

Article

Migration statistics transformation update: May 2018

An update of the migration statistics transformation programme for May 2018.

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1 . Introduction

Our role as independent government statisticians is to meet the demand from users of the statistics – in this case, a clear understanding of the latest trends in migration. Office for National Statistics (ONS) set out a cross-Government Statistical Service (GSS) programme, working with the Home Office (the lead policy department), the devolved administrations and other government departments who have a strong interest in improving the migration evidence base, such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and the Department for Education (DfE).

Working in partnership across the GSS is key to delivering the improvements in migration statistics and we have been working closely in order that we benefit from the expertise that exists within individual departments to produce robust, collaborative research that adds value. This programme of work is progressing and we increasingly have more data sources available to assess trends in migration.

On 17 May 2018, we announced the regular quarterly long-term migration statistics would be delayed due to survey processing issues. This release has been rescheduled for the 16 July 2018 and will present the best estimate of trends in migration using all sources of information available to us including administrative data and the International Passenger Survey (IPS).

The regular Migration Statistics Quarterly Report cycle will resume from August 2018 and will continue to further integrate evidence from all sources.

2 . Context

As we set out at the [Population and Public Policy forum](#) in September 2017, the context for our work is changing. Users are telling us that they need more information on the impact migrants have while they are in the UK, including the sectors in which they work, the communities they live in and the impacts on public services such as the NHS and schools. Furthermore, there is a changing policy context, largely because of the UK exiting the EU; we therefore need to be able to inform decision-makers over the near term, but also develop the data sources to ensure future policy and implementation are informed by robust evidence.

We therefore have plans to transform the information that the Government Statistical Service (GSS) produces on migration over the next two years to meet the changing user needs, and which will begin to put administrative data at the core of evidence on migration in 2019. The importance of improving the statistics and the value of the GSS programme of work has been recognised by the [Home Affairs Select Committee's report and the government's response](#).

3 . Migration Statistics Quarterly Report update

When we started processing International Passenger Survey (IPS) data for the May 2018 Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (MSQR), our quality assurance processes identified a potential issue with the data. The issue was identified in the way data collected on paper were merged with data collected on the new tablets during the transitional period (section 8 provides further information). The Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (MSQR) (covering year ending December 2017) will be published on 16 July 2018. As a first step towards putting administrative data at the core of evidence on migration in 2019, the MSQR in July 2018 will include the latest information on Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) based on the IPS, as well as a broader overview of migration trends based on an integrated assessment of all the sources available.

4 . Progress so far

Exploring visa and other immigration control data

Work has begun to better understand how migrants who have immigrated to the UK on work, family and other visas are measured. This builds on the work undertaken by Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Home Office, [published in August 2017](#), on student visas and utilising the same methodology. The previous work indicated that significant numbers of students extend their stay to carry on studying, whilst most others depart on time.

Further analysis of Home Office [Exit Checks data](#) is being undertaken in order to understand the movements of long-term migrants in the work, family and other categories, as well as what happens to students who switch into other categories such as work. This analysis will also enable us to better understand the quality of the International Passenger Survey long-term immigration and emigration estimates for migrants who originally came to the UK for 12 months or more.

The work is complex and, assisted by Home Office experts, has included ONS improving its understanding of the complexities of the data produced by the UK's immigration control administrative systems. We expect to be able to provide an update on this work stream on 16 July 2018.

Other analysis

In August 2017, Home Office published its second report on the data being collected under the Exit Checks programme, complementing the ONS analysis but focusing on compliance. It looked at those with visas due to expire in year ending March 2017 who did not obtain an extension to stay in the UK and indicated that the large majority were compliant.

In November 2017, Home Office published new experimental statistics on [Asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation](#).

In February 2018, ONS published an article discussing the available data on [labour in the agriculture industry](#) and how they can be used to understand employment in this sector. The agriculture industry relies on a combination of seasonal and permanent workers, many of whom come from EU countries. Our research found that there is no definitive data source on the size of the agriculture labour market or the role of migrants within it. As we progress with our work programme, these are questions we endeavour to be able to answer better.

On 16 April 2018, ONS also published the final chapter of the [living abroad series](#), which provides more information on British citizens living in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK. These articles were created in response to an increased user need for data about the people most likely to be affected by the UK's decision to leave the EU.

