

UNECE Online Meetings on Migration Statistics, 26–28 October 2021

ABSTRACT

Title	Measuring migration in the UK: Challenges and opportunities
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Session	Timeliness of migration data for policy-making, and use of estimates (27-28 October)

Accurate and timely statistics on migration have always been hugely important to help our understanding of the population. The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated this need, as policy-makers have sought to address a number of urgent challenges. From the UK perspective, these have ranged from managing the distribution of vaccines, to ensuring that key industries have the required work force to operate. These types of issues need high-quality information on the population, with ever-increasing granularity.

Our approach at Office for National Statistics to measuring migration – like most National Statistics Institutes - has been materially impacted by the pandemic. And like many aspects of life, it seems unlikely that the measurement of migration post-pandemic will resemble anything like what came before.

In this talk, we'll discuss our efforts to transform the production of UK's migration statistics. The main thrust of these efforts is to move away from measuring migration flows using the International Passenger Survey (IPS), a randomised face-to-face survey at airports and other ports of entry and exit. Estimates derived from the IPS, and based on traveler intentions to stay longer than 12 months, are shown to produce biased statistics on migration. In response, we are now focusing on measures centered around migrants' observed behaviors, stitching together the rich tapestry of information from administrative data held across UK Government.

We'll outline how the suspension of the IPS at the outset of the pandemic accelerated these plans, but also stimulated us to develop innovative modelling techniques to ensure the continued timely supply of information. Finally, we'll conclude by considering the key challenges that still lie ahead of us. For instance, how best to define migration so that population statistics provide the right tool to answer to complex policy questions that face us?