

POPULATION, MIGRATION AND LIFE EVENTS STATISTICS REVISIONS POLICY

This Revisions Policy, approved by the Inter-Departmental Population Statistics Strategy Group, and Government Statistical Service Population Theme Group comes into effect from March 2014.

The policy relates to the population, migration and life events statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Records Scotland (NRS), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Knowledge and Analytical Service (KAS) in the Welsh Government. It has been developed in line with the relevant statistical regulatory framework and departmental policy. These are:

Regulatory framework - The Code of Practice for Official Statistics states:

- Announce changes to methods or classifications well in advance of the release of the changed statistics (Principle 2, practice 4)
- Publish a Revisions Policy for those outputs that are subject to scheduled revisions. Provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that they are released (Principle 2, practice 6)
- Where time series are revised, or changes are made to methods or coverage, produce consistent historical data where possible (Principle 4, practice 7)

Departmental policy - ONS revisions policy states:

A revision (**R**) is a scheduled change to any published output whether printed or electronic. Revisions are categorised as follows:

R1. To incorporate better source data such as more complete or corrected reporting by respondents and source data that more closely match the concepts

R2. To capture routine recalculations, such as incorporation of updated seasonal factors and updating of the base period

R3. To reflect improved methodology such as changes in statistical methods and changes in concepts, definitions and classifications

- Major revisions and corrections (for any reason) will be accompanied at the time of publication by an explanation of their nature and extent. Updated back data will be provided if available and where it will add value
- ONS will announce substantial methodological changes (R3) before the release of statistics based on the new methods. In the case of key outputs, an information paper should be made available on the website
- In planning revisions due to improvements (R3), ONS will consider carefully the balance between 'bunching' revisions versus many successive revisions, in consultation with users. Whilst users often prefer grouping changes together to avoid multiple revisions, this does lead to larger, more complex projects and difficulties in distinguishing separate effects

Population, Migration and Life Events Statistics

The regulatory framework and departmental procedures will be applied according to the following principles specific to population, migration and life events statistics.

Revisions (R1/2)

- We will update our population statistics following a new Census, deriving a new population base, and revising the annual population estimates rolled forward from the previous Census as required. Where this leads to inconsistencies because a component of change within population estimates is revised but more detailed statistics specific to that component (e.g. long term migration) are not, an assessment of the feasibility of updating the latter to be consistent will be made and clearly communicated
- Outputs, for example some migration statistics and estimates of the very old, initially released as provisional data for the sake of timeliness will be marked as such and may subsequently be updated in later releases because more accurate or new data for the reference period become available
- Outputs that include rates dependent on population estimates will be updated in the first release after new or revised population estimates are released

Revisions (R3)

- Between Censuses, we will continue to examine methodology
- We will introduce new methods where there is quantifiable evidence that new or alternative methods are more accurate, and do not negatively impact transparency, timeliness or user acceptability
- We commit to actively update and consult users via online and face to face user groups during the research phase which may last for several months or years before a new method is implemented
- When statistics are released using existing methods that are actively under review in long term improvement projects, information accompanying the release of those statistics will make clear reference to the ongoing research and its timescales
- If and when implementation of new methods is confirmed, substantial methodological changes will always be announced before the release of statistics based on new methods or classifications, together with an indication of the likely effects
- Where data allow, a revised back series to ensure consistency over time will be provided. We will aim to provide this back series alongside the first release of a new estimate based on the new method. However, when there is strong evidence a new method is more accurate, it may be used for the most recent reference period before a comparable back series is available. There will be an element of judgement in this but user needs will be prioritised
- We will seek to avoid frequent revisions and will attempt to ensure that revisions are in place prior to the production of the biennial population projections

Notation and presentation

- Revisions will be marked with an 'R' when they are released for the first time except where minor adjustments are made to figures previously noted as provisional
- Depending on the nature of the revision, data within a table will be specifically marked, or the whole table will be labelled in the title

A note on corrections

- A correction is an unplanned change to any published ONS output, often in response to errors
- If errors are discovered after publication, their impact will be investigated, and corrected
- Where corrections are assessed as having large impact, they will be issued as soon as practicable. Where corrections are assessed as having a minor impact, they will be incorporated in the next planned release if it is practical and cost effective to do so
- Major corrections will be listed on the ONS 'Corrections pages'

March 2014

BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE REVISIONS POLICY

1. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics is available at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/the-national-statistics-standard/code-of-practice/index.html>

The ONS revisions policy is available at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/revisions/revisions-and-corrections-policy/index.html>

2. This policy covers all releases of population, migration and life events statistics produced by ONS, NRS, NISRA and the Welsh Government including:

- mid-year population estimates: national, regional and local authority levels, by age, sex, marital status and of the very old, including centenarians
- population estimates for wards, parliamentary constituencies and National parks
- small area population estimates (SAPE) (experimental statistics) including Super Output Areas,
- population estimates by ethnic group (experimental statistics), cohabitation, lone parent families
- national and sub-national population projections

- international migration and migration within the UK
- births, fertility, deaths, and cancer registrations
- national life tables and period and cohort life expectancy
- marriages, divorces and civil partnerships
- families and household demographics

Over time, this portfolio of population statistics may change and this policy will equally apply to new products.

3. Population, migration and life events statistics have a wide range of users and uses. For example, they are used in planning, resource allocation, target setting, policy considerations and in understanding the labour market. Population estimates are also regularly used as denominators to calculate rates, as well as being used to weight survey results and as inputs to various models. Revisions to population statistics have wide reaching implications and the need for them has to be carefully assessed. There are implications for producers and direct users of population statistics and also for the producers of other statistical series/outputs. There will always be a balance between the need for the most accurate and timely estimates and the need for stability.

4. It is crucial that there are effective communication channels with users when dealing with revisions to population, migration and life events statistics. Users must be made aware in advance of the programme for planned revisions, the timing of their release and the magnitude of the impacts. Users also need to know that unplanned revisions will be made in a transparent way. We are committed to continuous improvement, and welcome feedback if users ever feel they have not been kept informed. We invite comments on how, and through what channels, they would like to be kept informed.

Contact

If you require more information about this policy, please contact: psru@ons.gsi.gov.uk