

## Response to the ONS consultation on country groupings in international migration statistics

March 2014

### Introduction

This document forms the GLA Intelligence Unit's response to ONS's consultation on country groupings in international migration statistics. Details of the consultation process and the accompanying documentation are, at the time of writing, available on the ONS website<sup>1</sup>.

### GLA Intelligence Unit response

#### 1) Are these proposals acceptable to you?

The GLA Intelligence Unit is broadly in support of the new country groupings proposed by ONS. The current country groupings, with the exception of the European Union category, are not considered very relevant any more. The 'Old Commonwealth' and 'New Commonwealth' categories cover countries from across the world so there is no potential to be able to differentiate geographically what regions people are coming from/going to. The 'Other Foreign' category is also too broad to be able to allow users to see patterns regarding migration. Additionally there is no category that allows users to distinguish migration to/from countries in Europe which are outside of the European Union.

The new country groupings would address these issues by providing migration flow data on more of a geographical basis. Sub-categories within each geographical region would allow further breakdown of flows and for users to be able to see any trends. The proposed 'Other Europe' sub-category would mean that flows to/from countries outside of the EU but potentially considering joining the EU could also be obtained separately unlike at present.

#### 2) What additional categories would you like to see added to the groupings?

Some of the country groupings that have been proposed by ONS are broad and it would be useful if these could be split further in order to be able to obtain as much detail as possible. Given the context of changing and unpredictable patterns of international migration this could prove useful in the future.

- The GLA Intelligence Unit considers that the following groupings could be split further:
- 'EU 2004 and onwards' - namely, a split between the original EU8 countries which joined in 2004 and the more recent EU2 countries which joined in 2007 but had different restrictions placed on movement until this year.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/consultations/country-groupings-in-international-migration-statistics/index.html>

- ‘Caribbean and Latin America’ – a split to match those used by ONS in Census 2011 Country of Birth analysis, i.e. three groups of consisting of: Central America; South America; and the Caribbean.
- ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ – grouping all of Africa, bar North Africa together creates a very large group of countries which are likely to have differing migration patterns from each other. A split of this group into three: West and Central; East; and Southern would be more useful.
- ‘Central Asia’ – this group largely consists of Middle Eastern countries and the ‘-stan’ countries. Splitting these countries into two groups to be consistent with that used by ONS for the Census 2011 detailed Country of Birth tables would be useful.

### **3) Which of the proposed groupings are least useful to you?**

All the proposed groupings would be useful as currently the data released is only available in very broad groupings which are not geographically based and some of which, i.e. ‘Old Commonwealth’ and ‘New Commonwealth’ are no longer as relevant.

### **4) How important is it to have consistent groupings of countries applied to different statistical outputs (e.g. migration flows, labour market statistics, visa statistics)?**

The GLA Intelligence Unit considers having consistent groupings of countries applied to different statistical outputs critical. It is often necessary to carry out analysis comparing information from different sources so it is essential that the data can be grouped in a consistent fashion.

The country groupings proposed by ONS are not consistent with the groupings used by ONS for the detailed Country of Birth tables released as part of the 2011 Census. For example, Mauritania is allocated to the ‘Central and Western Africa’ group in the 2011 Census detailed Country of Birth tables but the ‘North Africa’ group under the proposals being consulted on. It would be useful to have countries fall in the same groupings consistently.

This is because if all the statistical outputs are not released based on the same groupings of countries, it is not possible to undertake any comparisons. For example, it would not be possible to corroborate a trend in an increasing number of migrants from a certain area of the world through just one source of data.

### **5) How important is to have consistent groupings of countries applied to backseries of data?**

The GLA Intelligence Unit analyses migration data released by ONS and reports to its borough contacts on any changes or key trends. It is therefore vital that any new country groupings are also applied to the backseries of data as this will allow trends to be seen and followed and for any comparisons to be made. If these groupings are not applied to the backseries of data it will be like starting from scratch because it will not be possible to see how migration flows to/from these groupings have changed over time.

### **6) Is there anything else you would like us to consider on the topic of reporting statistics by country groupings?**

The GLA Intelligence Unit has some concerns with British Dependencies being grouped with the UK with regards to consistency with other sources.

Consideration also needs to be given to the possibility of Scottish independence and which category Scotland would then be placed in.

# GLAINTELLIGENCE

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