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Migration flows – A summary of the UK’s recent experience
and the immediate challenges ahead *

Prepared by

Michael O’Rourke
Office for National Statistics
United Kingdom

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MIGRATION FLOWS - A SUMMARY OF THE UK'S RECENT EXPERIENCE AND THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Introduction

1. The following presents a short description of some of the key issues for the UK in relation to the estimation of international migration flows into and from the UK since 2004 and for the immediate future. Alongside some of the challenges faced, some of the solutions that have been put in place, or some of those that are being considered for the future, are also discussed. In doing this, a number of the objectives of the meeting are covered, particularly on developments concerning the categories of migrant that need to be measured and the likely difficulties in this area. Since the UK has contributed to the joint UNECE-Eurostat Task Force on measuring emigration using data collected by overseas receiving countries, and to the OECD project analysing census and survey estimates of overseas nationals and overseas-born residents in OECD countries, no reference is made in this paper to the verification of UK outflows against overseas stocks and other such matters, as these projects will presumably report separately. This is not a controlled document and the views expressed here do not necessarily imply the expression of any official opinion on the part of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), or that of any other UK Government Department.

Present UK practice and associated statistical issues

Overview

2. There is no single, all-inclusive system or data source in place to measure migration into or out of the UK. Therefore, it is necessary to use a combination of data from administrative and survey sources in order to produce estimates of international migration. None of the data sources used, while offering the best data currently available, are specifically designed to capture information solely on international migration. The UK uses the UN definition of a long-term migrant in the production of its official international migration estimates.

Estimating international migration

3. The main source of international migration data in the UK is the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This is an all year round, face to face, voluntary and anonymised sample survey of passengers arriving at and departing from UK air and sea ports and the Channel Tunnel, other than for all the routes to/from the Irish Republic. For the latter, data is supplied by, and agreed with, the Irish Central Statistics Office. From the IPS, immigrants and emigrants are recorded as those intending to live in the UK or move away from the UK for a year or more, having lived out of the UK (for immigrants) or in the UK (for emigrants) for at least a year. The IPS estimate is then adjusted for: (a) asylum seekers and their dependants (as the IPS does not capture most of the asylum seeker flow) using data from the Home Office, which is the government department responsible for the control of immigration; and (b) an estimate of those who switched from visitor/short term migrant to long-term migrant status, and back the other way from migrant to non-migrant status (by using IPS long stay visitor estimates). The weighted IPS estimate, the adjustment for asylum seekers and their dependants, and switchers are combined with Irish CSO data to produce the most complete estimate of international migration for the UK, which is known as Total International Migration (TIM).

International migration in 2005

4. Total inflows, outflows and resulting net flows of TIM for the last 10 years are shown in Figure 1, while Table 1 shows the components of TIM for the same period. For 2005 itself, the following were also noted:

- Net inflows of foreign citizens and net outflows of British citizens continued.
- Net in-migration of New Commonwealth citizens (especially India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) was the highest of all the foreign citizenship groupings.
- Net in-migration of citizens from the eight Central and Eastern European countries (A8) coming into the UK for a period of at least a year increased by just over 30 percent from 49,000 in 2004 to 64,000 in 2005.
- The allowance for asylum seekers and their dependants was the lowest since 1991, only contributing a net inflow of 11,000 to TIM (Table 1).