ONS have also worked with Home Office, DWP and others to improve the way we convey our regular migration statistics through our [quarterly report](#). The reports are now much less technical to ensure that a wider audience can relate to the key information. We would welcome feedback from users on this new presentation, please email migstatsunit@ons.gov.uk.

Many users have already expressed a desire for more analysis or data on illegal migration. However, this is a very complex area. We are currently assessing what we could do to meet this user need.

5 . Update to work programme

In February 2018, the Office for Statistics Registration (OSR) published a report on [improving the public value of the UK's international migration statistics \(PDF, 118.1KB\)](#). This report summarised two OSR roundtable events that threw a spotlight on various aspects of information needs for migration statistics, and revealed potential opportunities to help address them. The report recommended a number of actions, including that the [cross-government migration development plan](#) be reviewed in early 2018. This review has now been completed and an updated timetable, which lists the individual departments involved, is included in Annex A.

6 . Understanding the impact of migration

Over the next 18 months, we have several different workstreams in the plan to look at the impact migrants have on the economy and society. These pieces will provide further clarity on what the available data can tell us on how migrants interact with different sectors, what impact they have and what further work we need to do to provide better evidence to better inform policy-makers. These sectoral research pieces include:

- expanding our research on labour in the agriculture industry as new data sources become available to better understand the size of the agriculture labour market and the role migrants play within it
- review of the data available on migration patterns within the construction sector and identify next steps to build the evidence base
- research into the impact of international migration on the economy and labour market, including seasonal workers, to better understand how different groups of international migrants impact on the economy
- research into circular and short-term migration to better understand migration patterns by different types of migrants
- exploring the feasibility of administrative data linkage by linking visa data with other sources to explore the impact of student migration at a local level
- analysis and research to understand how migrants interact with educational services at all levels (students and employees) and how this information can help build robust migration statistics when combined with other public-sector data

7 . Administrative data at the core of migration statistics

The cross-government steering group on migration statistics, chaired by the Deputy National Statistician, Iain Bell, has allowed for the creation of a shared framework for improving evidence involving both Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other departments. Detailed discussions with government departments who hold data sources that could add to the evidence are underway and successful arrangements are already in place to enable ONS to access Home Office data. One of the key objectives of this engagement is to ensure a common understanding of the policy questions and associated data requirements. In addition to agreeing priorities, ONS is also leading on the practical implementation of the Digital Economy Act, such as setting up secure environments for data sharing and the required infrastructure and methodology considerations.

In Autumn 2018 we plan to publish our findings from the feasibility research on utilising linked administrative data to provide international migration flows. This will bring together the work on EU and non-EU nationals to explore the feasibility of different approaches to putting administrative data at the core of migration statistics. This work is part of the wider transformation to move towards an administrative data-based population statistics system to replace the census in England and Wales.

The annual Migration Statistics User Forum will meet on 19 October and provide an opportunity to engage further with users on some of these plans and new developments. ONS will also be launching a consultation in Autumn 2018, to consult users on the shape a new administrative data-based system should take and to ensure we understand their needs.

8 . Update on the processing of data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS)

In processing year ending December 2017 Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) data, our quality assurance processes highlighted an issue with the October to December 2017 International Passenger Survey (IPS) data. Our analysis of data for October to December 2017 showed anomalies when compared with other sources and processes. This led to identification that the revised code introduced for paper questionnaires had caused issues. A thorough exploration is going on to ensure we fully understand the whole issue.

Initial investigation traced the issue to a processing change. This change was implemented as a transitional arrangement during the IPS tablet roll out. This allowed data collected via paper to be merged into the new data structure required for tablet data collection. The issue does not relate to data collected from the new tablets but processing of the remaining paper-based forms.

An ONS review team from Methods, Data and Research, who are independent of the IPS and Migration Statistics teams, have been tasked with investigating further to provide assurance about the corrections process.

This work takes time to fully assure and 16 July 2018 was the earliest date by which we could complete all necessary checks and ensure processing to the quality required.

