



UK Statistics
Authority

Migration Statistics

*Office for National
Statistics*

Assessment Report 8

July 2009

Migration Statistics

July 2009

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The UK Statistics Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Statistics Authority is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics are deemed to be compliant with the Code of Practice. Whilst the Code is wide-ranging, designation may be broadly interpreted to mean that: the statistics meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further, for example on the validity of the statistics as a social or economic measure; though reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Designation as National Statistics will sometimes be granted in cases where some changes still need to be made to meet fully the requirements of the Code, on condition that steps are taken by the producer body, within a stated timeframe, to address the weaknesses. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the Code.

Designation is granted on the basis of the information provided to the Statistics Authority, primarily by the organisation that produces the statistics. The information includes a range of factual evidence and also assurances by senior statisticians in the producer organisation. The views of users are also sought. Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, the Assessment report may be withdrawn and revised as necessary.

Once designated as National Statistics, it is a statutory requirement on the producer organisation to ensure that the set of statistics continues to be produced in compliance with the Code of Practice.

1 Introduction

1.1 This is one of a series of reports prepared under the provisions of Section 14 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*¹. The report covers the set of migration statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS):

- *International long-term migration statistics*, published as estimates derived from the International Passenger Survey and taking account of flows between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and incorporating adjustments for people who change their intentions to stay in the UK, and for asylum seekers. ONS releases these statistics in an annual report in November of each year²; in addition, estimates for 'rolling years' are published within the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report³. ONS published provisional estimates of international long-term migration for the first time in May 2009.
- *Statistics on migration within the UK*, presenting interregional movements and moves between health authorities in the UK based on patient registers from the NHS Information Centre. These are released quarterly⁴ and annually as moves between local authorities.
- *Migration statistics at local authority level* presenting the distribution of immigrants by local authority. These are published annually as part of the mid-year population estimates⁵.

1.2 The Statistics Authority will be inviting comments on both the process for assessment and the presentation of reports with a view to further development of the arrangements in the coming months. The forward programme of Assessments is at

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/programme-of-assessment/index.html> and further information on the principles and procedures for assessment is at

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/principles---procedures/index.html>.

¹ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pga/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

² <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=507>

³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15230>

⁴ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=10191>

⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15001>

1.3 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2 Summary of findings, highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Code of Practice. This summary includes the UK Statistics Authority's recommendation in relation to designation as National Statistics.

Section 3 Subject of the assessment, an overview of the statistics and their history.

Section 4 Detailed assessment, providing more details about the assessment of compliance against each principle and protocol of the Code of Practice.

Annex 1 Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2 Summary of the assessment process and users' views.

1.4 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

2 Summary of findings

2.1 Recommendation for designation as National Statistics

- 2.1.1 The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *International long-term migration*, *Migration within the UK* and *Migration at local authority level* are designated as National Statistics, subject to the implementation of the enhancements listed in section 2.4 below by November 2009.
- 2.1.2 Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics are deemed to be compliant with the Code of Practice, and thus that they meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.
- 2.1.3 Designation also signifies that, subject to any caveats in this report, the Statistics Authority judges that the statistics are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

2.2 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 2.2.1 User engagement has been a focus of the migration statistics team in recent years, although information about how ONS consults users and the impact of the consultation on the development and publication of the statistics could be more accessible.
- 2.2.2 Both users and ONS' statisticians generally agree that migration statistics are not fit for all of the purposes for which they are currently used and require further improvement. However users also recognise that ONS is undertaking a large amount of work to make improvements. The commentary and metadata published with the statistics reflect the quality of the statistics and their shortcomings well. The assessment has highlighted that there are some areas where this commentary could be further improved, with the addition of quality assurance information and more details about the improvement work.
- 2.2.3 The accessibility of the statistics has been an issue of concern in the past and it may still be difficult for some users to find the statistics they want. ONS is taking steps to improve this, in a coherent quarterly report and through the Publication Hub.

2.3 Detailed recommendations

- 2.3.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable re-designation as National Statistics are listed in section 2.4 below. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users, but which are not central to their designation, are listed at annex 1.

