1. Introduction

This is the February 2011 update on the progress of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP). It provides an update on the plans and progress of the MSIP. A summary of completed research on anonymised data from the e-Borders pilot system (Project Semaphore) is also included as well as details of the mid-2009 England and Wales short-term migration estimates which have now achieved National Statistics status.

The MSIP was initiated in April 2008, with a vision for producing improved population and migration statistics that are relevant for user needs, are as accurate as possible, and are recognised as being definitive estimates. More information on the MSIP can be found at the following link:


Phase 1 of the Programme was completed in May 2010 with the delivery of improvements to mid-year population estimates. Phase 2 of the MSIP will run until March 2012. The programme will then be evaluated once results of the 2011 Census become available. Phase 2 consists of three key work streams:

i) Reconciling Administrative Sources and Population Estimates
ii) Improving Migrant Distribution
iii) Statistical Benefits of e-Borders

The MSIP update of August 2010 provides more detail on the nature of each work stream. A link to this document can be found here:

2. Summary of Progress against the Three Key Workstreams

i) Reconciling Administrative Data Sources and Population Estimates:

An internal feasibility report on the creation of plausibility ranges and a contingency methodology for adjusting population estimates was completed at the end of 2010. However, concerns were raised about the workability of the approach and the feasibility of implementing such an approach within the timescales of the Programme. This project has now refocused and will aim to deliver:

- A conceptual framework for UK migration and population statistics
- A reconciliation methodology to enable the quality of population estimates to be assessed by LA, age, and sex
- A strategic work plan for the development of a contingency adjustment method after the completion of the MSIP

This workstream will also ensure that service level agreements with data suppliers are in place to maintain continuity of data supply.

ii) Improving Migrant Distributions:

Good progress is being made on developing a new method to distribute IPS flows directly to local authority level using a range of administrative data sources. The workstream is on track to deliver a set of indicative immigration estimates for internal quality assurance by the end of March. A quality plan has been developed to ensure that the new methods are quality assured by external experts and the indicative immigration figures are sense checked by local authorities.

A Local Authority Insight Reference Panel (LIRP) is planned for April to help sense check the ‘first cut’ of immigration estimates based on this new method, with the possibility of a second meeting in June. A further series of road-shows are planned for October where the impact of the improvements on population estimates as a whole will be presented to a wider audience. Further details including how to attend these events will be published on the IMPS web-site shortly.
iii) Delivering the Statistical Benefits of e-Borders:

Uncertainty surrounding the future of the e-Borders Programme during the second half of 2010 has been resolved and there is now a clear way forward. The e-Borders system, through the delivery of the Core Capabilities Phase will provide functionality equivalent to the original e-Borders release packages one and two with essential enhancements.

Full person-centric travel history is not included in the scope of the Core Capabilities Phase, instead enhanced document centric travel history will be delivered. Full person centric travel history would have linked travel histories based on documents but connected to the same identity. This information would have helped in the production of ‘direct’ migration counts based on individual patterns of entry and exit over time. The ability to count in and out is limited where only document centric history capture is within scope.

It is expected that some statistical benefits could still be delivered in the long-term. This would include the use of aggregate flow data to produce improved measurement of ‘net’ migration flows and use of e-Borders data to improve the method for weighting-up of the International Passenger Survey. However, the timing of these benefits depends on achieving sufficient data quality, particularly in terms of coverage. It is expected that tangible benefits for ONS statistics are still several years away.

ONS and the UK Border Agency are continuing to work together to ensure the delivery of these benefits over the long term.

e-Borders is the system being developed by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to improve border security. It has the potential to also deliver improved statistics on those coming into and leaving the UK, including the migration statistics produced by ONS. Contract termination in 2010 and subsequent re-planning of the e-Borders Programme mean that statistical benefits will not be delivered before the end of the MSIP in March 2012. The MSIP is now aiming to deliver a platform for the delivery of statistical benefits in the longer term.

UKBA have been working closely with both ONS and Home Office statisticians in order to support the delivery of statistical benefits. A key work strand has been an assessment of the potential of e-Borders data. In 2010, ONS made an initial assessment of data from the e-Borders de-risking pilot system known as ‘Semaphore’. ONS are not able to publish details of the analysis because much of the research focuses on data about individual carriers, which is commercially sensitive. However, the following is a high level summary.

The extract consisted of a full set of records from the launch of Semaphore in December 2004 through to March 2009. Over this period, coverage increased from just one route to an estimated 19 per cent of total passenger flows into and out of the UK. The primary data feeds into e-Borders (and Semaphore) are pre-travel passenger information supplied by carriers. The de-duplicated data set contained 80.2 million journeys with 35.2 million individual travel documents. Assessment of the pilot data by carrier showed considerable variance in quality in terms of coverage, completeness and accuracy.

The next stage was to investigate the feasibility of creating travel histories by linking journeys using the travel document number\(^1\). Just over 18 per cent of journeys were unmatched, but since the vast majority of travellers coming into and out of the country are making short trips, it is clear that most of these unmatched travel histories were incomplete. This is mainly explained by the levels of coverage between arrivals and departures for certain carriers and routes.

These findings highlight the critical dependency on carriers being able to supply complete and accurate data. UKBA have systems in place to monitor the carrier data feeds, and so coverage and quality is expected to improve over time. UKBA have also advised that the overall level

\(^1\) Travel document number was anonymised by UKBA.
coverage has improved considerably since the extract of pilot data was taken (now over 55 per cent).

While it is clear that the level of data coverage and quality from this Semaphore extract is not yet sufficient to deliver improvements to migration statistics, benefits could be delivered assuming that coverage and quality reach sufficient levels. Therefore, ONS will seek to repeat this analysis on an updated extract during 2011 in order to measure the level of improvement.

England and Wales short-term migration estimates, which were formerly published as experimental statistics, now have National Statistics status. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards as set out in the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The UK Statistics Authority report of the Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics for Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales can be found at:


Consequently, on 24 February, the mid-2009 Short-term Migration Estimates have been published as a statistical bulletin for the first time. Improvements to this release include improved explanations of the short-term migration definitions used in the release and Excel tables have been provided to enable easier re-use and analysis of the data. Also, a new section on short-term migration by country of last residence has been added.

5. Update on Local Authority Level Short-term Migration Estimates

As mentioned in the November 2010 Migration Statistics Improvement Programme update, indicative local authority short-term migration estimates are currently being developed making use of several different administrative data sources. The short-term indicative estimates are being prepared alongside the long-term migration indicative estimates to ensure the methodology is consistent and best use is made of the available administrative data sources.

Indicative short-term migration estimates by LA will be made available as soon as the methodology has been fully developed, quality assured and proven to be robust. This is likely to occur later in 2011.
6. Feedback Opportunity

If any users of migration estimates would like to comment on this update, give feedback on the Phase 2 work programme, or would like to inform the IMPS team about how they make use of the migration estimates, please email the Improving Migration Statistics Programme imps@ons.gsi.gov.uk.