

Update on the Improving Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) Project - August 2006

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. Most are relatively short-term, e.g. for tourism, business meetings, seasonal work or short-term study. However some people come to stay in the UK for longer periods, e.g. to seek or take-up more permanent work, to join family members, to study for a higher qualification. Conversely, people who have been living in the UK go abroad for similar reasons. Globalisation and EU accession have recently led to increases in all the numbers and the resulting migration patterns can be very different between one part of the country and another. It is in the context of these pressures that the work of the Improving Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) project has been prioritised.

Recent IMPS research has focussed on the potential for making improvements to the methods and data sources used to estimate the population at national and local levels during the inter-censal period. The priority areas of this research have been those components of population change that are the most difficult to estimate accurately and which are the most likely to cause population estimates to diverge from census results when those become available in 2011. The key strands of the IMPS research are:

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

Migration Research

International Migration

A National Statistics (NS) Quality Review on International Migration Statistics was conducted jointly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Home Office (HO), and reported in September 2003. An implementation plan for taking forward the 19 recommendations of the review was subsequently published in January 2004. Enacting the implementation plan to improve estimates of international migration is a major component of the IMPS project.

International migration estimates are produced by combining survey data with other sources including Home Office information on those asylum seekers and their dependents not captured by the survey. Nevertheless, the International Passenger Survey (IPS) is the major data source on which the international migration estimates are based and some of the recommendations for improvement are in relation to the way the IPS is used to measure migration flows. The subsequent estimation of migration at national, regional and local levels has also been a priority for investigation. There are three main areas that IMPS has been investigating:

- Increasing the size of the sample of international emigrants will be introduced during 2007.
- New questions have been included in the IPS since 2004. These are designed to help identify short-term migrants (see below) as well as to estimate better how many migrants might change their original intention on length of stay as this would impact on whether they should be included in the migration estimates. The results will be used to evaluate the current assumptions used to estimate the number who are likely to change their intentions. A report of the work will be produced later in

2006 and if appropriate used to improve the methodology for the mid-2006 population estimates due to be issued in 2007.

- Following detailed comparisons of the geographical distribution of immigrants in the IPS, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the 2001 Census, ONS concluded that there was potential for using information from the LFS to aid distribution of international migration at a country/regional level. Potential methods for combining LFS and IPS data have been investigated and new country/regional estimates generated using a calibration methodology. The new estimates have been validated against other data sources and the new methodology quality assured by ONS methodologists. This work is currently being assessed for potential implementation, together with work to improve distributions of in-migrants at local authority level. ONS plan to implement the improvements in the mid-2006 mid-year population estimates (to be released in 2007) and will be consulting users prior to this. A report of the work will be available before the end of 2006.

More detail about work achieved against all 19 of the NSQR review recommendations and the latest report detailing progress is available at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/quality/reviews/population.asp

Short-term migrants

Currently ONS publishes estimates of international migration based on the UN definition: "A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence." This 12 month definition is used in UK population estimates; hence persons staying in the UK for periods of less than one year are not included in estimates of the usually resident population. ONS recognises the need for additional data on people entering and leaving the UK for periods of less than 12 months. A particular interest currently is in the migration of nationals of the countries who acceded to the EU in 2004. Some users require population estimates that include short-term migrants so that estimates of the working population include those who have migrated to work in the UK for short periods of time. Others providing services in local areas need to be better informed about the likely demand from all people using those services, not just the longer term residents.

ONS is carrying out research into the estimation of short-term migration flows to and from the UK. The first phase of the research is focussing on definitional issues and user needs in relation to short-term migrants. Alongside this, the data sources available to estimate or quality assure short-term migration flows are being assessed, such as National Insurance numbers (NiNos) issued to people from overseas and worker registration data which relate to nationals of the EU central and eastern European countries that acceded to the EU. Further detail about this work is available here www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Progress_report_August_06_short_term_migration_v3.pdf. ONS expects to report on this work by the end of 2006.

Interdepartmental Task Force on Migration Statistics

In May 2006, ONS set up an inter-departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics to identify improvements to estimates of long and short-term migrants that can be made over the next two years. The aim of the Task Force is to review the scope for improvements to our sources of information about migrants across government and thereby to fill gaps in existing population figures on migrants and their characteristics, including where they live in the UK. Further information about the Task Force is available here

www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Inter-departmental_Task_Force_on_Migration_Statistics.pdf. ONS expects to report to Ministers on the work of the Task Force in October.

