

Asylum support data: quality assurance of administrative data used in population statistics, Feb 2017

Report detailing the quality assurance undertaken on administrative data for asylum support data used within Population Statistics Division (PSD) publications.

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1 . Introduction

Each year, Population Statistics Division (PSD) within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) requests data from the Home Office (HO) on the number of asylum seekers receiving support. These data contain geo-location information, which is used in the geographical distribution of asylum seekers as part of the estimation of long-term international migrants and their inclusion as part of the mid-year population estimates for local authorities in England and Wales.

This report describes the processes that the data go through from initial data collection, to quality assurance in PSD, where it is included in long-term international migration and the international migration component of change in population estimates. It identifies potential risks in data quality and accuracy as well as details of how those risks are mitigated.

This report does not aim to cover the whole of either long-term international migration or mid-year population estimate processing or the quality assurance relating to the processing of the other components used in its production. Further information relating to the quality of the mid-year population estimates can be found in [Population Estimates Quality Tools](#) and in the [Annual Mid-Year Population Estimates QMI](#). Further information relating to the quality of international migration can be found in the [Long-Term International Migration QMI](#).

Within PSD, international migration data for Northern Ireland were assessed separately by relevant teams using the [UK Statistics Authority's Quality Assurance of Administrative Data Toolkit](#), which assesses an administrative data source in terms of the risk to data quality and its onward use in statistics as well as the profile of the statistics produced from the source. The results of those assessments are an A1 rating.

The A1 rating means that a basic level of assurance is required for these sources and this report will provide information to meet this level of assurance. If you feel that this report does not adequately provide this assurance then please contact pop.info@ons.gsi.gov.uk with your concerns.

The toolkit outlines 4 areas for assurance; the rest of this report will be split into these areas. The areas for assurance are:

- operational context and administrative data collection
- communication with data supply partners
- quality assurance principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers
- producer's quality assurance investigations and documentation

2 . Operational context and administrative data collection

The Home Office (HO) assumed responsibility for supporting asylum seekers from April 2000 when the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), a directorate of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), was created. NASS was set up to provide accommodation and/or subsistence payments to asylum seekers so that they could support themselves while they were awaiting a decision on their asylum application. Any person applying for asylum in the UK after 3 April 2000 would only be eligible to apply for support through NASS (apart from some in-country cases that were part of the roll-out). Before 3 April 2000, asylum seekers, depending on the location of their application for asylum, could apply for support from the Department of Social Security (now part of the Department for Work and Pensions) or local authorities.

NASS was disbanded in 2006. This service is now delivered by Asylum Support teams (part of International and Immigration Asylum Group) based in various regional locations, but managed centrally. The legislation in respect of eligibility for asylum support and the categories of support available has not changed.

All asylum data relating to the UK are administrative counts of casework processes, which are defined in UK legislation and are recorded under detailed categories on HO's administrative databases.

Asylum support was set up to provide for asylum seekers while they await a decision on their asylum application. Asylum seekers who apply for asylum support under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 can receive: accommodation only (where they are allocated accommodation in a dispersal area and must otherwise support themselves); or subsistence only (where they receive cash to support themselves but must find their own accommodation); or accommodation and subsistence (where they are allocated accommodation in a dispersal area and cash to support themselves).

To qualify for support the asylum seeker will need to be considered destitute in accordance with the [Asylum Support Regulations 2000](#). Asylum seekers apply for support by submitting a completed [asylum support application form \(ASF1\)](#) to a regional Asylum Support team. When an asylum seeker applies for asylum support their details are entered onto the ASYS database (a database specifically for the processing and provision of asylum support) by a caseworker, who establishes what type of support the applicant wishes to receive and whether they are eligible for such support. If support is denied, asylum seekers have the right to appeal to the [First-tier Tribunal \(Asylum Support\)](#).

Data relating to asylum support are extracted from ASYS. The figures relating to asylum seekers in receipt of support include dependants, unless otherwise stated. In addition to the data we receive, data on those receiving Section 95 support are also published by local authority.

Asylum support data are considered to be high quality. The totals are quality assured by HO.

