

Short-term Migrants: ONS Local Estimates

Background

In October, CLG Minister Iain Wright MP outlined how his department was working with local authorities to manage the transitional impact of migration on local areas. He specifically mentioned the cross-Government programme to improve population and migration statistics (IMPS). He was responding for the Government to a debate raised by Mark Field MP (Conservative, Cities of London and Westminster) on the subject of population estimates and the consequences for the City of Westminster's grant allocation.

He added that ONS estimates use the UN recommended definition of long-term international migrants, but ONS recognise the difficulties some LAs face and have published experimental national-level estimates of short-term migration for mid-2004 to mid-2006. He indicated that ONS intended to produce a feasibility report on its plans to produce local estimates and that if reliable estimates for short-term migrants then became available, the Government could consider whether to include this data in the three-year grants distribution system.

On November 19th 2008 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released the feasibility report on the production of local area short-term migration estimates. This is obviously a topic that has emerged as a high priority for local authorities in view of the recent increases in short-term migration, particularly since the A8 Eastern European countries joined the EU in May 2004. The GLA, London Councils and many authorities, notably Westminster as indicated above, have campaigned for short-term migrants to be considered by CLG in the local government revenue settlements.

This *Update* outlines the main arguments of the ONS feasibility study and describes the next steps.

The full ONS report is available at the following link:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/STM_Local_Estimation.pdf

ONS Proposals

There was a consultation following the original ONS feasibility study relating to short-term migration that specifically asked for views on the definition of short-term migrants to be used. Following the feedback ONS propose to use a definition that encompasses **any visit of between 1 and 12 months for any purpose**. This is much wider than the UN definition that relates to visits of 3 to 12 months for employment or study. Given the size of the sample in the International Passenger Survey (IPS) the strict UN definition would have only had 212 contacts in the year to mid-2006. The wider proposed definition would have had 2,142 contacts, of whom only 506 were for employment or study. London boroughs and some rural authorities were interested in temporary foreign workers, but the sample size precludes producing estimates of such closely defined groups of migrants at LA level. If all visits of less than one month were considered the sample would be swamped by the large number of holiday and short business trips that account for about 95% of all visits planned to be of less than a year.

Of the 2,142 visits in the sample for the year to mid-2006, 781 were to destinations in London. Given the level of missing destination records, **London had 41 per cent of the sample of short-**

term arrivals to England and Wales. The South East was the next most popular destination, but with less than half the number coming to London.

A further source of information on migration is found in a selection of administrative records. ONS is concentrating on the **Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)** and **National Insurance allocations to overseas nationals (NINo)**.

It is also using a range of variables selected to reflect the different reasons why people arrive in the UK for short visits and their potential locations. These include patient registration data (Flag 4s), unemployment, vacancies, HESA and Census data on overseas students, houses in multiple occupation, long-term emigration estimates, the Inter-Departmental Business Register, country of birth of residents and ethnic group population estimates. Each of these sources may be linked with both short-term and long-term arrivals but can offer no information about departures of short-term migrants.

The WRS is specific to migrants from the A8 countries but is unique in asking intended length of stay. Therefore there is value in comparing data for A8 citizens in both the WRS and NINo to attempt to disentangle short-term and long-term migrants. A further issue with the WRS is that it is geographically referenced to place of work rather than home address, like NINo.

ONS plans to link data using **regression modelling** using a range of variables for potential selection in a final model. Also being considered are the ONS estimates of long-term migration and population size. The modelling should **identify significant explanatory variables and their relative importance**.

The IPS 'completed flow' data – ie short-term migrants surveyed on exit – will be modelled. The missing information on location will need to be imputed, using the location of stay information of other contacts. The proposed model, in using a comprehensive range of potential sources, will need to accommodate the fact that a majority of the available variables relate to employment and study. However, variables have been found that should also reflect tourism, visiting friends or family and short-term business stays linked to locations of large or multi-national corporations.

Next Steps for ONS

- Finalise the IPS data to be modelled
- Model development, drawing on work on long-term migration

It is planned to publish the resulting estimates in summer 2009.

A small advisory group will be established in early 2009 to review the work before publication. The group will be drawn from local authorities, central government and academia. ONS will keep users informed via the quarterly IMPS updates, the CLIP Population Subgroup and LGA/ONS workshops.

Next Steps for GLA

The GLA is represented on the CLIP Population Subgroup and will keep the GLA family, London boroughs and other organisations informed through the Demography Liaison Group meetings and emails to contacts.

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