

Migration Statistics Improvement Work Programme Progress Report

November 2008

Introduction

This report provides an update on progress made between August and November 2008 in the Migration Statistics Improvement Work Programme. This is a substantial programme that includes taking forward the recommendations of the 2006 Interdepartmental Task Force on Migration Statistics and the more recent Treasury Select Committee report “Counting the Population”.

Organisation and governance

As reported in previous updates the improvement work programme is overseen and steered by a senior Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Board, with a Ministerial Group providing impetus. These governance groups have continued to meet throughout the period. The Ministerial Group last met on 16 October, and the Programme Board met on 22 September.

Improvements to Mid Year Estimates

ONS is considering the package of improvements that will feed into the mid-2008 (and future) estimates. These estimates will be used as the basis for the next local government finance settlement round by Communities and Local Government (CLG).

There are several strands to the research that is in progress and most likely to be included in the first improvement package:

- Using timely administrative data and statistical modelling to improve the distribution of immigration at local area level. Several statistical models have been developed and are being assessed objectively for relative performance.
- Use of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to improve estimation of UK and overseas students. In current research the data is being used in aggregate form to adjust internal migration flows.
- Development of short-term immigration estimates at local area level. A feasibility report on this approach was published on 19 November.
- Refinements to some of the improvements to methods introduced for the mid-2006 population estimates, in particular modelling emigration at local area level and checking the intermediate geographies used for distributing migration.
- Developing quality measures around population estimates.
- Producing indicators of migration at national and local area level

A decision will shortly be made on the timing of the improvement implementation. The timing will ensure that improvements to the mid-2008 estimates are incorporated so that the finance settlement is made on the basis of the best information available. It is also important to ensure we allow sufficient time for user engagement and an assessment of the effect the changes have on the estimates.

User Engagement

Plans for user engagement have been implemented. ONS is engaging with users through a variety of means, covering both technical and non-technical stakeholders. To date these have included:

- Presentation and discussion of the strands of the work programme at the Population Sub-Group of the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP)
- Presentation of key areas of research at the British Society for Population Studies (BSPS) annual conference in September 2008
- Presentation at Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) seminar
- Presentation at many regional and local events
- Regular joint workshops in conjunction with the Local Government Association, at which methods are discussed and ideas shared – the most recent of these was held on 5 November and we are aiming to hold them quarterly in the future.

- An IMPS update is published on a quarterly basis on the ONS website.

For the future over the forthcoming period we intend to:

- Convene small advisory groups of external experts (for example from academia and local authorities) to help quality assure the improvement methods being proposed
- Hold a series of roadshows or workshops in 2009 to explain the improvements and their impacts to customers around the UK
- Consult with Communities and Local Government financial group on options for implementation timetabling and requirements for further estimates and projections before 2011 Census.
- Continue with the reporting progress on a quarterly basis and the other initiatives outlined above

Implementation of the Port Survey Review

The new survey design including a larger, main migration sample and a sub-sample for interviews collecting data for balance of payments and tourism statistics (as reported in the August update report) has been developed and is on track for implementation in 2009.

Access to Administrative Data Sources

As previously reported in the August IMPS update, the Ministerial Group and the senior Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Board consider that improving the sharing of administrative data is key to improving migration statistics. Guaranteeing the security of individual level data is paramount. ONS are in the process of using the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 to establish legal gateways for information sharing for statistical purposes between the UK Statistics Authority and other public authorities and agencies, where these do not already exist. Notably:

- A draft regulation and supporting business case to allow sharing of Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) School Census data has been developed. It is anticipated that this draft regulation will be laid shortly.
- A statistical business case and draft regulation for sharing Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student data is being developed. The legislative process for this is expected to take around six months.

- Legal assessment has shown that a gateway already exists for the use of Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Migrant Worker Scan data on National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations for statistical purposes. ONS is in the process of ensuring the DWP protocols on data security and confidentiality are met.

Migration Reporting

The latest cross-government release of migration related statistics was issued on 19 November. This involved outputs from ONS together with the regular quarterly outputs from DWP and Home Office. This represents a further step toward the vision of simultaneous publication of demographic data at a small number of release dates through the year.

An interdepartmental working group is developing the plans for further improvements to the coherence in migration reporting, including further quarterly releases and the proposed annual migration report in 2009.

Short-term Migration

The latest set of short-term migration estimates were published in September 2008, covering the twelve months to mid-2006 and based on the International Passenger Survey. As part of this release ONS included quality measures (standard error) around the stock estimates.

Research on short-term migration estimation is concentrated on deriving local area distributions including assessing simple disaggregation approaches and more complex model based approaches. A report on the suitability of these approaches was published on 19 November. It is anticipated that local area estimates covering migrants staying between one and twelve months, could be released in Summer 2009 pending favourable research. ONS will be involving external experts in quality assuring any proposed method.

Beyond 2011

ONS is considering a longer term strategy to help meet future population estimation challenges beyond 2011. The National Statistician, with the Registrars General, has recently started the Beyond 2011 work programme to underpin this strategy. As part of Beyond 2011 ONS has initiated a cross-governmental project to investigate alternative census and survey designs and the potential use that could be made of administrative data

sources. Proposals for future work will be presented in a strategic business case planned for March 2009.