

Improvements to Migration and Population Statistics

May 2008 Progress Report

Introduction

This report provides an update on progress made between February and May 2008 in the Improvements to Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) work programme. This is a substantial work programme that includes taking forward the recommendations of the 2006 Interdepartmental Task Force on Migration Statistics.

Organisation and governance

In the February update (also available from the IMPS update page), ONS reported the arrangements that have been put in place for overseeing and steering the improvement work programme.

This followed the announcement by John Healey, the Minister for Communities and Local Government, on 4 February 2008:

"I can confirm that we will put in place a cross-Government programme of work driven by senior officials from central Government and the LGA, and led by the National Statistician. That will accelerate the work that has already begun to improve population statistics, including at a local level. The senior programme board will aim to meet for the first time this month. To support that programme of work a ministerial group, jointly chaired by me and the Minister for Borders and Immigration, will be set up, while the independent statistics board will ensure the quality of the statistics that are produced."

The first full meeting of the senior Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Board was held in March (following an initial scoping meeting in February). It will meet for the second time in June 2008. The Ministerial Group is also expected to meet for the first time in June.

Work plans

The Programme Board agreed that work plans will focus on:

- Improving the data available on numbers entering and leaving the United Kingdom;
- Making effective use of new and existing administrative and survey data sources;
- Improving local population estimates and projections used in allocating resources and developing services;
- Improving the public reporting of population and migration statistics; and
- Establishing a wider range of timely indicators and analysis to inform the evidence base on migration and its impacts on policy and public services.

ONS, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions have worked together to establish five interdepartmental working groups that cover each of these elements of work. These are cross departmental groups that also involve the Local Government Association (LGA), the devolved administrations, the Bank of England and, for the group on indicators and analysis, academic expertise.

Further information about progress in migration reporting and short-term migrants is given below. Further details and updates on progress as the work proceeds will continue to be made available at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/

User engagement

ONS has taken advantage of several opportunities to present recent progress to users through seminars and the recent meeting of the population sub-group of CLIP. ONS also presented an overview of the work programme at the BURISA/Statistics User Forum/ RSS conference on 16 May: "All Change - How Can We Get Better Population Statistics to Plan Local Services?"

The LGA and ONS have jointly organised a workshop, to take place on 23 May, to provide local authorities with an opportunity to engage with the Improving Migration and Population Statistics work programme. It is envisaged that this will be the first of several such local authority workshops.

Funding of the work programme

Several Departments have agreed to share in the funding of the work programme. ONS, CLG, Health, Home Office and Her Majesty's Treasury are to provide additional cash funding, totalling £12m over the next three years. Key data suppliers (including Health, the UK Borders Agency, Work and Pensions, Innovation, Universities and Skills, and Children, Schools and Families) will also take forward additional work within their Departments.

Full details of the programme, priorities and timings will be worked through by the Programme Board and its sub-groups.

Migration Reporting

The second of the cross-government releases of migration information was issued on 20 May. This is a joint release of ONS and Home Office statistics. The latest figures from the Home Office released on 20 May are for asylum applications, citizenship acquisition and accession monitoring information. ONS published its comprehensive reference volume of international migration for 2006. The headline numbers for the United Kingdom were presented in its first release in November 2007. ONS published a range of other statistics that include an article giving updated statistics on foreign workers, following the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey to bring the numbers into line with the latest population estimates. For the first time, the article shows data for both those who are aged "16+" and for those of "working age" and proposes that the former should be adopted as the preferred definition.

Further information on the 20 May release can be found here:

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/jrds0508.pdf

Short-term migration

ONS has published a research report which describes how combined short and long term migration estimates compare with counts from some key administrative sources. As a consequence of this assessment, ONS has been able to improve the "experimental" estimates of short-term migration released last October and the revised experimental estimates of short-term migration for mid-2004 and mid-2005 are shown. The research shows more comparability between the improved estimates and counts from administrative sources (at the UK level) than had been the case previously. Data for mid-2006 on this basis is planned for release in August. Research on the feasibility of producing estimates at a local authority level is also under way.

Entry and Exit data

In April 2008 a series of improvements to the IPS were implemented, including the introduction of new migration shifts that reflect new patterns of migration coming through airports such as Luton and Stansted. Development work is currently underway to take forward more fundamental changes to the design of the IPS for introduction next year. A more detailed progress report will be published with next month's migration releases.

There is a potential for enhanced statistical information about migration flows to and from the UK to be obtained from the e-Borders system, which is being developed to ensure the security of the UK's borders. It is expected that e-Borders will cover 60 per cent of passenger numbers by the end of 2009, 95 per cent by the end of December 2010 and 100 per cent by March 2014. ONS and the Home Office are researching ways of using this administrative information to improve migration flow estimates.