

Revisions to net migration estimates – Guidance note for users

On 10 April 2014, ONS published a review of the [‘Quality of Long-term International Migration \(LTIM\) estimates from 2001 to 2011’](#). This work was carried out in light of the results of the 2011 Census, which suggested that net migration was likely to have been higher during this ten year period than had been shown by published migration estimates. The quality paper included a revised series of net migration estimates for the UK for the calendar years from 2001 to 2011, as shown in Table 1. These are fully consistent with [revised mid-year net migration estimates](#) previously published by ONS.

Table 1 Revised net long-term international migration series for United Kingdom, calendar years, 2001-2011

Calendar year	Revised Net migration estimates	Original Net migration estimates	<i>thousands</i>
			Difference
2001	+ 179	+ 171	+ 8
2002	+ 172	+ 153	+ 19
2003	+ 185	+ 148	+ 37
2004	+ 268	+ 245	+ 23
2005	+ 267	+ 206	+ 61
2006	+ 265	+ 198	+ 67
2007	+ 273	+ 233	+ 40
2008	+ 229	+ 163	+ 66
2009	+ 229	+ 198	+ 31
2010	+ 256	+ 252	+ 4
2011	+ 205	+ 215	- 10

This note provides further guidance to users on how to interpret these revised net migration estimates, alongside other published migration estimates.

What does the table of revised net migration estimates show?

The revised net migration estimates are for whole of the UK and are for all citizenship groups. Estimates for immigration and emigration for 2001 to 2011 have not been revised.

The revised estimates show that net migration was underestimated across the decade but particularly between 2004 and 2008. This reflects the finding that the International Passenger Survey (IPS), the main data source for migration statistics, missed a large amount of immigration and emigration, particularly of EU8 citizens, in the years following EU Accession in 2004. The IPS underwent a series of improvements in 2009 which were shown in the review to have improved the quality of migration estimates produced from 2009 onwards.

Why were revisions to net migration needed?

The review into the quality of LTIM found that prior to 2009 the IPS did not identify the full extent of migration into and out of the UK. At the time, coverage of the IPS was focused towards major airports such as London Heathrow. As a result, the IPS missed migrants, particularly from EU8 countries, who travelled through regional airports, which saw an

increase in routes and passenger numbers in the middle part of the decade following EU expansion. This would have affected the measurement of both immigration and emigration flows.

Why has only net migration been revised, and not estimates of immigration or emigration?

The 2011 Census provided the opportunity to compare the estimated population of the UK in 2011 with the estimated population in 2001. The observed increase in population is due to natural change - (i.e. births minus deaths) and net migration. Since births and deaths data are based on registers and therefore considered to be accurate, the additional population growth must be due to net migration. Thus a figure for net migration across the decade can be derived, and can then be distributed to individual years using other data sources (such as National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations and GP registrations).

The 2011 Census does not give us a figure for total immigration since 2001. This is because the 2011 Census would not have included any people who immigrated since 2001 and subsequently emigrated prior to Census day. IPS figures suggest that around two thirds of emigrants who had previously immigrated to the UK have stayed for 1 to 4 years.

There are no additional data sources available that would reliably indicate the scale of missed immigration and emigration flows. The data sources that are available have limitations in terms of directly measuring migration. For example, the registration of National Insurance numbers to overseas nationals measure only those migrating for work, may not reflect when a person arrived in the UK and will include short term migrants (those staying less than 12 months). Another example is GP registrations. These data could also include short term migrants and will not always reflect when someone arrived in the UK (it is possible that someone may only register when they need access to health services).

Have the net migration estimates been published by citizenship or by other variables?

International migration estimates are published by a variety of migrant characteristics, such as reason for migrating, citizenship, age, sex, marital status, country of birth and occupation. It is not possible to meaningfully break down the revised net migration figures by these variables. This would first depend on being able to separately break down the revised net figures into immigration and emigration estimates, and then to allocate the revision across the many categories of the above variables. There are no additional data sources upon which these figures could be produced of measurable quality.

Could you apply the same distribution method to revise net migration by citizenship?

It is possible to examine the difference in population by citizenship between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. However, in addition to net migration, any differences identified may be due to:

- People changing their citizenship. Many people will have acquired British citizenship during the ten year period;
- Deaths of UK and non-UK citizens;
- Births of non-UK citizens;
- Net migration of non-UK citizens.

To identify the net migration component, it would be necessary to remove the changes that have occurred due to these other reasons. There are no suitable data sources that would enable this:

1. Citizenship can change over time. Although the Home Office publish data on acquisitions of British citizenship, which usually requires residency in the UK, a small proportion of grants of British citizenship are made to people who live overseas (for example, to a person who lives overseas but has a British parent). Additionally there are no data collected to show how many UK residents who have acquired British citizenship have subsequently emigrated from the UK, as the IPS would record them as 'British' and would not record any previous nationality.
2. Births and deaths registrations record country of birth (of the parents in the case of births) and not citizenship. Therefore it is not possible to break down births and deaths by citizenship.

Consequently it is not possible to produce a reliable breakdown of revised net migration by citizenship.

What figures should be used for migration by citizenship and by other variables?

Since 2009, the national level estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration by a range of variables published in the [1, 2 and 3-series tables](#) are of sufficient quality to be used for the measurement of migration into and out of the UK. These estimates are subject to uncertainty because they are based on a sample survey (as opposed to recording information from all passengers passing through UK borders). This uncertainty is expressed as a confidence interval in the published tables. Although revisions to the net migration series have also been applied to 2009, 2010 and 2011 (for numerical consistency), these are of a much smaller magnitude than those applied in previous years, and are broadly within the confidence intervals around the previously published estimates.

For earlier years, users should also continue to use the separate inflow and outflow estimates and additional breakdowns published by ONS in the [1, 2 and 3-series tables](#). These are the best available estimates for individual flows by migrant characteristics. However, users should bear in mind that revised figures exist for overall net migration, and that these indicate that net migration into the UK is estimated to be higher than previously published, particularly between 2004 and 2008.