

Statistical bulletin

Short-Term International Migration for England and Wales: year ending June 2019

A summary of the latest official short-term international migration (STIM) statistics for England and Wales for the year ending June 2019 published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).



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Notice

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As a result of our [transformation journey](#), this will be the last short-term international migration (STIM) bulletin using the International Passenger Survey (IPS) as its main data source. More detail is available in [Section 4: Development of short-term migration statistics](#).

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1 . Main points

Data collection and migration patterns have been impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. For this reason, caution should be taken when interpreting comparisons of these estimates with previous years. More detail is available in [Section 2: Short-term international migration and the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

- Visits to England and Wales for 1 to 12 months decreased from 1,070,000 in the year ending June 2018 to 870,000 in the year ending June 2019; attributed by decreases in visits for visiting friends or relatives and study for both EU and non-EU citizens.
- There were 350,000 EU citizens who visited England and Wales for 1 to 12 months in the year ending June 2019, compared with 390,000 in the year ending June 2018.
- The number of non-EU citizens who visited England and Wales for 1 to 12 months decreased by 90,000 in the year ending June 2019 to 430,000.
- Visits abroad for 1 to 12 months fell from 3.1 million in the year ending June 2017 to 2.5 million in the year ending June 2019; visiting friends or relatives and holidays continue to be the main reasons for a visit abroad.
- Under the UN definition of 3 to 12 months for work or study only, visits to England and Wales fell from 160,000 in the year ending June 2018 to 100,000 in the year ending June 2019.
- In contrast, under the UN definition, visits abroad have risen by 30,000 to 60,000 in the year ending June 2019; this is largely driven by a rise in visits for employment by British citizens.
- Visits to England and Wales for 3 to 12 months for all reasons fell from 270,000 in the year ending June 2018 to 230,000 in the year ending June 2019; whereas visits abroad for 3 to 12 months have remained broadly stable over the past three years.

Notes:

1. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Short-term international migration data from the ONS are based on a survey. It is not possible to survey all people coming to and leaving England and Wales, so these statistics are estimates based on a sample, not precise figures.

2 . Short-term international migration and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

These latest Short-Term International Migration (STIM) estimates are based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and relate to the year ending June 2019, before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

However, STIM estimates are based on “completed flow” data, meaning data collected up to June 2020 are used. Data were likely to be affected during the pandemic because of:

- incomplete data collection – the IPS was suspended on 16 March 2020 because of coronavirus and there is a gap in IPS data from 16 March 2020 to end June 2020 that would normally be used for these estimates
- changes in patterns because of worldwide travel disruption – people’s travel patterns, plans and behaviours have changed, with travel restrictions in some countries starting before the UK’s first lockdown

Assurance checks on the data have confirmed that the likely effect of these on the estimates is minimal.

Incomplete data collection because of the IPS suspension

STIM estimates are based on “completed flow” data, as short-term migrants are interviewed at the end of their stay away from their country of usual residence. This means the data collection period spans 23 months. For this release, the reference period is year ending June 2019, that is when people started their visit, but the data collection period is from July 2018 to June 2020.

The IPS was suspended on 16 March 2020 because of the pandemic. This means there is a short period of incomplete IPS data, approximately three months out of the 23-month data collection period. This affects only those starting visits between mid-March 2019 and June 2019 and all three STIM definitions (see [Section 3](#)).

Most short-term migrants stay for less than three months. We have concluded that a very small proportion of short-term migrants are usually observed during the last six months (less than 0.3%) and last three months (less than 0.1%) of the data collection period, based on unweighted IPS data from the previous year. Therefore, the likely impact from the incomplete IPS data is minimal.

Changes in patterns because of worldwide travel disruption

People’s [travel patterns, plans and behaviours have changed because of the pandemic](#), with travel restrictions in some countries starting before the UK’s first lockdown, approximately from January 2020. Between April and June 2020, there was minimal travel to and from the UK as this was restricted to essential travel only.

With the data collection period spanning July 2018 to June 2020, we would expect to see some changes in visits being completed between January 2020 to June 2020. It is challenging to fully understand how much this would have changed, however, the following scenarios were expected to have occurred:

- a person extended their stay because they could not return to their usual country of residence
- a person shortened their stay before the travel restrictions started and returned to their usual country of residence
- a person shortened their stay during the travel restrictions and returned to their usual country of residence

Although it is challenging to estimate the effect of this with the data available, we know only a small proportion are usually observed within the time period affected. Therefore, it is likely to have had minimal impact on estimates.

View [use of statistical models to estimate international migration](#) (for the period January to June 2020) and [overseas travel and tourism based on the IPS, administrative sources and modeling](#) (for the year ending 2020) for more detail.

3 . Definitions used for Short-Term International Migration (STIM)

We produce STIM estimates for England and Wales based on three definitions:

- the UN's definition of a short-term migrant as being "a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least three months but less than a year (12 months), except in cases where the movement to that country is for the purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends or relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage"
- 3 to 12 months – all reasons for migration, which includes the UN definition and the categories "Business", "Holiday", "Visiting friends or relatives" and "Other"
- 1 to 12 months – all reasons for migration, which includes the previous definition but for 1 to 12 months; this definition captures more visits made for holidays and to visit friends or relatives

These definitions form part of a collection of [concepts for how we count and describe migrants in our statistics](#). Throughout our transformation journey we have sought feedback from users and stakeholders on concepts and definitions of migration, to inform the way that we transform our statistics. User feedback has highlighted the need for further flexibility in what we measure, as well as a wider range of definitions.

