

Understanding migration within the UK



Summary

New methodologies that have improved access to, and the understanding of, data on internal migration within the UK are uniquely geographical, drawing upon disciplinary strength in the study of spatial inequalities.

Challenge

More than six million people change address in the UK each year, making it the most significant factor in determining demographic change in many parts of the UK. However, a lack of robust and reliable methods for measuring inward and outward migration between different local authority areas, especially in and out of central London, has prevented planners and policy-makers from being able to adequately record and respond to these changes.

Solution

Professor John Stillwell (University of Leeds) led the development of a web interface which allowed easier access to the Office of National Statistics' (ONS) Special Migration Statistics dataset on migrant origins and destinations. These can now be accessed by anyone as a Web-based Interface to Census Interaction Data (WICID) through the UK Data Service.

Analysis of these data showed that 10% of internal migrants are from non-white ethnic groups, who tend to move to less-deprived areas where there is a lower concentration of people from their own ethnicity, which reduces segregation in both the area of origin and destination.

Professor Stilwell's work, with other colleagues at the University of Leeds, has also developed a better understanding of how different areas experience migration by minority ethnic migrants in terms of volume and flow, aiding an understanding of population stability. The highest levels of population turnover and churn are found in London and other dynamic urban areas, whereas the lowest levels are found in rural and former industrial areas.

Benefits

Better decisions

Accurate information on a population size and its composition has a significant impact on the provision of services and level of central government funding that a local authority will receive. Understanding how groups move around the UK allows local authorities to adequately plan for future demands, such as on housing, schools and health provision. Changes in the composition and structure of local populations, for example ethnic background, may also increase issues relating to integration and social tension.

Boosting productivity and building capability

Geographers continue to support and advise the ONS on how the volume and quality of internal and international migration data, and how they are collected and analysed, can be improved.

Further reading

[WICID flow data](#)

ONS data on [internal migration in the UK](#)

This case study was originally published by the Society in 2010 and was updated in 2019