



Forecasting migration in Scotland: Potential impact of independence on the future trends

Migration to and from Scotland could potentially be affected by the outcome of the 2014 Scottish referendum on the constitutional future of the United Kingdom. The likelihood and extent of changes in migration have not been thoroughly analysed to date. This briefing paper presents selected outcomes of the analyses carried out by the ESRC Centre for Population Change on the possible effects of Scottish independence on internal and international migration. In particular, it aims to describe the uncertainty of future migration taking into account most of the available information. This includes the available historical data on migration, as well as opinions from experts in Scotland on future migration trends.

Key Points

- As with all migration forecasts, there remains substantial uncertainty about future migration to and from Scotland, and this uncertainty increases with the forecast horizon.
- There is greatest uncertainty about international immigration to Scotland.
- International emigration from Scotland is likely to increase in the near future, irrespective of the referendum outcome.
- Levels of migration between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom will likely remain at similar levels to the present, irrespective of the outcome of the 2014 independence referendum.

Introduction

In the context of the 2014 constitutional referendum, this research aims to forecast how Scottish independence could impact migration in Scotland, both within the boundaries of the current UK, as

well as internationally. It looks at four migration flows concerning Scotland: immigration from and emigration to the rest of the UK, and immigration from and emigration to other countries.

This briefing paper presents selected results obtained from the forecasting model. The results are based on two key sources; the historic statistical data on Scottish migration and the views of twelve experts on future migration trends. These opinions were obtained by means of a survey, carried out in the summer of 2013, which is described in detail in the supplementary CPC Briefing Paper 17 on 'Directions of impact of Scottish independence on migration: A survey of experts'. The forecasts demonstrate the uncertainty of future Scottish migration taking into account most of the available information, in the horizon of 2021.

Forecasts of migration trends

a) Description of methodology

To produce forecasts of migration flows, statistical models that combine the annual, historical, officially reported data on migration from 1975 to 2011 were used, with the opinions elicited from the experts. In particular, experts were asked to provide their subjective judgement on the possible ranges of the size of migration flows in 2021 and weights of plausibility they attach to them. The ranges were then used as parameters in the forecasting model.

It should be stressed, that the uncertainty of the final forecasts combines the uncertainty embedded in the historical data, uncertainty of the experts about future migration, as well as the uncertainty about possible outcomes of the 2014 independence referendum and its impact on migration.

At the top level of the modelling process, two scenarios were assumed: (a) Scotland does not gain independence, and (b) Scotland gains independence. Weights for these scenarios were obtained in the expert survey, as well as from various opinion polls carried out recently. Further, for the independence scenario, four different, equally weighted, paths that migration flows may follow were assumed: (i) gradual change from the current level to the level envisaged by the experts, (ii) a sudden change to expected levels in 2016 (the year of actual gaining of independence,

according to the Scottish Government White Paper on *Scotland's Future*), (iii) maintaining the level until 2016, followed by a gradual change towards the expected 2021 levels, and (iv) gradual change right from the referendum year (2014).

b) Results

The averaged forecasts for the four directions of flows are presented in figure 1. The uncertainty of forecasts represents weighted scenarios for both Scotland remaining in the UK, as well as gaining independence.

