

Data in Europe: migration

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Introduction

This guide highlights different sources of data useful for research on migration. It summarises key points and examples mentioned in a CESSDA webinar and workshop on the topic.

The slides and a recording of the webinar along with materials from the workshop are available on the training section of the [CESSDA website](#).¹

Examples come mainly from the UK and also from the resources held at the GESIS Data Archive; however, hopefully the issues discussed will be useful when thinking about research in other countries.

How we define migrants

The definition of a migrant can vary by dataset. Common definitions include

- a person whose country of birth/nationality is different to their country of residence
- a person who changes his or her country of usual residence for a particular time period, typically for a period of (at least) 12 months

Migration estimates by nationality and country of birth may not be in agreement. For example, British nationals born abroad or British born people who have acquired a different nationality can be classified differently depending on the definition used. Defining migrants according to intentions about length of stay can also provide an inaccurate picture because people can change their intentions regarding their length of stay in a country.

Migration measures can relate to:

- Flows = the number of people moving into and out of the country provide information on the flow of the population.
- Stocks = the number of migrants (e.g.) resident in a country at a given point in time (e.g. number of non-UK born or non-British citizens resident in the UK)

Data on flows and stocks are not directly comparable and can display different trends. For example, despite a decrease in immigration, the non-UK population resident or working in the UK could still be increasing if net migration is positive and migrants' deaths do not exceed net migration.

¹ <https://www.cessda.eu/Research-Infrastructure/Training/>

Measuring migrants and their characteristics: the UK example

Multiple sources of data can help measure the volume and characteristics of international migrants into a country. However, it may be that no individual source provides a complete, accurate picture. This section examines a range of differences sources of data with reference to key sources of data in the UK. For other countries, the data sources available and their relative advantages and disadvantages will vary. To find out more about possible sources, you can contact individual national data services/archives for help. Details of individual archives are available on the CESSDA website (<https://www.cessda.eu/Consortium>).

A CENSUS

The [UK Census](#) is one of the most comprehensive sources of data on migration In the UK,. Aggregate tables of census data give counts of migrants by demographic or socio-economic characteristic for different geographies. Researchers can also access census microdata, a 5% to 10% sample of individual records from the Census. However, the UK Census happens only every ten years.

SURVEY DATA

Survey data provides another source of useful information. For example, in the UK, [the International Passenger Survey](#) forms the basis for official statistics on immigration flows. Another key survey for migration research is the [Labour Force Survey](#), which captures information on country of origin, ethnicity, nationality, date of arrival to the UK as well as key socio-economic characteristics in a large representative sample. Since surveys collect varied information about individual's circumstances, behaviour and attitudes, survey microdata can be used to research a variety of migration topics and access to survey microdata enables users to develop bespoke tables and statistical models. However, survey data can often

- fail to capture certain migrant groups such as (1) short-term, temporary and seasonal migrants and (2) those not living in households or those living in communal establishments
- fail to capture recent change. For example, the UK LFS is a quarterly survey but only one quarter of the sample is refreshed at each quarter, therefore a time lag can appear.
- include small numbers of observations for sub-national geographies and specific groups, which increases the sampling error and produces less reliable estimates.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Administrative data offers an alternative source. For example, in the UK, the [GP Patient Register](#) is one of the more reliable sources of information on international migration at the local level. In some countries, administrative data can be hard for researchers to access. It can also offer an incomplete picture. For instance, the GP Patient Register in UK does not capture

delay between arrival and registration with a GP or information on patients who have left the UK. Some migrants may also not register for GP services at all, particularly short-term and younger economic migrants, especially healthy males (Migration Observatory, 2018).

COMBINING DATA SOURCES

Combining data sources can improve estimates of migration. For example, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) derives estimates of [Long-Term International Migration \(LTIM\)](#) by combining data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS) with other sources. Combining information helps to produce more robust estimates with adjustments made for asylum seekers, non-asylum enforced removals, people resettled in the UK under resettlement schemes, visitor and migrant switchers and flows to and from Northern Ireland (ONS, 2017). Researchers are also combining data to get a better understanding of migration flows, for example Wiśniowski (2017) uses Labour Force Surveys in both sending and receiving countries to better estimate migration flows.

Comparative studies of migrant lives and integration

In the last decade, researchers have developed major studies examining migrant behaviour and outcomes in receiving countries, including cross-national studies led by collaborative teams. For example, [2000 Families: Migration Histories of Turks in Europe](#) sampled Turkish men to collect information on Turkish migrant and non-migrant families. A goal in designing the study was to offer data to “enable comparisons of migrants with a counterfactual group of non-migrants in their country of origin, and (b) reveal processes of intergenerational transmission across multiple generations as well as across national boundaries” (Guveli et al., 2017, p. 2559).

A further study examining migrants in different receiving countries is [The Causes and Consequences of Socio-Cultural Integration Processes among New Immigrants in Europe \(SCIP\)](#). Carried out in 2010-2013, the two wave panel study (N=8,586/3,922) focused on examining socio-cultural integration processes across varying ethnic groups in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands.

A longitudinal comparative approach also forms the basis of the [Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries \(CILS4EU\)](#) project. Started in 2010 with a sample of schools, the project aims to provide a rich data resource by combining multiple data collection methods such as child and parent interviews, cognitive tests and sociometric classroom information (e.g. friendship ties) and ego-centered networks.

Public attitudes including attitudes towards immigration and immigrants

Surveys are also a key source of data on public attitudes including attitudes towards immigration and immigrants. A number of cross-national surveys examine changes in social attitudes over time, including immigration and its consequences. The biennial [European Social Survey](#), provides a key example, with a module on immigration and asylum issues fielded in both ESS1 (2002) and ESS7 (2014).

