

COMPAS Breakfast Briefing Summary



What is the latest picture from migration statistics?

Public debate on immigration matters has for many years now been lively but it is not always well-informed and the focus on the latest quarterly statistics can sometimes distract opinion-formers and the wider public from the bigger picture. This briefing will present a brief overview of the latest data and identify some of the key long-term trends underpinning some of the current debates. It will be of interest both to statistics experts and those with a general interest in immigration matters alike.

Migration statistics are published every quarter as part of a co-ordinated release across Government overseen by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and incorporating data from ONS, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions. Separately, ONS also publish statistics from the Labour Force Survey and a series of population estimates and projections. The statistics on migration in the UK are often criticised¹ but they provide a comprehensive range of data, and compare very well with other statistics and data on migration available in other countries.

Migration statistics are published every quarter, usually at 9:30 on the last Thursday of the second month. The latest set of statistics were published on August 30th 2012, and included information from the International Passenger Survey alongside Home Office statistics on admissions, visas, asylum, settlement and various aspects of immigration enforcement.

In addition, ONS publish statistics on foreign nationals employment rates from the Labour Force Survey and a series of population estimates and projections. The 2011 Census will also contain, for the first time, a detailed range of information relating to migration and the first ONS Census release in July 2012 provided a taste of what will come from that important source.

Together this data provides a comprehensive overview of migration matters in the United Kingdom. However, the big picture can sometimes be lost in the minutiae of quarterly changes in this or

that series and very often these extensive sources are still unable to answer all the questions that people ask about migration and migrants in the UK.

However, statistics do provide a reliable picture of the significant changes in immigration to the UK over recent decades, which help explain the nature of some of the current policy debates.

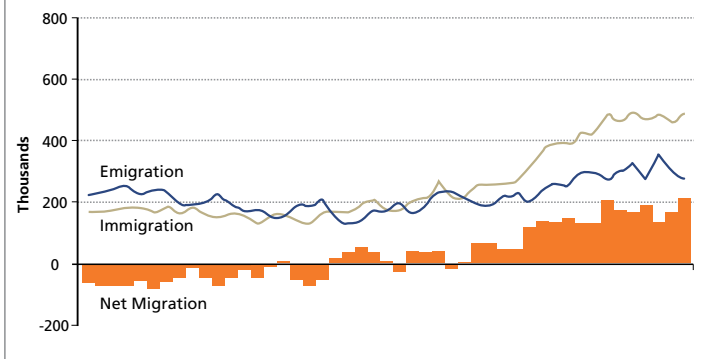
The most significant change has been in the level of migration in the UK, which from relatively low levels over the period from the 1960s through to the late 1990s then rose sharply over the last decade and a half, resulting in a significant net growth in the population. This change is clear in the 2011 Census results published by ONS which reported that *The population of England and Wales grew by 3.7 million to 56.1 million in the 10 years since the last census, an increase of 7.1 per cent, [...] and the largest growth in the population in England and Wales in any 10-year period since census taking began, in 1801.*

¹ Migration Observatory: "Top Ten Problems in the Evidence Base for Public Debate and Policy-Making on Immigration in the UK".



This change is also clear from the International Passenger Survey statistics produced by ONS since the 1960s, and which show the very sharp rise in immigration from the mid-1990s.

Long-term Migration into and out of the United Kingdom, 1964-2010



The latest statistics reported net migration to the UK to be contributing an additional 216,000 long-term migrants in 2011, an estimate that is lower than that for the year before, but not a statistically significant fall. By long-term we mean people who have changed their normal place of residence for a year or longer.

Part of the apparent reduction in the net figure was due to changes in the pattern of migration for British citizens, whose emigration in recent periods has been historically low but which has now once again begun to rise. One in seven (14%) of the long-term migrants arriving in the UK in 2011 were British citizens.

However, when we talk about migration we are not normally referring to the movements of British citizens. This is not always clear in the statistics, as some sources will refer to people by their country of birth rather than their nationality. Many people who were born abroad arrived in the UK some time ago and have since acquired British citizenship. ONS publish both measures of population, and in the latest release reported that 14% of the population of the UK were born abroad, but only 8 per cent are citizens of another country – equating to just under 5 million foreign residents. They comprise around one quarter (23%) from the old Europe, one quarter (22%) from the new European countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later, with the remainder being citizens of non-European countries. The most common foreign nationalities are Polish, Irish and Indian and these three nationalities alone account for more than a quarter of all foreign nationals resident in the UK.

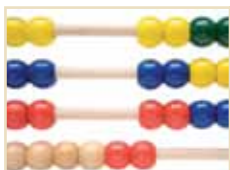
The arrival of more than 600,000 Polish citizens in the UK is probably the largest movement of a people across its border that the UK has ever experienced, occurring in less than a decade following the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004. In addition to the Poles, the ONS estimate there are now 134,000 Lithuanians and 93,000 Romanians and large numbers of other people from the most recent EU Accession states. Of course, we do not know how many of these new residents will remain in the UK permanently or return to their country of origin at some point, but the change in the normally resident population is significant.

The flows of British citizens and EU nationals are interesting, but of course they are not the business of immigration policy, which only controls the movement of those foreign citizens who are not subject to the EU Free Movement Directive. More than half of those arriving in the UK as measured by the long-term migration statistics are from outside the EU, just under 300,000 people in 2011. Unsurprisingly, this proportion is lower now than prior to the EU Accessions of 2004 when around two thirds of new long-term arrivals were from outside the EU.

However, an even more important change in the nature of migration to the UK, one that has occurred only in the last four years, is the decline in migration for work and the rise of migration for the purpose of study. As late as 2007, only a quarter of the long-term migrant inflow was for study but by 2011 this proportion had risen to 41%. An estimated 226,000 long-term migrants came to the UK for the purposes of study in the year ending December 2011, of whom 80% were from outside the EU. It is also worth noting that only half of the visas issued to students (excluding the short-term student visitors) are for study at Universities.

Only one third of the long-term migrant inflow is for work now. For migrants coming from other EU countries, around 60% come for work. For non-EU migrants, that figure is just 16% in the latest statistics. So work-related migration is much less important now for immigration policy, although it is still an important element of overall long-term migration, and clearly highly relevant for some sectors of the economy. This breakfast briefing will explore these issues, and present some clear statistical information to help facilitate discussions on the key trends.

About the speaker: *Jon Simmons* is Head of Migration and Border Analysis in the Home Office Science directorate.



COMPAS Breakfast Briefings present topical, cutting edge research on migration and migration related issues. This research is made accessible every month to an audience of policy makers and other research users.