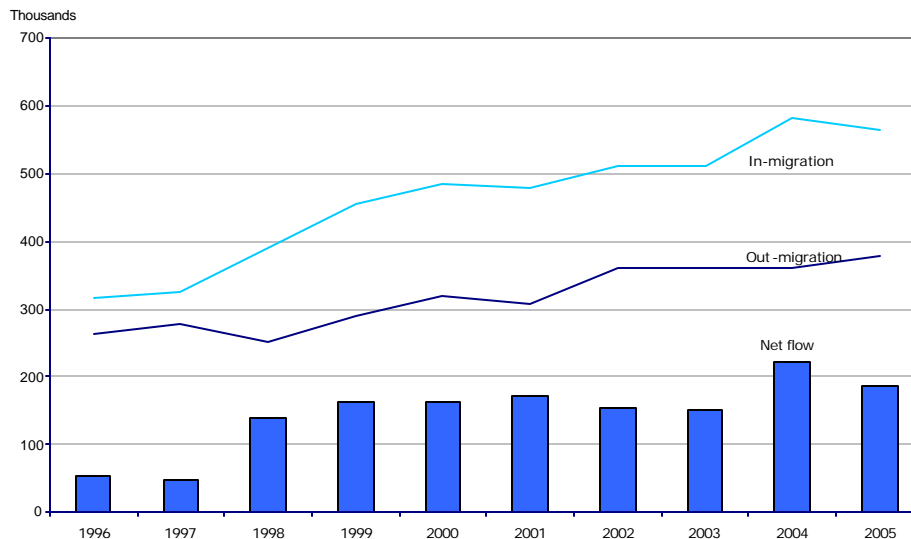


Figure 1: Total International Migration to/from the UK, 1996-2005

Survey issues – sample sizes

5. Already recognising that the IPS does not cover all migration flows, the first and largest issue is the size of the IPS sample and the associated degree of uncertainty or 'error' in the estimates that result. Each year, of the main IPS sample of just over a quarter of a million, only about 1 percent are migrants, which amounts generally to just over 3,500 contacts in total. In 2005, the most recent year for which data are available, this gave a standard error for the grossed-up IPS estimated inflow of 496,000 of 3.7 per cent, while for the estimated outflow of 328,000 the error

was 4.8 per cent. Additionally, as is evident from the standard errors, there is an imbalance in the sample sizes for in-migrants and out-migrants.

6. Given the usual tensions that exist between matters such as cost, quality and respondent burden, following a series of successful pilots in 2005 and 2006, the plan is to boost the IPS emigrant survey from January 2007 in order to achieve comparable margins of error with the inflow estimates. Research is also underway into non-sampling errors (eg false- and non-responses) and weighting issues on the IPS. ONS is also examining how to improve data collection on immigrant and emigrant populations via the in-country surveys that presently exist in the UK, which are also going through a period of restructuring and optimisation.

Intention vs. reality

7. The second major issue is that IPS estimates are based on respondents' intentions and that these may or may not accord with their final actions. Therefore, in the present methodology adjustments are made for migrant and visitor switching behaviours. In order to place these adjustments on a stronger footing, however, new questions have been introduced into the IPS from January 2004 in order to identify (i) short-term migrants (3-12 months) and (ii) to capture more intelligence on uncertainty and length of stay by asking overseas national leaving the UK (and UK nationals returning to the UK) how long they intended to stay when they originally arrived (or departed).

Changing patterns of flows – requirements for other definitions?

8. The aforementioned research on new IPS questions, which will report in 2007, is of increasing importance. This is chiefly because of accession to the EU of the A8 countries in May 2004 and a change in the scale and type of inflow to the UK from these nations. To illustrate this in a more accessible way, out of total net inflow average of 500 a day in 2005, the net inflow of long-term accession migrants equates to an average of about 175 people a day; prior to accession, net long-term migration of A8 citizens to the UK did not even average one tenth of this amount. Moreover, estimates from the IPS visitor survey and other administrative schemes¹, though not definitively measuring migration, suggested very much higher flows than those being registered by the long-term TIM estimates. Taken together, these data sources suggested that the majority of A8s entering the UK in 2004 and 2005 intended to stay for periods of less than 12 months. In addition, IPS long term migrant data indicated that about 60 per cent of long-term A8 migrants came to the UK for work related reasons, compared with only 25 per cent of all other migrants. This overall pattern of migrant behaviour is explained when considering a combination of factors like the relatively flexible nature of the employment market in the UK set against the closed-door policy of the majority of other EU Member States, and the relative ease and low cost of travel back to their original country of residence.
9. Given the large flows of A8 visitors, seasonal-, and short-term migrants coming to the UK for employment related reasons, the switcher adjustments for the estimation of TIM have taken on more significance (Table 1), reflecting the greater uncertainty in length of stay of accession

¹ For example, the Workers Registration Scheme, set up to monitor A8 migrants wanting to take-up employment in the UK (http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/reports/accession_monitoring_report). Such administrative sources on arrivals in the UK have limitations, in particular with regard to their inability to distinguish between short-term and long-term migrants. In addition they only cover those entering the UK to work (and not those arriving for study or other purposes) and do not provide any information on outflows.

migrants. Also apparent is the overall importance of short-term, intra-EU economic migration flows. So much so, the conclusion within the UK is that estimates based solely on the UN long-term definition of international migration are inadequate for some purposes. To reiterate, this is because of the apparent volume of short-term flows and the consequences of the impact such migrants have on the provision of local services and on the local labour markets - and therefore the management of the national economy. To this end, research has started in order to assess the feasibility of producing separate international migration estimates based upon the UN short-term definition. However, there are many difficulties here.

