

2006 and Revised 2002-5 Mid-Year Population Estimates

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 What do the mid-2006 population estimates tell us about population change in England and Wales?

Latest figures show that in the year to mid-2006 the UK population increased by 349,000 to 60,587,000 (an increase of 0.6 per cent), compared to an increase of 393,000 in the previous year (0.7 per cent). In the five years since 2001, population has increased by an average 0.5 per cent per year.

Increases in numbers of births, decreases in numbers of deaths and changes in the pattern of international migration into and out of the United Kingdom have all contributed to population growth since 2001. As a result of these changes, migration and other related changes accounted for 55 per cent of population growth in the year to mid-2006, compared to 68 per cent in the previous year and 71 per cent in the year to mid-2002.

More information is given in the press release published on 22 August, available from: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp>.

Q2 Where can we find the figures?

Population estimates and key related products are available from: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/popest>.

Q3 Why don't the mid-year estimates include short-term migrants?

ONS estimates relate to the usually resident population of each area. For this purpose, only long term international migrants are included in the estimates. ONS uses the United Nations recommended definition of a long-term migrant to identify who should be included - anyone who moves from their country of usual residence for at least a year (see definitions in Box One below).

ONS recognises the need to have a more comprehensive picture of population based on timely, accurate estimates of the number of people coming into, going out of and present in the country for different durations and reasons.

A significant amount of information on visits to and from the UK is published from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). These are in addition to the estimates of long-term migrants, but are not the same as estimates of short-term migrants. Visits data refer to individuals on trips of less than 12 months, so include very large numbers of holiday makers on stays of one or two weeks who would be excluded from the UN short-term migration definition. On the other hand, workers with a definite job to go to, staying for less than 12 months are excluded from visits data. Those workers who stay for between three and 12 months are within the UN short-term migration definition. A worker staying for longer than 12 months would be counted as a long-term migrant.

ONS are currently developing estimates of the numbers of short term migrants coming into, going out of and present in the country each year. It is planned to produce estimates at national level in October 2007, for the years to mid-2004 and mid-2005. These will also include estimates of average length of stay. Methods for producing short-term migration estimates at sub-national levels are being researched.

For the longer-term, ONS are also looking at the feasibility of producing population estimates on alternative bases, using information obtained from questions being developed for use in the 2011 Census and continuous population surveys.

Box one: United Nations definition of migrants

Long-term international migrant

The United Nations recommended definition of a long-term international migrant is:

A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. From the perspective of the country of departure the person will be a long-term emigrant and from that of the country of arrival the person will be a long-term immigrant.

This 12-month migrant definition is used for the UK usually resident population estimate series.

Short-term international migrant

The United Nations recommended definition of a short-term international migrant is:

A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least 3 months but less than a year (12 months), except in cases where the movement to that country is for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage. For purposes of international migration statistics, the country of usual residence of short-term migrants is considered to be the country of destination during the period they spend in it.

UK population estimates do not currently include short-term in-migrants as usually resident in the UK, nor do they exclude short-term out-migrants from the usually resident population.

Q4 Why has ONS revised figures for 2002 to 2005?

ONS is undertaking a substantial and long term programme of work to improve the population statistics it produces. This work highlighted several improvements to methodology that could be made immediately. These improvements have impacted principally on the distribution of the national population to local areas. The new methods have been used in making population estimates for 2006 and have resulted in revised estimates for the years 2002 to 2005. Revised figures for the sub-national population projections (that are based on 2004 population estimates) will follow on 27 September 2007.

More details on the improved methods are available from:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14834>.

Q5 What are the impacts of improvements on the revised figures?

The improved methods announced on 24 April 2007 mean that ONS will be adding 28,700 to existing population estimates for England and Wales for the period between mid-2001 to mid-2005. International migration is now estimated to have contributed 730,000 to the population of England and Wales as a whole over the four years 2002 to 2005.

As the improved methods redistribute national estimates of international migrants between local areas, they do not always increase the previous estimates of population change between 2001 and 2005 at a local authority level. Indicative impacts of the improvements to methodology were published on 24 April 2007. These tables will be updated to show final impacts on 13 September 2007. Both the indicative and final versions of the tables will be available from:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14834>.