General social surveys and public opinion such as the German [General Social Survey \(ALLBUS\)](#) often include core or rotating questions relating to migration. Other examples include the [British Social Attitudes](#) study and Swedish [SOM surveys](#), which have all been running since the 1980s.

Public opinion surveys can also be used to examine how immigration levels affect public attitudes. For instance, Schmidt-Catran and Spies (2016) explore how immigration levels decrease support for redistributive policies among native populations. Combining individual- and regional-level from 1994 to 2010, they find that native-born populations become more reluctant to support welfare programs when the proportion of foreigners at the regional level increases, especially in contexts with higher unemployment.

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Access details for key data sources

UK SOURCES

Census

<https://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/>

The UK Census collects information on previous address in the year prior to the Census, country of birth and nationality (asked for the first time in the 2011 Census), year of arrival in the UK and intended length of stay along with other demographic (age, sex) and socioeconomic characteristics (ethnicity, religion, national identity employment, education, household characteristics, tenure, accommodation type).

Access: via UK data Service (see link above). Aggregate data and most of the flow and boundary data are available to anyone under the Open Government Licence. Access conditions for census microdata depend on the dataset.

UK Labour Force Survey (and Annual population Survey)

A quarterly sample survey of 60,000 households providing the most detailed statistics on the UK labour market. The LFS captures information on country of origin, ethnicity, nationality, date of arrival to the UK as well as key socio-economic characteristics. The LFS also collects information on migrants by asking place of residence 12 months prior to the survey. LFS is the main source of information on the labour market experiences of migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK. Since 2010 it has also collected information on reason for migration. The Annual Population Survey (APS) merges waves of the LFS with boost samples to create a large sample that can support analysis of small area geographies or detailed migrant groupings

Access: via the UK Data Service (see links below). Access conditions depend on the dataset.

LFS: <https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=2000026>

APS: <https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=200002>

International Passenger Survey (IPS)

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) is based on an annual sample of around 800,000 interviews of passengers passing through main UK ports and airports. The survey asks respondents about their migration intentions and yields information consistent with the UN definition of international migration: to stay or leave the UK for more than 12 months. The IPS measures both immigration and emigration (the only data source that does in the UK). Interviewees are asked about the main reason of migration (definite job, looking for work, accompany / join, study, working holiday, other) and responses can be broken down by nationality, sex and age group. The IPS also forms the basis for official statistics on immigration flows.

Access: via UK Data Service

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=2000025>

GP Patient Register

Flag 4 GP Registrations by local authority are published by Office for National Statistics under an Open Government Licence. Flag 4 records indicate international in-migrants who register with an NHS GP. This dataset indicates, for each local authority in England and Wales, the number of new Flag 4 records added to the Patient Register during the mid-year to mid-year period.

Access: Via data.gov.uk (<https://data.gov.uk/dataset/7a8ffa53-8f81-4439-a53e-13d53bf9d387/flag-4-gp-registrations-by-local-authority>)

COMPARATIVE STUDIES FROM GESIS

2000 Families: Migration Histories of Turks in Europe

The 2000 Families: Migration Histories of Turks in Europe project sampled Turkish men (1600 migrants and 400 stayers) to collect information on Turkish migrant and non-migrant families. The project seeks to explore migration processes and the transmission of resources, values and behaviour across multiple generations and across national boundaries (Güveli et al. 2016: 2559).

Access: via GESIS https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA5957

Causes and Consequences of Socio-Cultural Integration Processes among New Immigrants in Europe (SCIP)

The *Causes and Consequences of Socio-Cultural Integration Processes among New Immigrants in Europe (SCIP)* is a two wave panel study (N=8,586/3,922) examining socio-cultural integration processes across varying ethnic groups and countries. Carried out in 2010-2013, the study covered first generation immigrants in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands.

Access: via GESIS https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA5956

Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries – CILS4EU

CILS4EU is a longitudinal comparative study of immigrants' progeny in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, England. It started in 2010, taking a stratified sample of schools, classes, pupils. A key aim was to meet the need for more data to examine the mechanisms generating important differences in the integration of second generation immigrants. Supplemental features make CILS4EU a powerful data source in this field of topic, including interviewing of students and parents, ability testing and the collection of sociometric classroom information (e.g. friendship ties) and ego-centered networks.

Access: via GESIS

(<https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/GDesc2.asp?no=0103&tab=&ll=10¬abs=&db=E>)

Access conditions depend on dataset

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

European Social Survey (ESS)

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since its establishment in 2001 and covering surveys in over 30 nations. The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial multi-country survey covering over 30 nations. Its aim is to measure and explain trends in attitudes, beliefs and values across countries in Europe and its close neighbours.

The core questionnaire includes questions on Media and social trust, Politics, Subjective well-being, Gender, Household, Socio demographics and Human values. A module focusing on immigration and asylum issues has been fielded in ESS1 (2002) and ESS7 (2014).

Access: via ESS website. Users need to register with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service to access ESS data.

German ALLBUS

The main aim of the ALLBUS is to monitor trends in attitudes, behavior, and societal change in the Federal Republic of Germany. It has run since 1980 and is a biennial survey. The ALLBUS regularly asks questions designed to measure attitudes towards immigration.

Access: via GESIS <https://www.gesis.org/en/allbus/allbus-home/>

British Social Attitudes (UK)

Over 30 years of data on the attitudes of the British public towards a wide range of social issues.

Access: via [UK Data Service https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=200006](https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=200006)

SOM surveys (Sweden)

Since 1986, SOM surveys Swedes on issues ranging from politics and media to lifestyle, health and leisure habits.

Access: via [SND \(Swedish National Data Service\)](#)