



Australia's population Children and young people

Extracted from Australia's welfare 2009

Chapter 2, pages 24–25

One in three Australians is aged under 25 years.

At 30 June 2008, children and young people accounted for one-third of the Australian population—7.1 million children and young people, of which 4.1 million (19%) were aged 0–14 years and 3 million (14%) were aged 15–24 years.

Although Australia's population is ageing, the proportion of children and young people in the population is more than twice that of the population aged 65 years and over. The number of males in the child and youth population (3.7 million) was slightly higher than the number of females (3.5 million). This is a reflection of more males being born than females (106 males born per 100 females in 2007).

The number of children in the population is affected by fertility patterns. Australia's total fertility rate reached a peak of 3.5 births per woman at the height of the baby boom in 1961, but declined sharply with the introduction of the oral contraceptive pill in the early 1960s.

The total fertility rate reached replacement level in 1976 of 2.1 births per woman, and gradually declined to a low of 1.7 babies per woman in 2001. Since then the total fertility rate has increased to 1.9 births per woman in 2007—the highest rate since 1981.

Over the last four decades, the proportion of the child and youth population relative to the total Australian population has been steadily declining due to lower fertility rates and increased life expectancy.

As a result, the proportion of children in the population has fallen from a peak of 30% in 1961 to 19% in 2008, and is projected to fall even further to 17% in 2038.

For young people, the proportion has similarly fallen, from a high of 18% in 1979 to 14% in 2008, and is projected to fall to 12% in 2038.

Despite this, the number of children and young people in Australia is projected to continue to grow from 4.1 million to 5.2 million children and from 3.0 million to 3.7 million young people between 2008 and 2038. These demographic projections are based on a total fertility rate of 1.8.

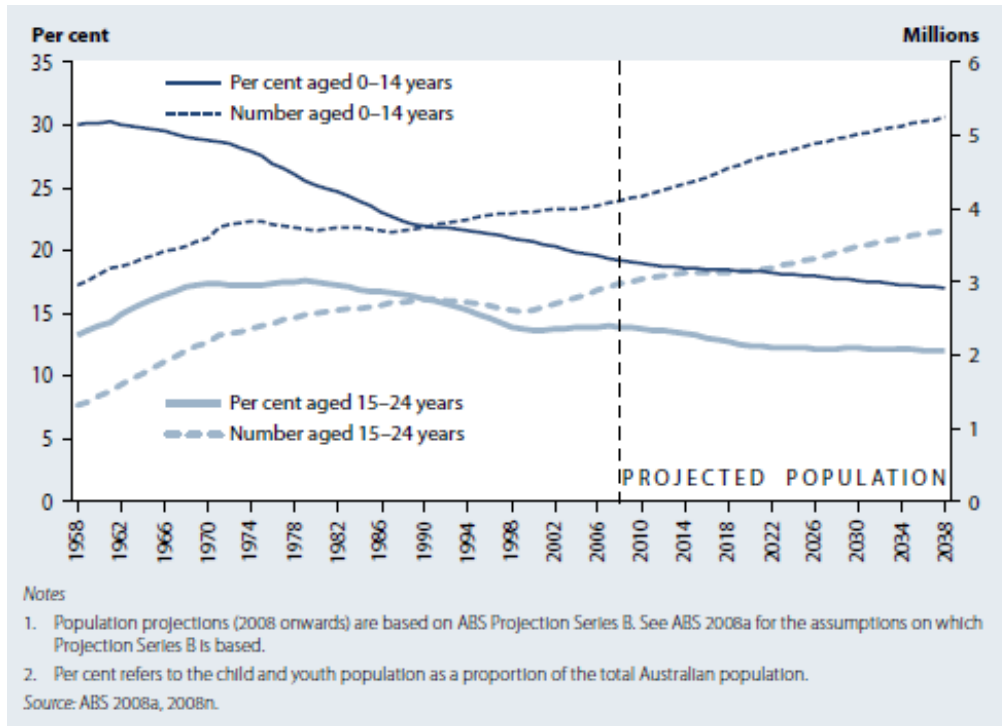


Figure 2.1: Number and proportion of children and young people in the Australian population, 1958–2038

Questions for discussion

Using the above graph, answer the following questions:

1. In 1958 what percentage of the Australian population was aged 15–24?
2. In 1958 what percentage of the Australian population was aged 0–14?
3. In 2038 what percentage of the Australian population is predicted to be aged 15–24?
4. In 2038 what percentage of the Australian population is predicted to be aged 0–14?
5. In 2038 is the need for schools likely to be greater or lesser than is the case now? Why?
6. Predictions about future population characteristics can easily be wrong. What are three reasons the predictions could prove to be wrong?
7. What is an argument (supported with figures) you could mount against someone who says: 'There are now so many more older people in Australia that new facilities should be built only for older people rather than for people aged under 25.'?