

Improvements to Migration and Population Statistics

February 2009

Introduction

This report describes the package of improvements being made to the mid-year population estimates. It also outlines the timing of the implementation and other progress that has been made between November 2008 and February 2009 in the Improvements to Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) work programme.

Improvements to Mid-Year Estimates Package Announcement

As reported in a previous IMPS update the package of improvements to be implemented into the mid-2008 round of population estimates has now been identified. These statistics will be available for use as the basis for the next local government finance settlement round in England by Communities and Local Government (CLG) in 2010 and by the Department of Health (DH) in resource allocation to health bodies.

Within the package a distinction is drawn between those elements of the package which directly affect the mid-year estimates and those which won't have a direct effect but will help improve users understanding of population change, in particular change relating to migration. It is also noted that a number of the improvements will affect previously published estimates. As a result earlier mid-year estimates may be revised from mid-2002 onwards.

The package will include the following elements which will directly affect the mid-year estimates only the final element of which will not affect the back series:

- Statistical modelling to improve the distribution of International Passenger Survey (IPS) data from sub-regional to local area level. Immigration models will make use of timely administrative data and other sources to replace the use of 2001 Census
- Emigration models, introduced into the mid-2006 estimates, will be enhanced in line with the research findings of the immigration modelling and methodological quality assurance by external experts at Southampton University. Both improvements will potentially affect the mid-year estimates series back to mid-2002. Users will be given advance indication of the likely impacts of these changes. How this will be achieved is described under User Engagement later in this report.
- Use of aggregate Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to improve the distribution of student moving to within England & Wales and between the constituent countries of the UK. Alongside this, an adjustment will also be made to improve estimation of former students moving at the end of their studies, based on a combination of sources including HESA data.
- HESA data will be used to improve the distribution of international students around London.
- An adjustment to the sub-regional 'intermediate geographies' at which International Passenger Survey (IPS) data are used for immigration estimation.
- Improved IPS data following the increase in migration sampling at Stansted, Luton and Manchester airports in January 2008.

Elements of the package which do not directly affect the mid-year estimates are:

- The production for the first time of short-term immigration estimates at local area level.
- The publication of migration indicators at national and local levels.
- A report on the development of quality measures around mid-year estimates.
- An improvement to the modelling method for internal (within England) migration within the subnational population projections for England.

A feature of a number of the elements in the package is the use of administrative data. The importance of using such data was identified by a number of recommendations by the 2006 Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics. Many users have also expressed the use of such data in migration estimation as a priority. Where administrative data is used it is generally at an aggregate, rather than individual record level. Alongside this package of improvements, ONS are continuing to pursue the establishment of legal gateways to accessing individual record level data as reported later in this update report.

Timing of improvements package

In deciding on the timing of the improvements package, ONS have considered many factors, such as data availability and sufficient time to consult with users on the package and implications of the timing of the improvements.

It has not been possible to introduce a package of changes to mid-2008 population estimates in time for August 2009. However it is possible to provide improved estimates before August 2010. Therefore the implementation of the improvements package will be made in time for CLG and DH's next round of finance settlements for England in 2010. The 2008 mid-year population estimates (LAs and above) will be published in August using the existing methods and sources and these will be revised in May 2010 (back to 2002 to include all the elements described in the Improvements to Mid-Year Estimates section). At the same time the 2008-based English subnational population projections will be published and they will include the impact of the improvements. A major advantage is the extra time this will allow for wide user engagement and consultation.

The mid-2009 LA Population estimates will be published in summer 2010. We are still considering the timing of key publications in the lead up to and following the 2011 Census.

ONS has consulted users in England and Wales on the proposed timetable and is working through issues with users of the statistics. We will report outcomes of these consultations in the next IMPS update in May 2009.

User Engagement

Many users will already be aware of many of the improvements being introduced as ONS have engaged with users using a range of means since the last set of improvements were introduced into the mid-2006 population estimates. An outline of the user engagement strategy has also been provided in previous IMPS updates. Since the last update, further user engagement has included:

- Consultation meetings on the options for implementation timetabling and requirements for further estimates and projections ahead of the 2011 Census. Meetings have been held with local Chief Executives and Chief Finance Officers as well as with the Communities and Local Government financial group.
- Meetings have also been held with representatives from the devolved administrations to identify issues with the proposed implementation package.

- Establishment of 'reference groups' who as part of the QA process comment on proposed methods and sense check provisional results on the key elements of the package. The reference groups are made up of local authority and academic experts. Groups have already met to discuss students and immigration distribution.
- A separate reference group for London covering the strands of the implementation package.
- Meetings and correspondence with local authority officials and other stakeholders looking at the implications of ONS's plans for timing of the improvements.