Internal migration

Moves within the UK impact on the population of local areas and accurate estimation of local populations requires high quality estimation of internal migration flows. ONS estimate internal migration based on re-registrations with GPs, using the change of resident address information to identify the origin and destination LAs. While the population coverage of GP registers is generally good, there are some known limitations to their use for estimating migration. For example, young healthy adults, especially young men, are unlikely to re-register quickly with a GP following a move. IMPS research work is investigating ways of improving the internal migration estimates and, where it is found to be feasible to make improvements to these estimates, these would be implemented in the population estimates in 2008

Local Authority Studies

In March 2006 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced that four Local Authorities (LAs) had been selected for the current round of population case studies. They are Barnet, Derby, Hammersmith & Fulham and Welwyn Hatfield. For more information about the methodology used to select the LAs for study see

www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/default.asp These studies are being carried out as part of the IMPS project. The aim of the studies is to investigate how national data sources compare to locally held data and local intelligence and to see whether local sources could be used to improve the mid-year population estimates, either for all LAs or for groups of similar LAs. If alternative robust local sources exist these might be used either in the compilation or in the quality assurance of the mid-year population estimates.

Since the four LAs were selected, staff from ONS and each of the LAs have met twice and have been in regular contact to identify and analyse data which may be of use in improving migration and population statistics. This collaborative working has been very useful in helping ONS to understand the data sources held at a local level by LAs, Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and other organisations, such as universities. Data sources that have been discussed within one or more of the LA Studies include: Housing Needs Survey data, Address gazetteers and NLPG (National Land and Property Gazetteer) data, National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), schools data, demographic information held on local PCT registers, data on Registered Social Landlords, student data from universities, Council Tax and electoral data. For example, the Welwyn Hatfield study has provided us with an opportunity to study local and national information about students and to assess whether our internal migration estimates based on patient registration are likely to adequately reflect the moves of students at the start of their studies.

ONS plan to produce reports for each of the individual case studies over the period between autumn 2006 and the end of the year. Following each case study report there will be a workshop with the local authorities in the same clusters as those that were selected for study. Following this consultation, a final report will be published in Spring 2007 which will be a single report of the findings of all four case studies. There will then be an evaluation of the LA Studies including an assessment of the best way to take forward IMPS collaborative working with LAs in the future.

Population Definitions

A Population Definitions Working Group (PDWG) was convened in autumn 2004 and this group continues to meet regularly. The working group consists of external users representing local authorities, central government departments, academia and the private sector, with internal ONS topic experts also attending. The working group has considered and made recommendations on population definitions including: usual residents, visitors, the household population. This work has fed into the planning of the 2011 Census. The working group has also considered user needs for information on potentially difficult sub groups such as those with more than one address or those with no usual address, students, children of parents living apart etc. A paper was included in the June 2006 issue of *Population Trends* in which a more flexible provision of output bases following the 2011 Census was discussed. This paper was based upon the detailed work of the PDWG and stemmed from ideas originally raised in the ONS report 'A Demographic Statistics Service for the 21st Century'.

Link to PT article: www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/article.asp?ID=1602&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=1

Link to Demographic Statistics report:

www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/Dem_Stat_Ser_21ST_Cen.asp

Implementation and communication

The IMPS project is now focussing efforts on potential implementation, where its research has indicated that it is feasible for improvements to be made to the methods and data sources used to estimate the population during the intercensal period. It is intended to start implementation with the mid-2006 population estimates that are due to be released in August 2007. Work is progressing to quality assure methodological changes and to quantify the impacts of those changes on the population. ONS will also assess whether or not it will be feasible, or necessary, to revise mid-year estimates to take account of the improved methodologies for previous years back to 2001 and to consider the implications of any revisions for other ONS population statistics such as the population projections and other outputs that use the population statistics (e.g. weighted outputs from ONS household surveys).

ONS will inform users about the impacts of the IMPS improvements prior to implementation. For example, this will continue to be discussed with demographic users at the Central and Local government Information sharing Partnership (CLIP) population sub-group, where both local and central government users are represented. Further consultation will be undertaken to ensure that all key users are informed and we will be writing to local authorities shortly to set out the proposed consultation process. The first stage is likely to be one or more events, such as a workshop or seminar, which we plan to hold in the winter of 2006. Although the details of dates and venues have yet to be confirmed, if you would like to register an interest in these then email the imps team at **imps@ons.gov.uk**