2.4 Requirements for re-designation as National Statistics

- Requirement 1** Publish documentation outlining the development work currently underway, including how the needs and experiences of users have impacted on this work, to give users a better understanding of progress (para 4.3)
- Requirement 2** Include migration statistics in the existing Revisions Policy for population statistics and link directly from the migration statistics website (para 4.9)
- Requirement 3** Improve metadata to include details of quality assurance work and quality issues relating to the publication of quarterly data as rolling years and local level estimates (paras 4.14, 4.15, 4.16)
- Requirement 4** Develop and publish a work plan, in partnership with EU officials, to investigate ways in which EU requirements can be better met (para 4.17)
- Requirement 5** Publish a Statement of Administrative Sources (4.35)

3 Subject of the assessment

- 3.1 ONS' migration statistics are produced by the ONS Centre for Demography. These cover long-term international migration based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and internal migration within the UK based on patient registers.
- 3.2 Other government departments also produce migration-related statistics - National Insurance registrations (Department of Work and Pensions), and data from the Worker Registration Scheme (Home Office). This assessment has focused solely on the statistics produced by ONS.
- 3.3 Migration statistics are an important component of population estimates, which themselves underpin decision-making on policy development, resource allocation and service delivery at a national and local level. The Bank of England uses the statistics in setting monetary policy, when judging the amount of supply available in the economy in relation to the demand for goods and services.
- 3.4 It is widely recognised that the current international and internal migration estimates are problematic, because the quality and range of existing data sources are limited. The International Passenger Survey is carried out at ports; the number of migrant contacts is relatively small. Internal migration statistics are based on registration with general practitioners; delays in re-registering after moves within the country result in some under-coverage in the estimates.
- 3.5 Migration statistics have been the subject of a number of reviews, including a Quality Review⁶ in 2003, an inter-departmental task force in 2006⁷ and an inquiry by the Treasury Sub-Committee in 2008⁸. A cross-departmental improvement programme is currently underway, with ONS leading the work. The UK Statistics Authority has also carried out a monitoring review to assess how the improvement work is progressing, with the final report published in July 2009⁹.
- 3.6 Changes to both the sources and the presentation of the data have been made recently: the IPS has been revised to increase its suitability for migration statistics; a new Quarterly Report was initiated in May 2009 (presenting a more coherent overview of the range of migration statistics being published); and provisional estimates of long-term international migration were published for the first time as part of this quarterly report.

⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/nat-stats-qual-revs/qual-revs-by-theme/population/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14731>

⁸ http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/treasury_committee/countingthepopulation.cfm

⁹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/authority-report-4--migration-statistics-the-way-ahead.pdf>

3.7 ONS is also developing short-term international migration statistics at a local level; these will be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in the future.

4 Detailed Assessment

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 4.1 Migration statistics have a diverse and wide-ranging user base. ONS has a good knowledge of the uses of the statistics and the needs of users. Feedback from users during this assessment highlighted that they are satisfied with the level of engagement and ONS' open attitude towards the development of migration statistics.
- 4.2 Key users of the statistics within the UK include other government departments, the Bank of England, local authorities, and researchers. The Central and Local Information Partnership group captures users' experiences and obtains their input into the changes being proposed. ONS has also carried out a number of formal consultations on significant changes¹⁰. In addition, ONS has set up reference groups to provide local authority expert opinion on key issues, such as adjustments to internal migration estimates resulting from data about students.
- 4.3 Regular published updates from the improvement programme provide a good overview of the consultations and the work being carried out¹¹. However, detailed work and considerations are not published, which means that only those users directly involved in the consultation groups see the full picture. In order to reach a wider audience, ONS should publish documentation outlining the development work currently underway, including how the needs and experiences of users have impacted on this work, as part of the re-designation as National Statistics¹² (Requirement 1).
- 4.4 ONS has made efforts to publish more timely data in response to users' needs, publishing provisional estimates of long-term migration for the first time in May 2009¹³.
- 4.5 At the time of the assessment ONS' migration team did not appear to have a good dialogue with EU officials, despite the EU being a key user of migration data (see para 4.17).

¹⁰ One example is a public consultation carried out on the reporting of migration statistics held in 2008, see <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/closed-consultations/Public-consultation-on-the-reporting-of-migration-and-popular-statistics/index.html>

¹¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/msiwpmay09.pdf>

¹² In relation to Principle 1 Practice 1, Practice 5 and Protocol 1 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

¹³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15240>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 4.6 Migration statistics are published free-of-charge via the National Statistics Publication Hub, according to a pre-announced timetable. There is a new cross-cutting theme page on the Publication Hub to increase accessibility.
- 4.7 The statistics are presented in an impartial and objective way. Reflecting the cross-departmental nature of migration statistics, ONS takes part in a working group of statisticians from producer departments before the publication of figures in order to discuss the presentation of the migration statistics as a whole.
- 4.8 ONS presents information about changes that have been made to methodology in the past, in background notes and 'frequently asked questions' directly linked to the data. Information about planned changes is published as part of the improvement programme updates, linked from the ONS migration webpages. These updates give a good overview of the changes but, as noted earlier, do not provide detailed explanations of the proposals.
- 4.9 As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, ONS should ensure that migration statistics are included in the existing Revisions Policy for population statistics and link this directly from the migration statistics website ¹⁴ (Requirement 2).