9 . Annex A: Government Statistical Service migration development plan

Table 1: Government Statistical Service migration development plan

Date	Topic	Description	Department Input
16 July 2018	Work and Family visa analysis – providing better evidence on travel and migration patterns of non-EU nationals	How non-EU nationals interact with the visa system, following analysis on student migrants published in August 2017. This will also compare results with IPS data on migration patterns of non-EU nationals	Collaborative piece between ONS and Home Office
16 July 2018	Delayed Migration Statistics Quarterly Report	The Migration Statistics Quarterly Report containing Long-Term International Migration to year ending December 2017, as well as a broader overview of migration trends based on an integrated assessment of all the sources available	Lead – ONS Contributors – Home office, DWP
Spring to Summer 2018	Review of IPS switcher adjustment – to assist us in accounting for people who change their intentions regarding their travel plans	To analyse migrant travel patterns to check whether our assumptions of people's intentions have altered since the last review	Lead – ONS Contributors – Home Office
19 June 2018	Construction paper – review of data sources available	Review of the data available on migration patterns within the construction sector. It will also identify any next steps that could be taken to build the evidence base	Lead – ONS Contributors – BEIS, Home Office
August 2018	Including further benefit categories in the DWP official statistics	DWP publish annual official statistics every August showing the number of non-UK nationals (at point of NINo registration) claiming a range of working age benefits. These statistics are being developed to cover Universal Credit and Housing Benefits with the aim to be included in the next release in August 2018	Lead – DWP
August 2018	Statistics on exit checks	Further reporting on exit checks data, following the first (2016) and second (2017) reports	Lead – Home Office
Autumn 2018	How different groups of non-EU international migrants impact the economy, building on available evidence	Investigating the ability to link different governmental datasets in order to better understand migration patterns and the impact of this on the economy. It will include a look at how migrants interact with the UK tax and benefits system	Lead – ONS Contributors – Home Office, HMRC, DWP, DfE
Autumn 2018	EU nationals travel and migration patterns – How do EU citizens interact with administrative systems in the UK and what can we learn about their movements to supplement existing analysis?	Drawing on our previous work looking into non-EU citizens, this will explore how EU citizens interact with different UK government tax and benefits systems in order to understand the broader migrant population and start to identify the steps required to move to a system where administrative data is at the core of migration statistics	Lead – ONS Contributors – Home Office, DWP, HMRC
Autumn 2018	Administrative data at the core of migration statistics – feasibility research on utilising linked administrative data to provide international migration flows as part of the wider transformation to an administrative data-	Exploring the possibility of producing migration flows over time from integrated data sources and identifying signs of activity within the system. This will bring together the work on EU and non-EU nationals to explore the feasibility of	Lead – ONS

	based population statistics system	different approaches to putting administrative data at the core of migration statistics	Contributors – Home Office, HMRC, DWP, NISRA, NRS, Welsh Government (WG), NHS Digital
Autumn 2018	Consultation with migration statistics users on the shape that a new administrative data-based system would take – to include how data can be shared	In conjunction with our work on utilising administrative data and identifying signs of activity, we will be consulting with our users on our findings and their needs	Lead – ONS Contributors – All GSS Partners
Autumn 2018	Increase the fidelity and detail of the education and qualification information for migrants, which is collected within the Labour Force Survey (LFS)	Current question routing within the LFS leads to only limited education or qualification questions once the respondent is identified as a migrant. The need to address this is accepted and a suitable cost-effective approach will be identified as part of the detailed education question review that will shortly commence and we will report this Autumn	Lead – ONS Contributors – DfE
2018 to 2019 onwards	Further development of Home Office immigration statistics outputs	This work will review the tabular presentation of Home Office immigration outputs; and investigate the feasibility of including new breakdowns of appropriate categories of statistics by geographic area, age and gender	Lead – Home Office
2018	Admissions data	Following the public consultation in 2017, if agreement is reached to withdraw landing cards, the Home Office will develop new statistical outputs from new digital systems at the border for the statistics on admissions to the UK	Lead – Home Office
Summer 2019	International migration and the Health Sector – building on information already available across the public sector	Understand how migrants interact with health services (users and employees) and how this information can help build robust migration statistics when combined with other public sector data	Lead – ONS with the devolved administrations Contributors – NHS Digital, HMRC
Autumn 2019	International migration and the Education Sector – building on information already available across the public sector	Understand how migrants interact with educational services at all levels (students and employees) and how this information can help build robust migration statistics when combined with other public sector data	Lead – ONS with the devolved administrations Contributors – NHS Digital, HMRC
Autumn 2019	Placing administrative sources at the core of Migration Statistics as part of the wider transformation to an administrative data-based population statistics system	Outlining our approach to establishing administrative sources at the core of Migration Statistics, including next steps, taking into account user needs and feedback from the consultation	Collaboration between all GSS partners

Source: Office for National Statistics

