

December 2006 Update from the Improving Migration and Population Statistics Project

Introduction

It is increasingly important to have high quality statistics on migration and the population, for policy development and for planning and providing public services. Achieving this aim is challenging in the context of increasingly complex lifestyles and changes in migration to and from the UK over the last decade.

It has long been recognised that international migration is one of the most difficult components of population change to measure accurately. Large numbers of people travel into and out of the UK every year although migration numbers can be very different between one part of the country and another. There is no single, comprehensive source which can provide the information, at national and local levels, that is required for statistical purposes.

It is in the context of these pressures that the work of improving migration and population statistics has been prioritised. It is focussed on making improvements to the methods and data sources used to estimate the population at national and local levels during the inter-censal period. These improvements are needed to minimise the risk of divergence between the rolled forward mid-year population estimates and the 2011 Census-based population estimates, and to better understand the differences that remain.

The key strands of the IMPS research are:

- migration research (both international and internal within the UK)
- collaborative work with local authorities to investigate the potential for making greater use of administrative data sources to improve local estimates
- population definitional issues

More information on the progress made on each of these strands of research is provided in this update.

In May 2006, ONS set up an Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics with other government departments. The objective of the task force was to recommend timely improvements that could be made to estimates of migration and migrant populations in the United Kingdom, both nationally and at local level. The final report of the task force was published on 15 December 2006 at the following link:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/default.asp>.

Migration Research

Estimating migration is complex, the UK has no compulsory registration and there are no comprehensive administrative sources of information about migration. The International Passenger Survey (IPS), supplemented by other sources, provides estimates of long-term migrants. However, it is generally recognised that migration is very difficult to measure accurately and ONS are undertaking a major project to improve migration and population statistics.

The focus of this project is on the potential for making improvements to the sources and methods that are used to estimate the population at national and local levels during the inter-censal period. As part of this work, ONS is taking forward recommendations from the National Statistics Quality Review of International Migration Statistics for improving the estimation of total migration flows to and from the UK and the allocation of international migration to local areas.

In 2007, ONS plans to implement the improvements that have been identified so far from the research, and to do so in time to feed in to the mid-2006 population estimates. The changes that will be made are to improve:

- the estimation of the proportions of people who switch from migrant to visitor status and from visitor to migrant status;
- the geographical distribution of UK estimates of international migration inflows to countries within the UK, and to government office regions (GORs) within England;
- the geographical distribution of the Wales estimate and the GOR level estimates for England of international migration inflows to local authorities; and
- the geographical distribution of the Wales estimate and the GOR level estimates for England of international migration outflows to local authorities.

Implementation and Communication Plans for Improvements

The improvements outlined above will be incorporated into the mid-2006 population estimates. The 2006 estimates will also take account of the impact of the improvements on the previously published mid-2002 to mid-2005 population estimates. ONS plans to publish revised mid-year population estimates for 2002 to 2005 shortly after publication of the 2006 estimates. These revisions will impact on other products that are based on or use the population estimates and which will be revised subsequently e.g. small area population estimates, population estimates by ethnic group. ONS will be making public, during 2007, its plans for revisions. Publication dates will be pre-announced at least two weeks in advance of publication.

ONS will be staging a series of seminar events in spring 2007 to inform users of the details of the improvements and their impact on the previously published population estimates. These events will also inform users about the ONS plans for revisions to other products such as the sub-national population projections, the small area population estimates and the population estimates by ethnic group. Details of the dates and venues for the events will be published on the 'IMPS – Updates' page of the National Statistics website and a link will be sent to users with a key interest in these events. The research and impact analysis will also be published on the National Statistics website in spring 2007.

Further Improvements

The changes planned for 2007 that are described above, will make modest improvements by 2008. They are part of a continuous programme of improvement that is needed to meet changing requirements from migration and population statistics. More substantial improvements are also planned in 5-10 years (for example, full coverage by e-Borders in 2014 and better coverage of migrants and other populations in the 2011 Census). In the interim, the inter-departmental task force has identified an integrated sequence of improvements which is required to capture the complexity of migration and deliver more timely, integrated migration statistics.

Short-term Migration

Migration statistics are currently based on the UN definition of a long-term migrant, which is someone who travels with the intention of staying at their destination for twelve months or more. However there is now an increasing demand for estimates of the number of people travelling with the intention of staying for shorter periods. Although short-term migrants are not included in the mid-year population estimates, knowing about their numbers is important. For example, they may contribute to the economy of their host country, both as consumers of goods and services and as a source of labour,

and they do place demands on public services.

ONS reported in August 2006 that research into the potential production of estimates of short-term migration had begun. This initially focussed on definitional issues and user needs. ONS has also begun to look at the available data sources on which estimates could be based. ONS are currently examining the feasibility of constructing stock and flow estimates of short-term migration. To aid our understanding of this issue we have already introduced new questions on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). A paper will be published shortly which will:

- include some illustrative figures on flows from the IPS
- focus on what might be achieved in 2007, mainly at the national level
- seek feedback from users on their information requirements in this respect

Local Authority (LA) Case Studies

ONS is planning to publish the case study reports over the coming months and to follow each report with a workshop involving the case study LA, the other LAs from the same cluster, local demographic experts and other interested parties. (For information about the clusters, see:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/HowLACaseStudyAreasChosen.pdf>)

The current plan for the reports and workshops is as follows:

- Welwyn Hatfield: report in January, workshop in February
- Derby: report in March, workshop in March or April
- Hammersmith & Fulham: report in March, workshop (in conjunction with Barnet) in April
- Barnet: report and workshop (in conjunction with Hammersmith & Fulham) in April

The timetable for this work has been delayed slightly due to the priority given to work on the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics.

The reports will be available from the IMPS section of the National Statistics website. A final report detailing the findings of the LA Case Studies project will follow the workshops in spring 2007.

Population Definitions

The work of the Population Definitions Working Group (PDWG) has continued along the lines indicated in the last report, with meetings in both October and December 2006, feeding into planning of the 2011 Census via the Census Definitions and Bases Topic Group and Migration Topic Group. Items discussed have included: second residences, communal establishments and people who do live in the UK but have no usual address at the time of the Census, e.g. they may be staying with friends having left their parental address but not yet established their own home.

A population matrix is being developed. It is being drawn up for the specific purpose of assessing which people should be counted in the 2011 Census and assessing whether current approaches will get the best possible population count. A matrix is being compiled which identifies groups of people by characteristics such as nationality, residency status in terms of intended/actual length of stay, present/absent when count is taken, whether in household or institutional population, economic activity etc. An attempt is made to quantify and prioritise each population group identified and on that basis judgements made as to whether the census procedures and questionnaire will identify the key groups adequately. This matrix can be used more widely, e.g. to assess other data collection instruments such as surveys. It provides a framework for identifying population types that need to be

covered across the flexible population bases that users require.

This work is being taken forward within the ONS Centre for Demography. It will be reported in spring 2007 and will be available on the National Statistics website.