Project summary: internal migration in Scotland

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This document summaries 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 approaches to 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: presents new opportunities for migration research

Findings

Method allows for assessment of characteristics of movers and moves at fine geographic scales for first time

Reliance on administrative health data to detect moves, so systematic underreporting of some forms of mobility

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
2. **The social-spatial mobility nexus**

**Context**

Social mobility: key issue of contemporary policy and political salience

Multi-level methodological approach: individual and wider determinants of occupational progression


**Findings**

Occupational mobility into highest ranking jobs: important individual (e.g. education level) and place based (e.g. London & SE) determinants

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. Need to rebalance economy.

Longer distance migration as a catalyst for career progression. Need to consider uneven ability/propensity to engage in such forms of spatial mobility (see themes 3 and 4 below).

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’/hypermobility versus effects of great recession, population ageing and emergence of ‘secular rootedness’

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

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, mainly driven by drop in short distance moves

Not explained by changing population composition (e.g. ageing, home ownership, relationship status): wider, longer term cultural shift?
Uneven impact of the recession: mostly suppressed mobility of 26-35 year olds, graduates and those in higher ranking occupations. Again mainly due to fewer shorter distance moves, as still more likely to move over longer distances

Cities losing population via internal migration, but overall gains because of international migration

Those living in relatively wealthy areas, and those in higher ranking jobs, more mobile over longer distances, but more short distance mobility amongst renters, ethnic minorities and people living in more deprived areas

Potential implications

ICT (e.g. broadband) and transport changes (e.g. more fuel-efficient cars) enabling fewer shorter distance residential moves

Issues of housing unaffordability and housing market rigidity acting against residential mobility

Socially selective declines in shorter distance moves: concern that still high rates for those in precarious housing situation e.g. housing ‘have v have nots’, welfare reforms, insecurity of tenure

Longer distance moves linked to positive occupational mobility (theme 2), but this option only seemingly available to some, relatively privileged groups, groups

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

Corroboration across data sources: SLS and UKHLS

Findings

Apart from Pakistani/Bangladeshi, minority groups have higher levels of residential mobility than White Scottish/British/Irish

White Polish and African/Scottish African consistently have the highest levels of migration

Ethnic variations most pronounced over shorter distance moves i.e. residential mobility

Differences not fully explained by population compositional effects

As with overall trend, slight decline (and convergence) in mobility trends amongst ethnic groups

Immigrants become less mobile with time spent in Scotland/UK, 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 group distinctive, perhaps due to disadvantaged labour market position (high employment rates but overrepresented in low paid and insecure work): requires special policy attention