Q6 How are the population estimates compiled?

Estimates of the population during the inter-censal period are made using a cohort component method. Simply, this updates the previous mid-year estimate, allowing for natural change due to births and deaths in the past year and adding on net migration.

In more detail, a number of components are used in calculating the England and Wales population estimates. These include: births, deaths, prisoners, school boarders, armed forces (home and foreign), internal migration and international migration (IPS, Eire, asylum seekers, visitor switchers and migrant switchers). It is important to remember that short-term international migrants are not included in the MYEs - this is consistent with the UN definition of a usual resident that excludes anyone who is in a country for less than 12 months.

Full details of the methodology for population estimates can be found in the documents available from:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=575>.

Q7 What are the data sources used to compile population estimates?

The base from which inter-censal population estimates are calculated is the most recent Census.

Births and deaths data used in the compilation of mid-year population estimates are obtained from the General Register Office through compulsory registrations of all births and deaths occurring in England and Wales.

Internal migration, that is moves within the UK, is estimated using:

- The NHS Central Register (NHSCR) which records movements of patients between Health Areas; and
- Annual downloads of each patient register from Health Areas which identifies migrants when they change their residential postcode and notify their GP of the change in postcode.

International migration is estimated from sources including the:

- International Passenger Survey (IPS);
- Labour Force Survey data on the location of recent migrants;
- Home Office data on the number of asylum seekers and dependents who are not counted by the IPS;
- National Asylum Seeker Support Service data on numbers of asylum seekers by local authority;
- Irish Quarterly National Household Survey and the National Health Service Central Register data for estimates of flows between the UK and the Republic of Ireland;
- 2001 Census data; and
- A wide range of other data sources used for out-migration modelling in the propensity to migrate model.

Q8 Why don't ONS use administrative sources in migration or population estimates?

ONS is investigating whether other data sources can be used to estimate migration and population and are considering a wide range of sources that cover migrants. In May, ONS set up a Task Force on Migration Statistics with the other government departments who hold the key data sources that include migrants, for example National Insurance numbers (NINOs), Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) and GP patient registers. These data sources are being investigated to assess their value either as a source to make direct estimates or as a source which can be used in the quality assurance of estimates.

ONS research has identified some key issues that would need to be addressed before these sources could be used for the purpose of estimating statistics on the resident population. For instance, three key issues are:

1. Population coverage:
 - a. Short-term vs. long-term migrants: ONS population estimates are based on the UN definition of long-term migrants – someone who changes their country of residence for at least 12 months. Registration data tend to also include people who will only stay a few months and it is not possible to identify long-term migrants separately.
 - b. Population estimation covers long-term migrants coming to or leaving the UK regardless of their age, nationality or reason for migrating. Registration data sets, on the other hand, cover the target populations that are relevant to the purposes of the administrative process, for example NINos include overseas nationals who register to work or claim benefits.
2. Two way flows: Registration data such as WRS and NINos reflect flows into the country but do not generally reflect flows out.
3. Registration data may reflect when a migrant registers rather than when they arrive, for instance those migrants with existing NINos such as returning British people will not be recorded as a migrant in the NINo data set.

Q9 Are the population estimation methods robust?

- ONS population estimates are the best currently possible;
- Natural change components of estimates are of high quality;
- Migration is widely recognised to be more difficult to estimate accurately and ONS has a substantial programme of work aimed at improving estimates of migration and population;
- In the meantime the ONS international migration estimates are based on the best available sources of long-term international migration;
- ONS is open and transparent about the methods it uses to produce outputs, following international standards, and having methodological changes peer reviewed by independent experts;
- ONS has a very detailed methodology guide published, setting out the complete methodology, and this is open about any limitations. This is available from: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=575>.

Q10 Are migrants from accession countries included in population estimates?

The migration estimates (and hence population estimates) will include citizens from these countries who move for at least 12 months. The 2005 mid-year period covered the first full year of post-accession migration resulting in a large increase of in-migrants from the accession countries from about 20,000 in mid-2004 to 77,000 in mid-2005.

