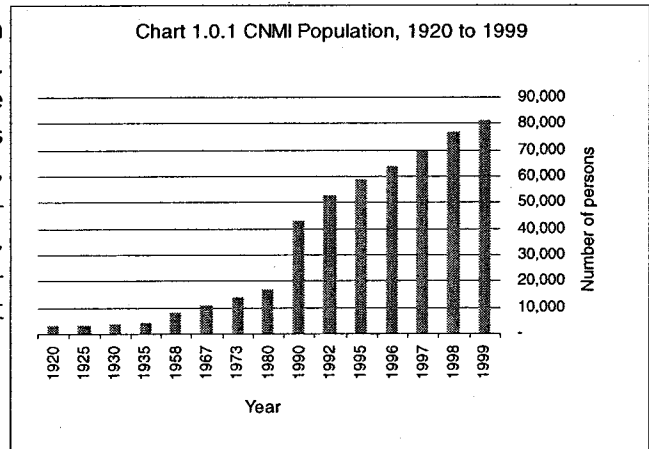


Table 1.0 CNMI Total Population by Island, 1920 to 1999

Year	Number of persons					Percent distribution				
	Total	Saipan	Rota	Tinian	N.Islands	Total	Saipan	Rota	Tinian	N.Islands
1999*	81,126	73,272	4,440	3,414	-	100.0	90.4	5.8	3.8	-
1998*	76,708	69,421	4,350	2,937	-	100.0	90.5	5.7	3.8	-
1997*	69,801	62,956	4,023	2,822	-	100.0	90.2	5.8	4.0	-
1996*	63,613	57,181	3,721	2,711	-	100.0	89.9	5.8	4.3	-
1995	58,846	52,698	3,509	2,631	8	100.0	89.6	6.0	4.5	0.0
1992*	52,900	47,786	2,561	2,553	-	100.0	90.3	4.8	4.8	-
1990	43,345	38,896	2,295	2,118	36	100.0	89.7	5.3	4.9	0.1
1980	16,780	14,549	1,261	866	104	100.0	86.7	7.5	5.2	0.6
1973	14,333	12,382	1,104	714	133	100.0	86.4	7.7	5.0	0.9
1967	10,986	9,035	1,078	610	263	100.0	82.2	9.8	5.6	2.4
1958	8,290	6,654	969	405	262	100.0	80.3	11.7	4.9	3.2
1935	4,297	3,194	788	24	291	100.0	74.3	18.3	0.6	6.8
1930	3,829	2,915	644	43	227	100.0	76.1	16.8	1.1	5.9
1925	3,493	2,639	487	180	187	100.0	75.6	13.9	5.2	5.4
1920	3,398	2,449	651	112	186	100.0	72.1	19.2	3.3	5.5

Note:\* Population for these years is based on estimates while population for all other years are census counts.

## 1.1 Population by Age

The age structure of the CNMI population changed significantly between 1980 and 1990: the median age of the population increased and the age distribution of the population changed from a relatively young population to a more middle-aged population.

### 1.1.1 Median Age

The median age of the CNMI population increased quite drastically from 19.6 years in 1980 to 27.4 years in 1990. The median age is the age that divides the population into two halves; for example, half of the population in the CNMI was younger than 27.4 and the other half was older than 27.4 years of age. The median age increased during this period for two reasons: (1) the CNMI's indigenous population was aging, people were living longer and birth rate was declining; but more importantly, (2) the presence of a large migrant-worker population in the CNMI, which is concentrated between ages 20 and 54, pulled the median age of the CNMI's total population higher. The median age remained at this higher level between 1990 and 1999.

### 1.1.2 Age Distribution

The age distribution of the CNMI total population shifted significantly between 1980 and 1990. In 1973, and in 1980, age group 0 to 4 years old, constituted the largest age group followed by age groups 5 to 9, 10 to 14, 15 to 19, 20 to 24, ..., 80 to 84, and 85 and over. But by 1990, age group 25 to 29 became the largest age group followed by age groups 30 to 34, age group 20 to 24, age group 35 to 39 and then age group 0 to 04 years old. Since 1990, age groups between 20 to 39 years of age (the middle age-groups) have continued to outnumber the lower and the higher age groups. The shift in the age structure of the CNMI population is best described using a population pyramid chart.

In a population pyramid, a horizontal bar represents each age group of the male population and each age group of the female population. The horizontal bars for each age group for male and female populations together form a chart that resembles a pyramid, such as the top part of Chart 1.1.2.1 below. The shape of the pyramid depicts the age structure of the study population.

In 1980, the CNMI population pyramid resembled a regular pyramid shape, where age group 0-4, at the bottom of the chart, was the largest age group followed by age group 5-9, 10-14, 15-19 and on up to age group 75 and over. The shape of the CNMI population pyramid shifted from this regular shape between 1980 and 1990. By 1990, the horizontal bars no longer resembled a regular pyramid, but looked more like a Christmas tree or a two-tier pyramid, one bigger pyramid sitting on top of a smaller one. In 1995 the age group horizontal bars deviated even further from the regular pyramid shape. This two-tier pyramid shape continued up to 1999. The shift in age distribution, as depicted by the population pyramid, resulted from the age distribution of the migrant-worker population in the CNMI. The shape of the larger pyramid on top, that starts at age group 20 to 24 through age group 45 to 49, is dictated by the number of migrant workers in the Commonwealth who outnumbered the indigenous population in these age groups. The smaller pyramid on the bottom, that starts from age group 0 to 4 through 15 to 19 age group, reflects the increasing number of total births in the CNMI in recent years. But although the number of births has been increasing in recent years, the number of migrant workers remains higher still. Comparing the age pyramids for 1980 through 1999 also explains why the median age of the CNMI population is much higher now than it was in 1973 or 1980.