

Public consultation on the reporting of migration and population statistics: Summary of responses and future reporting

August 2008

1. Background

There are many migration and population outputs produced by different departments across government at varying times, using different definitions, reference periods, and data sources. This creates confusion for users who may be unsure of the appropriate statistics to use for their specific purposes, particularly if seemingly related statistics appear to tell different stories.

This issue was recognised in the report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on Migration Statistics, published on 15 December 2006, which made the recommendation:

E(1): Key information on migration collected across government should be brought together in one place to achieve coherent reporting. This should be summarised in an Annual Report on Migration Statistics, by the National Statistics Centre for Demography.

A cross-government migration reporting working group was set up to fulfil this vision. The group agreed the proposal which formed the basis of a consultation document. A public consultation on the reporting of migration and population statistics ran for 13 weeks from 26 February to 27 May 2008.

2. The Proposal

The general proposal for a more coherent approach to migration and population reporting involves:

- provision of a principal point of access to all migration and population-related reports although individual reports may still be accessed through the appropriate government website; and

- adding value to the outputs in terms of insight, expert analysis and commentary to describe the similarities or differences between the data and why these occur.

This implies joint releases of outputs across the Government Statistical Service which will be achieved through greater coordination between departments.

In response to the migration task force recommendation migration-related publications from across government and the UK are now being published in a more coordinated manner. Three joint publication dates have been achieved so far this year, in February, May and June. This report is published as part of the August release of migration and population statistics.

3. Consultation response

This report summarises the responses to proposals for more coherent reporting of migration.

Thirty responses to the consultation were received, from a range of users and organisations. Overall the respondents welcomed the proposals outlined in the consultation.

Population and migration statistics are used on a daily basis by 57 per cent of the respondents. Mostly they are used to:

- gain an overview of UK migration and population;
- inform administration and provision of services;
- understand migration patterns at a local area level;
- underpin policy advice; and
- inform research.

A quarter of the respondents use the statistics for publication, writing reports and other onward processing.

More than 80 per cent of respondents regularly use:

- Mid-Year Population Estimates (ONS)
- Subnational Population Projections (ONS)
- Small Area Population Estimates (ONS)
- National Insurance Number Allocations to Overseas Nationals (DWP)
- Population Estimates by Ethnic Group (ONS)

The majority of respondents (86 per cent) stated that the approach of a web-based dissemination would meet their needs and was seen to be advantageous. None of the respondents saw the move to web-based dissemination as disadvantageous.

The public consultation confirmed that a single web page on the National Statistics website from which all other migration data could be accessed and which explained and reconciled differences between sources would be of benefit to users.

In response to the question relating to the grouping and timing of release of migration and population outputs in 2008, 61 per cent of respondents did not foresee any problems or did not comment.

Of those respondents who commented, the most common issue raised was the confusion to users caused by the grouping of outputs that relate to different reference periods.

The consultation asked users if an Annual Migration Report providing an overview of migration in the UK would be of benefit to them. Three quarters of respondents said yes. More than half of the respondents thought the most appropriate time for the Annual Migration Report would be to coincide with the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales.

4. Future reporting of migration and population statistics

This section sets out planned improvements to reporting of migration and population statistics, taking into account the findings of this consultation.

4.1 Timing of cross-government releases

To date progress has been made across government in the timing and release of migration and population statistics. With each new release date (August, being the fourth this year) procedures are being refined and put in place to ensure a coherent approach to cross-government releases. Further developments to procedures are planned in the near future to take account of user's views expressed in the public consultation and from migration task force governing bodies. These developments include:

- consideration of the optimum number of release dates per year; and
- streamlining cross-government releases in respect of reporting periods and number of outputs.

Further work to improve coherence in migration reporting is planned over the coming year. In particular, a cross-cutting commentary is being developed to accompany the releases and the first of these is planned for November 2008. The commentary will help to address the issue of confusion to users caused by the grouping of outputs relating to different reference periods.

4.2 Migration Web Page

A single migration landing page will be developed on the UK Statistics Authority Publication Hub. This page will contain links to:

1. the latest migration releases;
2. the commentary on each release;
3. relevant National Statistics reports and articles;
4. other relevant information; and
5. the latest annual migration report.

4.3 Annual Migration Report

An annual migration report will be produced, summarising key information on migration collected across government. This will take the form of a single on-line report.

Although users indicated their preference for this report to be published at the same time as the mid-year population estimates, this will require significant changes to systems, processes and data supply. Therefore, a spring publication date is proposed for the first report – with a view to moving to August in future if feasible.