Engagement events planned for the next quarter include:

- The next quarterly joint workshop held with the Local Government Association is scheduled for 20th March in London.
- A quarterly joint workshop held with the Local Government Association planned for May in Birmingham
- A second round of reference groups on the local area distribution of immigration and student migration. A first reference group on short-term migration is scheduled for 23rd March.
- Publication of the next IMPS update in May, summarising the work of the development programme.

Implementation of the Port Survey Review

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has been redesigned as a result of development work following the Port Survey Review. These improvements went live in the field on 1 January 2009. The improvements consist of three main elements:

1. More efficient allocation of IPS shifts to better reflect migrant flows at different ports
2. Increased number of migrants sampled at all air and channel tunnel routes
3. Increased coverage by interviewing at additional ports, namely Belfast and Aberdeen

Other changes which are being made as a result of the Port Survey Review include improved methods for weighting the survey results, improved imputation for non-response and a newly developed information system to process the survey results.

A full report will be published on the IMPS Updates Page in the May quarterly release and will include full details of the background, the new survey design and its implementation.

Indicators of Migration

In May 2009, we will be publishing the first set of indicators of migration at the local and national levels.

At the national level, we will publish an indication of international migration based on provisional data from the International Passenger Survey. This will be updated quarterly consisting of an annual rolling series. Initially, each quarterly update will be based upon IPS data three quarters after it is collected. This will give a more timely indication of international migration compared to the current annual publication of Total International Migration, which is published in the November after the calendar year in which the IPS data were collected.

At the local level, we will publish the start of a suite of indicators of migration, which will be added to as data sources become available. The suite will allow for comparisons of migration indicators between local areas and indicators can be compared against each other. The output will allow users to view trends over time for a particular area and access summary data for their own analysis. The underlying data used to produce the indicators will be from a variety of sources and will be updated on a quarterly basis where possible.

Access to Administrative Data Sources

As previously reported, the Ministerial Group and the senior Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Board consider that the sharing of administrative data is key to improving migration statistics. ONS have been working closely with other government departments and public authorities to establish legal gateways for information sharing for statistical purposes between the UK Statistics Authority where these do not already exist.

- ONS and the Department of Work and Pension (DWP) have been able to benefit from an existing legal gateway which allows the sharing of Migrant Worker Scan data on National Insurance Number registrations for statistical purposes. The data was successfully transferred to ONS in February following the agreement of protocols on data security and confidentiality.
- A draft regulation to allow the sharing of Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) School Census was laid in December 2008 and Parliamentary approval for access to selected data items was given following debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords in January 2009. ONS and DCSF are working closely to finalise data transfer.

- A special Working Group has been set up to manage the work involved in sharing the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student data. It is focused on resolving complex legal and data ownership issues as there are potentially five organisations involved.

Entry and Exit Data

As has been reported previously, ONS and the Home Office are looking at how data from the e-borders system will help improve migration flow estimates. The e-borders system involves scanning passports on entry to and exit from the UK. Linking these records together should enable identification of the number of long and short-term migrants. It is expected that 95% coverage of E-borders data will be achieved in December 2010.

As with other administrative sources, ONS have researched what might be possible with e-borders before gaining access to the individual record level data. A report outlining the potential benefits of E-borders for improving migration and population statistics will be published in spring 2009. It will outline the six possible benefits identified from preliminary research.

Migration Reporting

Coordinated publication of migration-related outputs was initiated throughout 2008. This included coordinated release dates, joint press releases and a joint press conference with representation from ONS, HO and DWP. The response to this approach was very positive and media coverage was good. Some lessons have been learned to take forward into 2009, in particular with respect to the presentation and scope of the materials published on any single date

To address concerns raised about keeping the volume of materials manageable and messages clear, future releases will be more focussed on migration releases and stories and less relevant outputs such as the small area population estimates, will no longer form part of the joint releases.

There will be quarterly migration reports which will summarise the regular quarterly releases which form the bulk of the joint releases. They will provide key stories and brief analyses. The first report will be published in May as a prototype and feedback on the reports is welcome with a view to developing and improving them over the coming year. Early migration indicators will be incorporated into the reports as they are developed.

A migration topic page will be developed on the new publications hub, which will provide an overview of migration data and links to relevant migration releases. This page is expected to be in place for the May migration release.

The first on-line annual migration report will be published in November 2009. It will contain a range of articles and data, including the first release of ONS international migration data.

Short-term Migration

The latest set of experimental England and Wales level short-term migration estimates are now available. See

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/STM_mid07.pdf

These mid-2007 estimates are published eight months earlier than the equivalent mid-2006 estimates. This improvement in timeliness has been achieved through the use of some provisional International Passenger Survey (IPS). A more detailed explanation of this improvement is provided in the appendix to the report published.

Following this publication, research will now concentrate on developing methods of producing local authority level estimates of short-term migration building on the feasibility report published in November 2008. Further improvements to the timeliness of the estimates are also a priority for this project.