



Strategic Migration Partnership

Response to Review of Border and Immigration Agency Statistics on "Control of Immigration"

February 2008

Background

COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership is funded by Border and Immigration Agency to perform an enabling role in Scotland. The team has a successful record in supporting BIA in their stakeholder engagement in Scotland. The enabling grant agreement states one of our responsibilities to be:

"To gather (national) data and trends, and monitor and evaluate the impact of asylum and other immigration policies on the dispersal process and provision of support and services for migrants."

We therefore act as a conduit between BIA and other stakeholders in analysing and disseminating data required for the planning of services. However, there are gaps in the statistics available to us and as a result we have been tasked by our Strategic Coordination Group to:

"Continue to press for the quality and scope of information recorded and disseminated about refugees and migrant workers to be improved to facilitate the planning of appropriate services by all partners"

In the past year we have used BIA Statistics to support a number of partners in the planning of services. A key example of this is where we used Management Information to support Scottish local authorities to respond to the case resolution process quickly and effectively. We also produced a breakdown of the number of supported asylum seekers living in each Community Planning Partnership area to support the appropriate distribution of Community Planning resources.

COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership has a vested interest in the production of BIA Statistics on Control of Immigration and welcome the opportunity to comment on the internal review of published statistics. We believe that if the quality and scope of the statistics made available is improved in the ways outlined in this paper we can bring added value to the way we meet our enabling role commitments. However we would also stress that there are key gaps in data and would encourage BIA to widen the scope of the review to consider how data is collected. In responding we have outlined what we get from each of the BIA sources currently available to us and then outlined information that is not currently available to us, but which is needed.

Types of data currently used by COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership

Published statistics

The published statistics produced by Border and Immigration Agency provide a useful overview of immigration trends across the UK. We recognise that these publicly available documents are invaluable to a range of organisations and support their continuation. The published statistics are also a key means of ensuring that BIA is accountable and open to the general public. Some of our partners use these statistics for planning and research and we are concerned that reduction in the detail could have negative implications for them. We would also caution against reducing the frequency of publication since it is difficult to evaluate the impact of immigration policies if a full set of immigration statistics is only available at yearly intervals. Publishing detailed statistics at quarterly intervals would be more appropriate, but in a context where new immigration legislation regularly enters the statute books monthly updates are useful.

Management Information produced by Local Delivery Team

The Management Information provided to us by BIA's 'Local Delivery' Team (formerly the Regional Strategic Coordination Team) are useful because they provide regional detail that is missing from the published statistics. We have liaised with this team in the past year about our data needs and have received a positive response to many of our requests. We now receive information on languages spoken by asylum seekers and this is invaluable in planning services.

One criticism of the Management Information we receive however, is that key information is often missing. For example we rarely receive updates on the number of UASCs in Scotland, although this data has been requested and a space exists within the report for the information.

The quality of the data could also be improved by better contextualisation. For example we receive information on the number of people signing up for voluntary return, but receive no details about whether those people are legacy cases or new asylum model cases. We have no information about the number of new cases being lodged in Scotland and therefore have no way of evaluating the performance of the new asylum model.

ASYS summaries

By far the most useful source of statistical information that we receive from BIA are the extracts of ASYS data for our region. These consist of extracts of the central ASYS database with identifying information removed (i.e. names, addresses, home office reference numbers). This data is invaluable to us because of the flexibility it gives us to do analysis and produce reports that meet the needs of Scottish local authorities and of our regional partners. For example it includes postcode data which allows us to use the lookup function in excel to produce reports of numbers of asylum seekers in particular areas within Scotland. The value of conducting this analysis at a local level is that reports produced are geographically and policy relevant. As a result the reports we are able to produce are invaluable for service planning. By contrast, reports that have been produced for us by BIA are not always so relevant, a key example being summaries of the location of asylum seekers across the UK which used the pre-1975 local government boundaries.

We encourage BIA to continue to share this level of data with Strategic Migration Partnerships because we have found it is key to delivering parts of the enabling role. It is also a key example of how sharing detailed data with key stakeholders can lead to improvements in improving strategic responses to immigration. We stress that any reduction in detail within these datasets would endanger the effective planning of services in Scotland.

We recognise that there are data protection concerns in sharing detailed information, but when identifying information is removed this is less of an issue. However, we do not share

the raw data (particularly postcodes) with partners, but endeavour to produce reports tailored to their needs.

Information gaps identified by COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership

Asylum

The majority of the information we receive directly from BIA is about supported asylum seekers. The data we receive is good quality, however there are still some key gaps. It would be useful for BIA to produce:

1. Information on 'population churn'

The information we receive tends to take the form of a snap-shot (this is true of published statistics and ASYS data). It would be very useful to know how many asylum seekers are arriving in the region each month. This information would be invaluable for planning appropriate services and evaluating the impact of immigration on the region.

2. Information on family make-up

We only receive information on the main applicant (gender, date of birth etc) and the group size. Information on the dependents within families would allow for planning of gender appropriate services and for services for children.

3. Information from Asylum Casework

We currently receive very little information from the Asylum Casework team. We are currently in discussions with BIA Scotland about receiving more information, and would like to receive information on the team's performance in Scotland: rate of new arrivals, decision making timescales in Scotland, number of appeals, number of grants and number of removals. This information would allow us to track the performance of Asylum Casework and work in partnership to address issues such as low take up of voluntary return.

Refugees

There are currently very few sources of statistics on refugees available in the UK and COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership would encourage the Border and Immigration Agency to share information that may be available to them. This may include information about number of grants of status; applications for ILR after the 5-year period; number applications for travel documents; information about

The current lack of information about the number and location of refugees across Scotland makes planning services very problematic.

Migration

There are key gaps in the information available to COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership about migration in its wider sense. Most of the data we use comes from NINO registrations and Workers Registration Scheme. Border and Immigration Agency's should consider making more information available and this may involve extending the review to look at how data is collected. We suggest the following data is needed:

1. Information on internal migration 'population churn'

The data available tells us how many people have applied for NINOs or the WRS in a particular area. This data is of limited usefulness because it does not tell us how many people are living or working in an area at any one time. Data has to be made available about the movement of migrants within the UK so that resources can get to the areas where they are needed and appropriate services can be planned. This is a key area of concern for Scottish local government.

If the WRS could be amended to record information about dependents; when workers are economically inactive; move to another local authority or area; or leave the UK it would be an invaluable resource for the planning of local authority (and other) services.

2. Information about dependents

The WRS currently only records details of adults who are hoping to find work in the UK. No information is recorded about their dependents, despite the fact that those dependents are likely to need to access local authority services. This is again a key area of concern for Scottish local government and data has to be made available about the number of dependents of people on the Workers Registration Scheme.

3. Information about people outwith the WRS

In terms of service planning it would be invaluable to have information about people outwith the WRS scheme, whether they are A2 nationals or migrants from further afield. We hope that the new managed migration structures will produce relevant information.

Conclusion

We welcome Border and Immigration's review of statistics, but suggest that in light of information gaps we have identified that the review may need to go further and look at how data is collected. In order to allow local authorities to plan appropriate services for migrants, Border and Immigration Agency needs to become more sophisticated about recording and disseminating information about where migrants are living and working across the UK. We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to a wider review.

The statistics that are available from BIA must be produced in a way that they are useful at a regional and local level for planning and evaluation purposes. In our experience the information that translates best to a regional level is detailed and flexible enough to allow for analysis and the production of geographically and policy relevant reports.

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