For the 2006 mid-year period, in-migration of citizens of the accession countries remained at a similar level as in the year to mid-2005 at 74,000. However, mid-2006 is the first mid-year to include a full year of out-migration since accession in May 2004. Thus out-migration of citizens of these countries has increased from 3,000 in mid-2005 to

16,000 in mid-2006. Citizens of these countries arriving in the UK since accession can not be counted as international out-migrants until they have lived in the UK for at least 12 months, so May 2005 was the earliest point at which they could be counted as out-migrants. Therefore, for the 2006 population estimates, outflows of citizens from the accession countries have started feeding into population estimates for the first time.

Bulgaria and Romania acceded to the EU on 1 January 2007 and therefore will not be included in population estimates until the mid-2007 estimates are published in 2008.

Q11 What is ONS doing to improve the methods and data sources it uses?

ONS has a continuous programme of review of its population and migration statistics and data collection processes to monitor the quality of published statistics and develop improvements to existing data. Recent and current developments include:

- Increasing the size of the sample of international out-migrants in the International Passenger Survey since January 2007.
- New questions have been included in the IPS since 2004 to help estimate how many people change their original intention on length of stay.
- Improved methods for estimating international migration implemented in 2007:
 - Combining LFS and IPS improves the regional distribution of national international in-migration estimates.
 - Replacing existing intermediate geographies with one that produces more robust estimates.
 - Improving the way international out-migrant estimates are distributed between local authorities in each region of England and in Wales – by distributing IPS figures to local areas using new factors that reflect propensity to migrate.
 - Improving the basis for making assumptions about the proportion of people who will not realise their original intentions at the time of travel, in terms of their expected length of stay in the destination country – these are known as migrant switchers and visitor switchers.

These improved methods were incorporated in the first release of mid-2006 population estimates and in revisions to published estimates for mid-2002 to mid-2005.

- National stock estimates of short-term migrants are planned to be published as experimental statistics in October 2007.
- ONS is continuing to feed its statistical requirements into the Home Office electronic borders (e-Borders) programme.
- Requirements for collecting better information about migrants are being fed into the development of the new enlarged household survey, starting in 2008, and the 2011 Census.
- ONS is currently conducting a review of port surveys and will report its findings in due course.

More details on the improving migration and population statistics project are available from:

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

Q12 Are some LAs losing population in the latest estimates?

For England and Wales as a whole, the population has increased by 2.6 per cent between mid-2001 and mid-2006. Over this period, there has been an increase in population for 340 of the 376 local authorities. The remaining 36 local authorities have experienced population decreases of between 0.1 and 2.4 per cent. The ten largest percentage decreases in population over the five year period are shown in the table below.

Local Authority	Total Population		Total Population Change	
	2001	2006	Numbers	Per Cent
Bridgnorth	52,500	51,800	-700	-1.2
Liverpool	441,900	436,100	-5,800	-1.3
Reading UA	144,700	142,800	-1,900	-1.3
Stockport	284,600	280,600	-3,900	-1.4
Sunderland	284,600	280,600	-4,000	-1.4
Bournemouth UA	163,600	161,200	-2,400	-1.5
Burnley	89,500	88,000	-1,500	-1.7
Sefton	282,900	277,400	-5,500	-1.9
Middlesbrough UA	141,200	138,400	-2,800	-2.0
Rushmoor	90,900	88,700	-2,100	-2.4

Q13 When will ONS make further improvements and will users be consulted?

Work is continuing on making further improvements to population statistics (see response to Q11). However, a further set of revisions to existing population estimates is not planned for at least two years.

Before any major methodological changes to the population estimates are implemented ONS will be keen to consult with users and will do so through the usual routes such as:

- Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) Population Sub-group;
- British Society for Population Studies (BSPS);
- External quality assurance panels, such as the one convened to review the improvements being made to methods in 2007; and
- Seminars that may be convened to explain plans to users.

Regular updates will continue to be published on the National Statistics website, and will be available from:

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