

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales

Consultation update

December 2023





Consultation update

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) ran a consultation from 29 June 2023 to 26 October 2023 on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS). The consultation document outlined the ONS's proposals to create a sustainable system for producing essential, up-to-date statistics about the population. The consultation questionnaire was designed to build upon existing understanding of how people currently use our population and migration statistics, and capture feedback on our proposal for the longer-term future of these statistics.

This consultation update will detail who responded to the consultation and outline how we engaged with users of population and migration statistics both before and during the consultation. It will also explain how we will carry out our analysis of the responses.



ONS is responsible for producing population statistics for England and Wales. The consultation covers only population and migration statistics produced for England and Wales, and the Welsh Government have been closely involved throughout. We are continuing to work closely with our partners in National Records Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

For further details, please see our consultation document ¹.

Responses

We received a total of 706 responses at the close of the consultation. The table below shows how respondents represented themselves based on the categories provided in the consultation questionnaire.

1 [https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/supporting_documents/Future of Population and Migration Statistics Consultation Document.pdf](https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/supporting_documents/Future_of_Population_and_Migration_Statistics_Consultation_Document.pdf)

Sector	Count of question “What sector does the organisation belong to?”
Individual response	366
Local government	147
Charity or voluntary	52
Central government	34
Other public body, for example health, transport, or emergency services	31
Business, industry or commercial	21
Academia or research	18
Religion or faith	8
Devolved administration and associated bodies	9
Other*	20
Grand Total	706

* Other includes responses from sectors such as Think Tanks, Journalism or Media; which have been combined to avoid disclosure.

Note - Responses with more than one named author have been included, in this table, as a single response.

Users shared the reasons why population statistics are important to them. Broadly, the main reasons included:

- Informing national and local public policy to provide the best strategy and intelligence
- Monitor trends and changes in communities and populations
- Informing funding and allocation decisions around service provision, to meet the needs of the local communities and societal groups
- Academic research and detailed analysis in the respective fields of study
- Respondents personal interest in being kept up to date on the analysis of data for issues important to them or their organisation
- A number of responses were from users of population data via Census records for family and social history purposes

Pre-consultation engagement

In 2014, the UK Government set out its ambition that “censuses after 2021 will be conducted using other sources of data and providing more timely statistical information”². Driven by this goal, the Office for

2 https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/letterfromrthonfrancismaudemp-tosirandrewdilnot18071_tcm97-43946.pdf

National Statistics (ONS) led a programme of research over several years to improve our population and migration statistics by further expanding the range of data sources we use. This research has demonstrated progress across a number of topics, including that the ONS can produce population estimates with a more consistent level of detail and accuracy over time, and migration estimates based on observed travel patterns rather than respondents' stated intentions, using administrative data to respond to the difficulties of estimating internal and international migration. We have continuously engaged with users throughout this research.

This suite of evidence built the framework on which the public consultation on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) was developed. In the lead up to the consultation, we provided evidence to support the consultation and regularly published our research developments. A full list of our research outputs using administrative data can be found on our website ³.

3 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/populationandmigrationstatisticstransformationinenglandandwalesresearchoverview/2023>

Prior to the consultation being launched we undertook targeted engagement to maximise awareness and accessibility of our proposals. This included a series of roundtables across a number of sectors, where we sought feedback on our consultation approach and promoted the importance of engaging with the proposal across these sectors. These roundtables covered a broad range of users, but we were cognizant that these conversations alone may not be representative of the total user base.

Engagement during consultation

The consultation was a formal collection of users feedback on ONS' proposal to transform the way we produce population and migration statistics.

We communicated the launch of the consultation through various channels, including a new releases, media articles, social media posts and blogs: Growing confidence in our ability to move to a new population statistics system⁴. Information about the consultation was sent to users that attend our forums and an invite to subscribe to our information alerts and newsletters. To celebrate the launch of the consultation, we held in person launch events in London and Cardiff. We

4 <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2023/06/27/growing-confidence-in-our-ability-to-move-to-a-new-population-statistics-system/>

also delivered two drop-in sessions in both Parliament and Senedd Cymru. These were followed by a series of webinars targeting a range of stakeholders across sectors including central and local government, charities, and community organisations. These fora gave stakeholders an opportunity to hear more about the transformation proposal and consultation. It also allowed them to ask questions, explain how they currently use population statistics, and the impact of our proposals on their needs. In addition to the webinars that were run throughout September and October, we held a Reddit Ask Me Anything question-and-answer session.