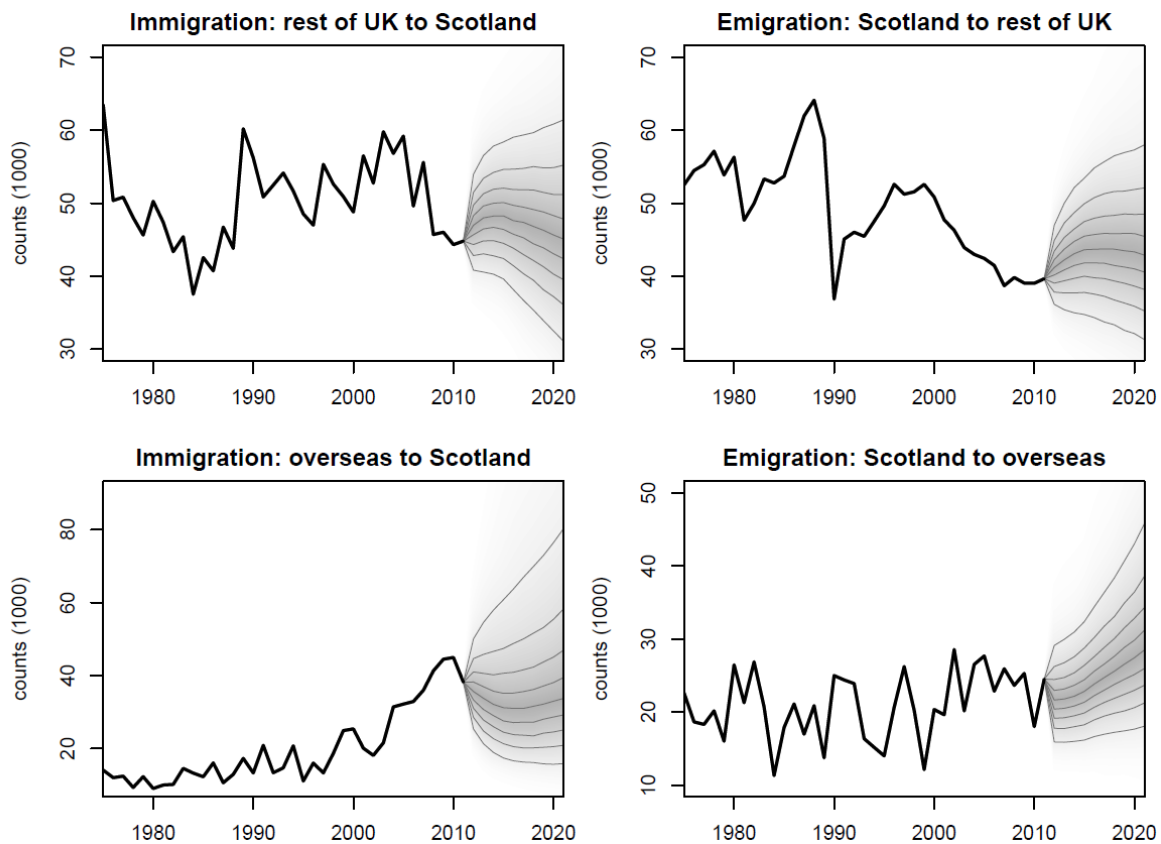
For immigration from the rest of the UK, the results suggest that it will likely remain at similar levels as observed in the past. The uncertainty of the forecasts suggests that immigration is more likely to decrease than increase, which is even more likely under the independence scenario.

As far as emigration from Scotland to the rest of the UK is concerned, it is expected that it will remain at levels similar to those observed in the 1990s and 2000s, with a tendency to increase. It is also expected that the outcome of the independence referendum will have hardly any impact on the level of this direction of flows.

Immigration flows to Scotland from the rest of the world are characterised by substantial uncertainty. Future immigration is likely to remain at similar levels to those observed in the 2000s. However, there is a slight possibility of large inflows. Further, immigration from overseas does not seem to be affected by the referendum outcome. It may also be the case, that the effect of the referendum is blurred due to the general high unpredictability of this direction of flows.

For emigration flows from Scotland to the rest of the world, again, the referendum outcome is not expected to be a major driver of mobility. It is forecasted, though, that emigration flows will increase towards the horizon of 2021, compared to the historically observed levels.

Figure 1 – Averaged forecasts for migration in and out of Scotland, 1975 to 2011 (solid line) and forecasts 2012-2021 (grey), in thousands. Grey lines in the forecasts represent deciles (10-percent probability bands) of the uncertainty of predictions; shades of grey represent plausibility of a given migration path to fall into a given range – the lighter the colour, the less plausible a given path is.



Discussion and policy implications

The predictions of Scottish migration which are presented here are based on the results of the forecasting exercise, which takes into account available historical data, expert views, and uncertainty about the outcome of the referendum on independence. This analysis reveals large uncertainty about both internal and international migration in Scotland. Generally, internal migration is expected to remain at similar levels as those observed in the past two decades. Independent Scotland may attract more migrants from overseas, but the inflow will likely be balanced by an increase in emigration.

Since the Scottish government, in its White Paper on *Scotland's Future*, has identified immigration as one of the key drivers of population and economic growth, these considerations are clearly important for decision making surrounding migration policy.

If constitutional change allows the Scottish government to set up and implement its own migration policy, it is expected to follow a less restrictive approach to immigration than the current UK policy.

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