
John Pullinger CB CStat | National StatisticianBernard Jenkin MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

19 April 2016

Dear Bernard,

Migration Statistics

Thank you for your [letter of 24 March](#) asking for further details of the work we are doing with HMRC and DWP on National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) for overseas nationals and, in particular, the work that was outlined in [Sir Andrew Dilnot's letter to Will Moy](#) on 8 February looking at the differences between NINOs and the International Passenger Survey (IPS).

ONS produced a [briefing note in March](#) explaining that these two sources of information measure different concepts: the IPS measures the flows of migrants who intend to stay in the UK or leave the UK for 12 months or more, while the NINO data measure the number of people registering for a National Insurance Number over a period of time regardless of when they arrived in the UK or how long they intend to remain in the UK. So the NINO data will include short term migrants and people who come to the UK to work or look for work for periods of under a month, provided they register for a NINO, while the long term migrant data from the IPS will not. Given they measure different concepts, the two data series can be expected to show different patterns.

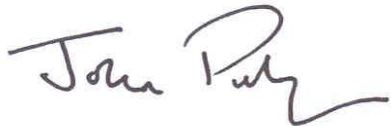
However, the recent divergence between the two data sources does need to be understood, explained and be credible with users. Rather than address via correspondence, a taskforce comprising analytical experts from ONS, DWP, HMRC, Home Office and Cabinet Office is in place to look at the available evidence to do this. In his letter to Will Moy, Sir Andrew Dilnot highlighted that the analysis required to understand more fully the NINO data is complex. Access to the relevant datasets has since been provided and analysis is underway. A report of our findings will be published in May.

In your letter, you mention exploring the use of NINO data to support your Committee's enquiry into data sharing and the use of administrative records to provide enhanced statistics. I very much welcome this because having access to administrative data is critical for our statistical work, including for quality assuring our survey sources.

Both the IPS and NINO data have value and help improve our understanding of migration but also have limitations. As you will know, there is currently no complete count of migrants coming into and out of the UK and while we are exploring with the Home Office whether new exit check data might help improve our existing sources we do not at present expect they will replace them. Currently, the IPS provides the most appropriate existing measure of international migration consistent with the UN definition of migration (ie. changing country of usual residence for 12 months or more).

Our report in May will improve the information available and more fully inform debate on this issue in the run up to the EU Referendum. However, as I mention earlier, the reconciliation work is complex. You can be reassured that we will explain our findings and also highlight any further reconciliation work that might be needed, as necessary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Pullinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

John Pullinger