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 4.10 ONS publishes migration statistics releases separately from Government or political statements and there is no evidence of any information being released ahead of time. The statisticians involved in the production of the statistics are able to publicly comment on the statistics and take part in the press conferences held when data are released.
- 4.11 Any issues related to integrity appear to be directly dealt with by the Head of Profession or National Statistician in accordance with the Code. This was demonstrated in the recent Public Administration Select Committee hearing on the February 2009 release of international migration statistics¹⁵.

¹⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpublicadm/c387-i/c38702.htm>

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 4.12 Feedback from users highlighted that migration statistics are not fit for all the purposes for which they are currently used, especially at regional and local authority levels.
- 4.13 However there was also recognition of the improvements currently being made. ONS has made significant steps to improve the data, in particular adapting the IPS to better suit migration statistics and beginning to use Labour Force Survey data to calibrate regional and local distributions. ONS is also investigating the use of other administrative sources to supplement survey data as part of the improvement programme¹⁶.
- 4.14 ONS publishes helpful information about the data and the methods used on its website, in the form of 'frequently asked questions' and other metadata. There could be more information on why certain methodologies are used, for example with the publication of quarterly data as rolling years. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, ONS should explain this more clearly in metadata linked to these quarterly data¹⁷ (Requirement 3).
- 4.15 The quality of local level data is of particular concern. Considering the importance of these data – for the purposes of resource allocation, and the delivery of local services – ONS should clarify the level of reliability of the data. This could involve flagging local authority estimates where there are higher levels of uncertainty to give users some indication of quality¹⁸ (Requirement 3, continued).
- 4.16 The assessment identified a large amount of quality assurance work, for example, in relation to a drop in IPS figures on emigration in 2007. However this work was barely publicised despite the fact that this information could have been of great importance to users when trying to understand and interpret the figures presented. ONS should include details of quality assurance work that is planned or that has been carried out¹⁹ (Requirement 3, continued).
- 4.17 The data do not fully meet the requirements in EU legislation, resulting in issues with international comparability. The Assessment team was told that the UK data are insufficiently reliable at the level of detail required by the EU (for example, for age groups and citizenship) due to the survey sample sizes, and that data are not provided according to the specified regional breakdowns. External academics have recently carried out work to investigate ways in which

¹⁶ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Potential_of_DWP_sources.pdf

¹⁷ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

¹⁸ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 3 of the Code of Practice

UK data could be brought into line with EU requirements. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, ONS should develop and publish a work plan, in partnership with EU officials, to investigate the extent to which EU requirements can be better met²⁰ (Requirement 4).

²⁰ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 6 and Principle 1 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 4.18 Confidential data are handled and stored appropriately. Confidential data on asylum seekers, for example, are password protected and only published at aggregate level. Patient register data are also stored on a limited access server with closely controlled access lists. Identifiers are removed once data checks are completed.
- 4.19 Data sent to third parties are aggregated. Published estimates based on fewer than three contacts are suppressed. Records of data requests from third parties and users of these data are kept.

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 4.20 Migration statistics are derived from a variety of sources; for international long-term migration the IPS is used, supplemented with administrative data from the Home Office and data from the Central Statistics Office Ireland. Internal migration statistics are based on administrative data from the NHS.
- 4.21 ONS has carried out substantial work to evaluate these data sources in relation to other potential sources. It undertook a Port Survey Review to consider how to enhance the IPS following the recommendations from the Inter-Departmental Task Force, and it published a report in May 2008 comparing administrative sources of data²¹. It also made efforts to use the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* to gain access to administrative data sources, and has recently gained access to student data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- 4.22 The respondent burden on those being interviewed for the IPS is minimal. Interviews are carried out as people are on their way through the airports or ports, and information about the survey, the respondents' consent, and confidentiality is given verbally. There is a high response rate, estimated at around 80%.