3 . Communication with data supply partners

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exists between us and the Home Office (HO). The MoU provides a clear understanding about the working relationship between the HO and us. It is set in the context of the provision of data on asylum seekers and their dependants by the HO to Population Statistics Division (PSD) for the production of long-term international migration estimates, which are classified as National Statistics. This MoU has been signed off by the producer and supplier of the data.

Specifically, this memorandum details information about:

- the parties to the understanding and their contact details
- a description of the data delivered
- the management arrangements for data delivery
- MoU management and issues resolution
- expectations, quality standards and performance

The variables of the data that the Migration Statistics Unit receives on the asylum seeker support dataset are as follows:

- postcode
- whether support includes dispersed accommodation or subsistence only

No breakdown is provided by age or sex.

3.1 User engagement

PSD continually engages with users, through a variety of means, to understand how our outputs are meeting their requirements. Feedback provided tends to relate to the overall statistical methodology and the impact on the final statistics, rather than to any individual data source. To date no specific feedback on the use of this data source has been provided.

4 . Quality assurance principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers

Checks that the data are accurate, which are applied as part of the data collection process, are described in Section 2. Population Statistics Division does not rely on any further validation checks being carried out by the supplier before conducting its own investigations as described in section 5.

5 . Producer’s quality assurance investigations and documentation

This section details the checks and standards applied to the data after receipt by Population Statistics Division (PSD). Initial checks are carried out by the Migration Statistics Unit (MSU), with further checks conducted by the Population Estimates Unit (PEU).

MSU

Once data from the Home Office (HO) is received by MSU, it is entered into a geography tool. The purpose of this is to validate each postcode to check that it is a valid postcode. If it is not validated then it is rejected. The geography tool looks up every postcode and allocates them to the local authority (LA) that the postcode resides in. If there were any invalid postcodes present, the HO would be contacted for further investigation.

This data is grouped into 4 quarters of the year by MSU. Distributions are compared with those from the corresponding quarter the previous year to see if there are any large differences. The applicant-to-dependant ratio is looked at as well. If any major differences were spotted, the HO would be contacted for clarification.

PEU

Checks are carried out by staff in PEU once the asylum seeker data has been received from MSU. All 4 quarters of data are compared to make sure that the used quarter, Quarter 2 (Apr to Jun), is representative of the whole year. Quarter 2 is used because it contains the specific date (30 June) for which the population is being estimated. The second quarter is compared with previous year’s data for total count, support type and LA. The format of the LA codes is checked for consistency with the most up-to-date LA codes that are used in the processing and publication of population data at LA level for the reference year.

The processor of the asylum seeker component checks to see if the raw data checks have been carried out correctly and have been recorded. In addition to this a further check is undertaken to make sure that only England and Wales data are present on the spreadsheet that is then used in processing; for example, no LA codes beginning with S (for Scotland) or N (for Northern Ireland).

Once the checks are completed, the LA distribution derived from these data is applied to the regional asylum seeker totals provided to PEU separately. Finally, age-sex profiles to the data are applied using data from other sources.

6 . Conclusions

6.1 Strengths and limitations

Key strengths for the asylum support data in this context are:

- the data enable a geographical distribution to be made for asylum seekers
- the derivation of local authority from postcode is judged to be of very good quality, with postcode recorded for every record in the dataset

Limitations for the asylum support data in this context are:

- the data do not provide complete coverage of the asylum seeker population and act as a proxy
- the data do not correspond exactly with the target population as they reflect stocks rather than flows
- no age or sex data are provided

6.2 Level of assurance

Both Migration Statistics Unit (MSU) and Population Statistics Unit (PEU) deem the asylum support data to have a low risk of quality concerns. This is due to the small size of the component that asylum seekers make up in the long-term international migration and mid-year population estimates respectively, that the data are used to make a geographic distribution of a previously determined total, checks on the geographical distribution have been successfully completed and the completeness of the source.

Both the long-term international migration and mid-year population estimates have a higher public profile due to the high levels of media and policy interest, with the mid-year populations feeding into resource allocation decisions.

As such, both PEU and MSU have deemed the asylum support data to have a low risk of quality concerns and higher public-interest profile and have independently determined an overall assurance rating of A1: basic assurance.