10. Even before any data are investigated, there are clearly conceptual challenges to resolve if this aspiration is to be met. Some examples are:

- At the outset there is issue as to whether the UN definition can be appropriately met within the sources available and whether this definition actually meets the majority of users' needs.
- As already noted, there are definite differences between stated and actual intentions. So, producing timely estimates of short-term migration from the IPS based on evidence gathered from those at the start of their visit would produce statistically different estimates when compared with lagged results from 'historical' information collected from those at the end of their migration event. This is an important issue given the broad indication that some short-term flows may be at least as sizeable as the estimates of some long-term flows.
- The problem of switching and the potential for double counting is also extremely prominent when considering the potential behaviour of short-term migrants. By the definitive nature of short-term migration, and because of the economic and political situation in the EU, there may be multiple movement events by a single person, for different reasons, within any given period of data collection. This leads to counting events and not people/migrants, as well as double counting within different short-term definitions that may emerge, plus the complicating factor of switching into/out of long-term estimates. This perhaps leads to the requirement to move to more complex measures of short-term migration, such as person months spent within the country/region of the country? Obviously, this is methodologically more complex and would not be easily understood by users.

11. Clearly, there are very many challenges to be overcome even before data is explored in earnest. Consequently, the UK is keen to learn of the experiences of other countries with regard to using a combination of data sources to produce estimates of short-term migration.

Improving intra-country geographical resolution

12. While at the international setting the challenge is to produce comparable/harmonised national totals broken down by various variables, at the national level the demands for migration data are driven by other forces in addition. Most notable is the point that for international migration data to have real utility for policy makers and planners (and hence have resources devoted to its collection), it is essential to have some confidence in the geographical distribution of the flows within the country, particularly in the context of the high volumes of A8 short-term flows already discussed. Because the UK's long-term international migration estimates are based on intentions, the quality of the estimates about the likely location of residence of international migrants are variable. There is, for instance, a possible reporting bias towards some 'well known'

destinations, or where the migrant's lack of geographical knowledge does not allow any spatial accuracy (eg just the name of the capital 'London'), even with the presence and expertise of an interviewer.

13. Consequently, research has nearly been completed whereby the use of administrative sources, such as the Labour Force Survey and health data amongst others, can be used in conjunction with the IPS in order to more accurately estimate the internal geographical distribution of all immigrant and emigrant flows. Indeed, as will already be appreciated, geographical resolution and accuracy are significant with regard to the discussion on short-term migrants given the large volumes of flows involved.

The future in the short and medium term

14. The UK recognises that relevant and fit-for-purpose migration statistics are essential for the management of the UK's economy and resources, as well as to help provide an insight into the degree of demographic and societal change that is taking place now and in the future. In view of this, a number of key events in relation to the provision of migration statistics have occurred in recent years. A National Statistics Quality Review (NSQR) of International Migration Statistics was conducted jointly by the ONS and the Home Office, and reported in September 2003. An implementation plan for taking forward the recommendations of the review was subsequently published in January 2004². This has now been incorporated within the Improving Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) project within ONS³ and some of the outcomes from this work have been mentioned in this paper. Other important developments are scheduled with regard to the management of immigration at the UK's borders, and these too should yield more reliable data on total flows; a good example of this is the e-Borders programme⁴, where travellers will be electronically checked before they reach the UK, as they enter and as they leave, and the new five year strategy for immigration and asylum – *Controlling Our Borders: Making Migration Work For Britain*⁵, which includes a points-based system for entry applicants.
15. Finally, following recent public debate over the scale of movement of citizens from the A8 countries, attention has very recently refocused on the overall quality and responsiveness of international migration statistics, particularly in relation to the labour market and local service provision. So much so that in early 2006 the UK established a high level, cross-governmental review on migration statistics; the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics⁶. It is planned that ONS will report the findings of the Task Force to Ministers in December 2006 with a view to recommending a range of actions that will span across government departments in order to establish a foundation and plan to deliver better information and statistics about the complex topic of migration.