We are exploring additional data sources to apply to both existing and new definitions of short-term migration. We welcome your feedback on this by email at pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

4 . Development of short-term migration statistics

We have long acknowledged that the [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\)](#) has been [stretched beyond its original purpose](#) and we need to consider all available sources and methods to fully understand international migration. Between March 2020 and January 2021, the IPS was suspended because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Following the restart of the IPS, no specific interviewing of migrants has taken place but some data on migration continues to be collected through the standard survey questions. We have now accelerated our approach for transforming migration statistics using new methods and administrative data.

So far, our focus has been on developing [long-term admin-based migration estimates](#) as well as responding to the [challenges of measuring migration since the pandemic](#).

We plan to iteratively transform short-term international migration statistics using all available data, including administrative and survey data. We will look to bring these in line with the methods and development of the overall transformed population and migration statistics system. This gives us the opportunity to use more timely data and provide more informative insights than we were previously able to for short-term international migration to and from the UK.

This means this will be the last Short-Term International Migration (STIM) bulletin using the [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\)](#) as its main data source.

We want your feedback

Your feedback is important. We want to hear what our users need from the development of these statistics to ensure we are providing the best insights on population and migration.

We are interested in hearing:

- what short-term migration definitions are needed or are of interest (for example, actual length of stay, legal status on visa)
- whether certain patterns of movement need to be captured (for example, circular, temporary)
- what characteristics of short-term migration are needed (for example, reason for migration, occupation)
- your needs on the timeliness of the estimates (for example, how often do you need to access these statistics and what time difference between data capture and publication is acceptable?)

We plan to run a series of events with stakeholders, to discuss our latest research findings and gather feedback. Get in touch by emailing pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

5 . Migration data

[Citizenship by main reason for migration – flows, England and Wales](#)

Dataset STIM.01 | Released 27 May 2021

Estimates of Short-Term International Migration (STIM) to and from England and Wales are based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This dataset contains the nationality of short-term migrants by the primary purpose of their visit, by inflow and outflow.

6 . Glossary

EU citizenship groups

EU estimates exclude British citizens. Citizens of countries that were EU members prior to 2004, for example, France, Germany and Spain, are termed the EU15. Central and Eastern European countries who joined the EU in 2004, for example, Poland, are the EU8. EU2 comprises Bulgaria and Romania, which became EU members in 2007.

7 . Measuring the data

Why we have reduced the content of this bulletin

To allow for greater focus on our transformation work and development of our statistics, in this release we have updated the estimates for Table STIM.01 only. We know that users were keen that high-level national Short-Term International Migration (STIM) estimates were still available.

So far on our transformation journey, we have focused on developing [admin-based migration estimates for long-term international migration](#) but are now exploring how measurements of STIM estimates can be improved (see [Section 4](#)).

Producing Short-Term International Migration (STIM) estimates

STIM estimates are produced directly from the International Passenger Survey (IPS) at the end of the person's stay in the country, so measure actual migration behaviours.

To help improve timeliness, we publish [provisional STIM estimates](#), which use 18 months of final IPS data and six months of provisional data. The provisional estimates are then updated the following year.

Adding together Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) and STIM estimates cannot be used to provide one single estimate of international migration. This is because:

- short-term immigration flows have methodological differences from LTIM flows and are based on journeys to England and Wales, not the UK
- someone can be both a long and short-term migrant in any given period
- STIM estimates are based on actual migration behaviours, whereas LTIM uses intentions to infer length of stay

Instead, LTIM and STIM estimates should be considered alongside and in the context of each other. These estimates represent people migrating for different reasons, but they can help to provide an overall picture of international migration.

International Passenger Survey (IPS) – imbalances and discontinuity work

Arrivals and departures from the IPS have shown an [imbalance in UK travellers](#) over an annual cycle. Improvements on this imbalance were made and a [new method](#) will be implemented in the future.

8 . Strengths and limitations

Accuracy of current short-term migration estimates

Surveys gather estimates of information from a sample within a population because it is not possible to ask every person travelling in and out of the country to fill out a survey.

The [International migration statistics first time user guide](#) summarises the reliability of the international migration estimates. For further information on the statistics, please see [International migration methodology](#).

Uncertainty in the ONS migration statistics

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) is a sample survey and as such provides estimates. When the estimates are broken down beyond the headline figures, they are subject to greater levels of [uncertainty](#).

Some uncertainty is not represented. Examples of this include limitations of the survey methodology, potential misunderstandings of the questions and the accuracy of interviewees' answers.

Quality and methodology

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Short-Term International Migration \(STIM\) estimates for England and Wales QMI](#) and the [STIM estimates for local authorities QMI](#).

For more detailed information on our migration statistics methodology, please see [International migration methodology](#).

9 . Related links

[Population and migration statistics system transformation – overview](#)

Article | Updated 16 April 2021

Latest update on our population and migration statistics transformation journey.

[International migration: developing our approach for producing admin-based migration estimates](#)

Article | Released 16 April 2021

A summary of the current research into estimating international migration using administrative data focusing on the Registration and Population Interaction Database, which includes data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs; and Home Office Border data.

[Migration Statistics \(Home Office\)](#)

Landing page | Updated 27 May 2021

Statistics on migration and border control from Home Office administrative systems.

[National Insurance numbers allocated to adult overseas nationals to March 2021 \(DWP\)](#)

Article | Released 27 May 2021

Quarterly publication of National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals entering the UK, data to March 2021.