Throughout the formal consultation period, we delivered a sizable engagement programme, to reach as many users as possible. We focused on providing resource to make sure users had access to information to make an informed response to the consultation questionnaire. The questionnaire aimed to understand how they interact with our published outputs, use our data and whether the proposed changes would meet their ongoing needs.

We gathered this feedback in different ways, including:

- Receiving direct feedback to our publications
- Engagement events with users and stakeholders
- Conferences
- Webinars

- Other channels
- And ultimately through consultation questionnaire responses

We promoted the consultation at several events and conferences. For example, at the Royal Statistical Society and the British Society for Population Studies conferences in September 2023. We took part in interviews and features in various sector-specific outlets, including local government, health, academia and genealogy.

Throughout the consultation period we provided regular reminders to users to complete the consultation and the time left to take part. Points of contact were provided on consultation material, including a telephone number and email address to ensure equality of access. These allowed people to contact us and discuss any questions they had or request support on how to take part. In addition to this, we produced videos to give an overview of the proposed transformation and support the understanding of the methodology including the Dynamic Population Model (DPM). A list of our key engagement materials can be found in Annex 1.

We reached a wide variety of users of our statistics, including those who use them to shape services and policies at both the national and local areas level; academics, charities, businesses and interested users, such as genealogists.

Overview of the analytical methodology

All feedback received through our engagement activities and consultation responses will be analysed using a mixed methods approach.

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

We will analyse text data with the support of NLP software. The NLP software used was the Insights Tool ⁵ developed by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). This software processes the data, drawing out themes, sentiment and key messages. These themes will be generated through a high frequency of particular words being used within the text data. The NLP tool will assist in identifying themes. However, qualitative analysts will review the responses to further refine and quality assure the themes coming from the responses.

Descriptive analysis

We will conduct descriptive analysis to draw out key data, such as the number of respondents, frequency of themes occurring, and the sectors represented. We will also look at why users need our data and the proposal's impact on their user needs.

5 <https://giaa.blog.gov.uk/2023/07/25/celebrating-our-giaa-insights-engine/>

Analysis by sector

We will carry out our analysis by sector so that we are able to identify the requirements of our stakeholders for further engagement on the topics important to them. It also allows us to assess our research plan for the future of statistics to best meet our users' needs. These sectors were self-reported by the respondent through a multiple-choice question within the consultation questionnaire.

Quality assurance and moderation

Once analysis had been completed, our findings will go through a robust process of quality assurance and moderation. This involves ensuring that all key messages and sentiment had been accurately recorded. Moderation sessions will be carried out with those with a background in methodology and subject expertise.

Next steps

Responses to the consultation will inform a recommendation to Government from the UK Statistics Authority, on the advice of the National Statistician. This recommendation will outline how the ONS will produce statistics about population and migration in future. The outcomes of our analysis will be published in 2024, to coincide with the recommendation.

The consultation has provided ONS with an opportunity to engage with a wide range of users, representing the diverse population and communities, which we serve as producers of official statistics for England and Wales. However, the conversation and engagement with users does not stop here: user need will continue to be at the heart of what we do moving forward. As we approach the formal recommendation and develop our future research plan, we will continue to build on the engagement we sought throughout the consultation and build in opportunities for further feedback from users.

We would like to thank all respondents for their valuable feedback, which will continue to guide our work in this area.

If you would like to get in touch about our future research plan, please email
FPMSenquiries@ons.gov.uk

Annex 1

Engagement materials

Watch our animated video in English to find out why we are transforming the way we produce population statistics.

<https://youtu.be/WoFp3wuyzEY>

Watch our animated video in Welsh to find out why we are transforming the way we produce population statistics.

<https://youtu.be/SfvDnCTWPtc>

Watch a British Sign Language (BSL) version of our animated video in English to find out why we are transforming the way we produce population statistics.

https://youtu.be/93P_AR8fv8U

Watch a British Sign Language (BSL) version of our animated video in Welsh to find out why we are transforming the way we produce population statistics.

<https://youtu.be/jseOrPWqmt0>

Watch our animated video about the DPM in English.

https://youtu.be/UCWS9kEGX_U

Watch our animated video about the DPM in Welsh.

<https://youtu.be/upZzNmmOUMU>

Watch a British Sign Language (BSL) version of our animated video about the DPM in English.

<https://youtu.be/OwYVwPPxPj4>

Watch a British Sign Language (BSL) version of our animated video about the DPM in Welsh.

<https://youtu.be/qqrIeB05WAI>

