



COMMENTARY

Who Counts as a Migrant in Scotland?

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www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

In the Migration Observatory's recent analysis of public opinion about immigration in Scotland, one intriguing finding was that about one person in ten in Scotland said that when they think about immigrants, one group they normally have in mind is British citizens arriving from England.

This finding highlights two fundamental questions that lie at the heart of the Scottish independence debate and its implications for migration. Firstly, what makes someone Scottish? And secondly, what makes someone a migrant? These also beg further questions: who actually counts as a migrant in Scotland? And will that change if Scotland votes for independence?

What makes someone Scottish?

This question has many answers. Normally we might think of national identity as something that comes with citizenship. Perhaps the simplest answer to the question of what makes someone British is 'having British citizenship'. But this cannot be applied to Scotland as long as it remains part of the UK. Current law does not provide for Scottish citizenship. Rather, people in Scotland have access to British citizenship on the same terms as people in the rest of the UK, where eligibility is conferred either by birth or through various provisions for naturalisation. British citizenship confers rights of residence in any part of the UK without fear of deportation and political rights – such as the right to vote in national elections – on the citizen. (See the Migration Observatory policy primer "Citizenship – What Is It and Why Does It Matter?")

But aside from legal status there are many other factors that could be invoked by someone wishing to define themselves as Scottish: Scottish birth, residence in Scotland, Scottish origin or marriage to a Scot are all factors that could be used to claim 'Scottishness', and under current proposals from the Scottish government all of these would potentially qualify someone for Scottish citizenship.

But 'Scottishness' is, at this stage, still a somewhat fluid concept. Both the Scottish census and the England and Wales census allow respondents to self-identify as 'Scottish' on their own terms, without any official qualifications in terms of heritage, family, birth or residence. Survey research in the run-up to independence has shown that many people identify themselves as both Scottish and British.

The right to vote in the Scottish Independence referendum includes EU citizens resident in Scotland and some commonwealth citizens resident in Scotland too. This may also be seen to confer a certain 'Scottishness' on those who are granted it, as voting rights are often strongly associated with citizenship.

So, the qualifications for being defined as 'Scottish' – particularly in the absence of the simple definition based in citizenship – are complex and can be defined in many ways.

What makes someone in Scotland a migrant?

Understanding what, precisely, is meant by the term 'migrant' is also very challenging, even without the added complication of an independence referendum. The Migration Observatory's "Who Counts as a Migrant?" briefing highlights the fact that there is no universally agreed definition of a migrant. For example, an international migrant can be defined as someone who was born in a different country from their country of residence, a person who is a foreign citizen, as someone who moves permanently from one country to another, or someone who moves temporarily.

In official statistics on immigration, emigration and net migration, the UK government uses the UN definition of somebody who moves from his or her country of residence to live in another country for at least one year.

But this issue is complicated by Scotland's current dual status as both a 'country' or 'nation' in its own right, and as a part of the state of the United Kingdom. Independence would formalise the border between Scotland and England, but a border does already exist between these two countries.

Even with this existing border, a person who moves from England to Scotland, or vice versa, despite travelling between two areas that are recognized as 'nations' is still not an international migrant in migration statistics. Currently, despite devolution, Scottish people moving to or living elsewhere in the UK are considered, legally at least, to be internal migrants, not international migrants – as are English, Welsh or Northern Irish people living in Scotland.

If Scotland were to vote for independence, many such individuals by default could become international migrants, at least according to some definitions. Those born in Scotland but living in England (or vice versa), would become international migrants by the 'country-of-birth' definition – though it should also be noted that by the 'country-of-citizenship' definition this would not necessarily be the case.

Implications of Scottish independence on migration statistics and impact studies

A vote for independence would therefore suddenly change the number and characteristics of the foreign-born populations of both Scotland and the remaining UK, with significant implications for studies that use migration data in this way.

The 'foreign-born' population of Scotland would increase by the number of non Scottish-born British people resident in Scotland, and the 'foreign-born' population of the remainder of the UK would increase by the number of Scottish-born people resident there.

As Table 1 shows, from a statistical point of view this would potentially mean that, in the event of a vote for independence, Scotland's foreign-born population would increase to about 17% of its total population from its current level of about 7% – to account for approximately 514,000 people born in England, Wales or Northern Ireland resident in Scotland (see our Scotland: Census profile).

Meanwhile England and Wales would see the migrant share of its population increase by about 733,000 (the number of Scottish-born people living in England and Wales in 2011) from 7.5million (13% of the total population) to 8.2 million (14.7% of the total population) to account for Scottish-born people living there.

Table 1

	Scotland	England & Wales
Total resident population 2011	5,295,403	56,075,912
Foreign-born population 2011	369,284	7,505,010
Scottish-born population 2011	4,411,884	733,218
Non-Scottish UK-born population	513,522*	47,830,470*
Foreign-born share of the population 2011	7%	13%
Hypothetical foreign-born population after Scottish independence (includes Scottish born in England and Wales and vice versa)	882,806	8,238,228
Hypothetical foreign-born share of the population after Scottish independence (as above)	17%	14.7%

Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS and Scotland Census 2011, NRS.

Note:*Excludes UK part not specified, as well as Great Britain part not specified for England and Wales.

These changes would have reverberations for future studies of the impacts, economic and otherwise, of migrant populations on Scotland and on the UK. Each new nation would have a significant portion of its foreign-born population made up of residents that would have previously been considered 'native-born', and would share many characteristics with the native-born population.

Conclusions

These changes would all be the result of a reclassification of existing residents in both Scotland and the remaining nations of the UK, rather than as a result of any new movement of people. The dual identity of Scotland as a nation in its own right and as a part of the United Kingdom blurs the lines between international and internal migrants, and while a vote for independence may clear this up in some respects, it seems likely that it will create a new set of statistical complications.

Fundamentally, what this highlights is that definitions of an international migrant is arbitrary in important ways. It is dependent on the location and formality of an international border, and while borders may seem fixed most of the time they are, in historical perspective, vulnerable to changes and contestation.

If Scotland were to vote for independence, sudden and rather dramatic changes to the numbers and characteristics of foreign-born populations in both Scotland and the UK would occur without any of the actual border-crossings normally associated with the terms 'immigration' and 'emigration'. Aside from the oddity of reclassifying as migrants people who have not moved, this would create important discontinuities in analyses of the size, characteristics, and impacts of migrant populations in Scotland and the UK.

Related Material

- Migration Observatory report – Immigration and Independence: Public Opinion on Immigration in Scotland in the Context of the Referendum Debate www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/scottish-public-opinion
- Migration Observatory policy primer – Citizenship: What Is It and Why Does It Matter? www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/policy-primers/citizenship-what-it-and-why-does-it-matter
- What Scotland Thinks – Comment and Analysis blog <http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/>
- Yes Scotland – Citizenship Q&A www.yesscotland.net/answers/who-will-be-eligible-scottish-citizenship-independence-and-future
- About My Vote – Guide to Voting www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/the_independence_referendum/guide_to_voting.aspx
- Migration Observatory briefing – Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/who-counts-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences
- Migration Observatory briefing – Scotland: Census profile www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/scotland-census-profile



The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

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