

# Project summary: internal migration in Scotland

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This document summarises the key findings of a recent project led by Dr David McCollum and colleagues at the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh which focused on recent internal migration trends in Scotland. The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, through the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative. The study drew on data from the Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS), administrative health data and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)/UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) to address the following themes;

1. Technical approaches to assessing internal migration
2. The social-spatial mobility nexus
3. Is internal migration on the wane?
4. Do immigrants and ethnic minorities have distinct patterns of internal migration?

Key findings in relation to each of these themes are presented below.

## 1. Technical aspects of assessing migration

### Context

- Migration major component of population change in Scotland and symptom and cause of major economic and social phenomena
- Internal migration much more quantitatively significant than international migration, but focus of less analytical scrutiny
- Research hindered by data issues: attribute rich but time poor census data, or time rich but attribute poor administrative data
- Recent linking of administrative health data into the census-based SLS: new opportunities to study experiences of sizeable quantity of individuals, at detailed geographies and over a significant period

### Findings

- Effective assessment of characteristics of movers and moves at fine geographic scales for first time, captures most mobility
- Reliance on administrative health data to detect moves, so systematic underreporting of some moves
- Set of weights devised to help researchers overcome this selection bias

### Potential implications

- New method: opportunities to better understand migration in Scotland, especially residential mobility
- Demonstrates value of data linkage and longitudinal datasets in migration research
- Suitability of administrative data for research set to become evermore important issue in post-census era
- Practical, legal and ethical considerations around linkage and accessibility to researchers



## 2. The social-spatial mobility nexus

### Context

- 🌐 Social mobility: key issue of contemporary policy and political salience, especially in post-recession era
- 🌐 Role of specific places and migration as engines of social mobility?
- 🌐 Combined weighted BHPS-UKHLS dataset allows for UK-wide long-term perspective (1991-2014). Also SLS-based refined measure of occupational mobility 2001-2011

### Findings

- 🌐 Career escalator effects for skilled workers of working in particular places (UK and Scottish scales), especially for women
- 🌐 Migration: only longer distance moves related to (upward & downward) changes in occupational standing.
- 🌐 Recession related stagnation in occupational mobility, and only muted recovery

### Potential implications

- 🌐 Absence of a meritocracy: occupational mobility patently about more than just one's efforts and abilities e.g. persistence of gender inequalities in terms of entry into top jobs. Need to tackle structural barriers to social mobility
- 🌐 Geography matters: uneven spatial distribution of career opportunities in the UK. Rebalance economy, or facilitate working in escalator regions
- 🌐 Longer distance migration as a catalyst for career progression. Need to consider uneven ability/propensity to engage in such forms of spatial mobility, and those who lose out from it
- 🌐 Stagnation in occupational mobility: need to focus on quality as well as quantity of jobs, especially in post-recession era of concerns surrounding progression, productivity and stagnation in real wage levels

## 3. Is internal migration on the wane?

### Context

- 🌐 'Age of Migration', globalisation and hypermobility versus demographic, economic and cultural factors favouring reduced internal migration
- 🌐 Changing patterns of internal migration pertinent to key policy issues e.g. operation of housing market, spatial mismatch and the (im)mobility of jobseekers
- 🌐 Changes socially and spatially selective i.e. migration reflects and reinforces existing inequalities as some groups more willing and able to move than others
- 🌐 Corroboration across data sources: SLS, raw census and health admin data, BHPS/UKHLS

### Findings

- 🌐 Overall slight decline in rates of address changing in Scotland, and UK generally. Changes have coincided with great recession. In Scotland, drop in short and long distances moves (since 2010 and 2007 respectively). No changes in medium distance (10-50km) moves.



### Findings

- Not explained by changing population composition (e.g. ageing, home ownership, relationship status): part of wider, longer term behavioural change shift?
- Higher skilled, those in higher ranking occupations and residents of wealthier areas more spatially mobile over longer distances. Ethnic minorities more mobile over shorter distances.
- Uneven impact of the recession: mostly suppressed mobility of 26-35 year olds, graduates and those in higher ranking occupations and in wealthier areas. These groups no longer exceptionally mobile over longer distances. More socially uniform suppression of residential mobility

### Potential implications

- Largely uniform decline in shorter distance moves;  
**Choice:** ICT (e.g. broadband) and transport changes (e.g. more fuel-efficient cars) enabling fewer shorter distance residential moves  
**Constraint:** issues of housing unaffordability, housing market rigidity, household debt and economic uncertainty acting against residential mobility
- Longer distance moves linked to positive occupational mobility, but this option only seemingly available to some, relatively privileged, groups. Now, even these groups becoming less spatially (and socially) mobile.

## 4. Do immigrants and ethnic minorities have distinct patterns of internal migration?

### Context

- Differing internal migration rates reflect inequalities in desire, ability and thus propensity to move
- Practical and policy ramifications as growing migrant and ethnic minority population in Scotland

### Findings

- Apart from Pakistani/Bangladeshi, minority groups have higher levels of residential mobility than White Scottish/British/Irish. Especially the case with White Polish and African/Scottish African groups. Differences not fully explained by population compositional effects
- Ethnic variations most pronounced over shorter distance moves i.e. residential mobility. Minorities relatively immobile over longer distances
- As with overall trend, slight decline (and convergence) in mobility trends amongst ethnic groups
- Immigrants become less mobile with time spent in Scotland, except the Polish ethnic group

### Potential implications

- Ethnic minorities more mobile over short distances but less mobile over longer distances: concern about residential insecurity and constrained career opportunities
- Evidence of some convergence: possibly a positive development as ethnicity becoming less of a determinant of mobility experiences
- Polish/A8 group distinctive, perhaps due to disadvantageous labour market position (high employment rates but overrepresented in low paid and insecure work): requires special policy attention