²¹http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Reconciliation_Exercise.pdf

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 4.23 The production of these statistics is sufficiently resourced. Within the migration statistics team there is a clear division between staff working on developments and those working on regular production. This ensures that ongoing production is not affected by fluctuations in development work. ONS has received extra funding from other departments as part of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme²². ONS has told us that staff are shared between the two teams to ensure that skills and knowledge are effectively utilised.
- 4.24 ONS has told us that staff on the migration team are given the opportunity to develop their skills and therefore generally stay a long time with the team.
- 4.25 Budgetary planning and project management techniques are used in accordance with organisational procedures and appear robust. It would be useful to specify how resources are allocated to improvement work and ongoing production so that users can understand the priorities being determined.

²² See page 36, UK Statistics Authority Report "Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead?"
<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/index.html>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 4.26 The majority of users providing feedback were happy with the clarity of presentation and the helpfulness of the commentary provided. Some users said that they had struggled to find the documentation and data they needed. Due to the range of data published on migration statistics, it is important that entry points to the data and commentary are as clear and insightful as possible. ONS is leading efforts to make the statistics more accessible for users, such as via the new Quarterly Report²³.
- 4.27 There are some problems in making data accessible in the geographical detail that users would like, due to the lack of robustness of the underlying data. ONS has taken steps to meet users' needs, such as with the publication of quarterly data as rolling years (see para 4.14).
- 4.28 Commentary provided with the data is the result of discussions involving other departments and ONS senior management. The new Quarterly Report represents a significant step forward in providing clear commentary.
- 4.29 A large volume of data is published each quarter, and this presents users with the challenge of finding what they need. We suggest that a first step would be for ONS to review the migration webpages, and to publish a page with an overview of migration statistics, such as the cross-cutting theme page on the Publication Hub. We also suggest that the migration team could usefully ensure that users' views on accessibility feed into the overall ONS website development work.

²³ see footnote 4

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

- 4.30 ONS has undertaken a wide range of user engagement initiatives and has taken account of users' views in developing migration statistics. The publication of the Quarterly Report and provisional long-term migration estimates are examples of how users' needs have led directly to the improved presentation of the statistics.
- 4.31 Users are involved in the evaluation of experimental statistics on short-term international migration statistics²⁴. These will be assessed against the Code of Practice in the future.

²⁴http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/STM_mid07.pdf

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 4.32 Migration statistics are released via the Publication Hub according to a specific timetable. The responsible statistician attends a press conference where one is held and is named on the releases.
- 4.33 Pre-release access appears to be granted in accordance with current legislation and lists are published on the website. Efforts have been made to minimise the lists as far as possible.

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 4.34 ONS is carrying out extensive work to investigate the possibilities of using administrative sources in the production of migration statistics (see Principle 6). The administrative sources already available are used systematically, ensuring that maximum benefit is obtained. Recently, access was granted to student data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and this is being fully investigated along with other sources as part of the improvement programme²⁵.
- 4.35 As these statistics are partially produced from administrative sources, ONS should publish a Statement of Administrative Sources, as part of the re-designation as National Statistics²⁶ (Requirement 5).

²⁵ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Potential_of_DWP_sources.pdf

²⁶ In relation to Protocol 3 Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to ONS' migration statistics outputs, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for re-designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Specify how resources are allocated to improvement work and ongoing production so that users can understand the priorities being determined (para 4.25) |
| Suggestion 2 | Review the migration pages on the ONS website and publish a page to provide an overview of migration statistics (para 4.29) |
| Suggestion 3 | Ensure that users' views on finding migration statistics (on the ONS website) feed into ONS website development work (para 4.29) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from April to July 2009.

A2.2 The Assessment team met representatives of the ONS migration team at an initial meeting in April 2009. Some background information was provided by ONS in mid-May 2009, and the Written Evidence for Assessment was provided by the end of May 2009. The Assessment team subsequently met with ONS in mid-June 2009 to confirm and clarify the written evidence provided.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 As part of the assessment, questionnaires were sent to around 50 users and other interested parties. The Assessment team received 20 responses. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Internal ONS	4
Other Central Government	4
Local Authorities	4
Academics/Research bodies	3
International	1
Suppliers	4

A2.4 The users who expressed an opinion were satisfied with the frequency of the publications. Of the users who expressed an opinion, the majority were satisfied with: accessibility and format; ease of finding information; timeliness; clarity of presentation; helpfulness of commentary; that the producer understands needs; and that the producer consults effectively. The quality of data was cited by the majority of users as being unsatisfactory. However, the vast majority of users also recognise the efforts ONS has gone to in order to improve the data, timeliness (quarterly release) and commentary through significant engagement with users.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

International long-term migration:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15053>

Internal migration: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=10191>

International migration at LA level as part of mid-year population estimates:

<http://nswebcopy/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=601>