N. O'Rourke
Head of Migration Statistics Unit
Office for National Statistics, Centre for Demography
UK

² www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/quality/reviews/population.asp

³ www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/default.asp

⁴ http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Cutting-Edge_Technology_To_Secur?version=1

⁵ http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Controlling_Our_Borders_Making_?version=1

⁶ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Inter-departmental_Task_Force_on_Migration_Statistics.pdf

**Table 1 Total International Migration (TIM) methodology:
time series 1996 to 2005
Components and adjustments used to estimate TIM¹**

United Kingdom
thousands

Year	Total International Migration (TIM)	Components		Adjustments ⁴			Visitor Switchers adjustment ⁶	Migrant Switchers adjustment ⁷
		International Passenger Survey (IPS) ²	Irish Republic ³	Asylum Seekers adjustment ⁵				
				All	Principal Applicants	Dependants		
Inflow to UK								
1996	318	261	15	31	26	5	25	-14
1997	326	273	11	34	28	6	23	-14
1998	390	318	9	51	43	9	28	-17
1999	454	354	8	80	66	14	29	-18
2000	483	364	6	92	79	13	40	-18
2001	480	372	5	84	70	14	36	-19
2002	513	386	5	96	83	13	45	-19
2003	513	431	5	54	45	8	44	-22
2004	582	518	4	36	31	6	49	-26
2005	565	496	4	26	22	4	63	-25
Outflow from UK								
1996	264	223	19	7	6	1	17	-2
1997	279	232	21	10	8	2	18	-2
1998	251	206	21	10	8	2	16	-2
1999	291	245	19	8	6	2	21	-2
2000	321	278	16	10	9	2	19	-3
2001	308	251	14	18	15	4	26	-3
2002	359	306	13	21	16	5	22	-3
2003	362	314	13	17	13	4	21	-3
2004	359	310	13	16	13	3	23	-3
2005	380	328	15	16	13	2	25	-3
Net Flow								
1996	+ 54	+ 37	- 3	+ 24	+ 20	+ 4	+ 8	- 11
1997	+ 47	+ 40	- 10	+ 24	+ 20	+ 4	+ 5	- 12
1998	+ 139	+ 113	- 12	+ 41	+ 34	+ 6	+ 12	- 15
1999	+ 163	+ 109	- 11	+ 72	+ 60	+ 12	+ 8	- 15
2000	+ 163	+ 87	- 10	+ 81	+ 70	+ 11	+ 20	- 15
2001	+ 172	+ 121	- 9	+ 66	+ 55	+ 11	+ 10	- 16
2002	+ 153	+ 80	- 8	+ 75	+ 66	+ 9	+ 23	- 16
2003	+ 151	+ 118	- 8	+ 37	+ 33	+ 4	+ 23	- 18
2004	+ 223	+ 208	- 9	+ 21	+ 18	+ 3	+ 26	- 23
2005	+ 185	+ 168	- 10	+ 11	+ 9	+ 2	+ 38	- 22

1 Based mainly on data from the International Passenger Survey. Includes adjustments for (1) those whose intended length of stay changes so that their migrant status changes; (2) asylum seekers and their dependants not identified by the IPS; and (3) flows between the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

2 IPS data for 1996-1998 has been adjusted for the IPS weighting adjustments introduced in 1999

3 Based on data supplied by the Irish Central Statistics Office

4 Adjustments are made to allow for migration flows that are not captured by the IPS or Irish components

5 Based on Home Office data on asylum seekers and their dependants

6 Based on IPS visitor data. Visitor switchers are those who enter or leave the UK intending to stay in the destination country for less than a year but who actually stay for a year or longer.

7 Based on IPS migrant data. Migrant switchers are those who states the intention in the IPS to stay in the destination country for more than a year but who actually left sooner.

+ Denotes a net inflow figure

- Denotes a net outflow figure

Figures have been rounded independently and may not add to totals