

## Population turnover and area deprivation

**This study draws on detailed analysis of flows of population for neighbourhoods in England and Scotland, based on 2001 Census data. It examines whether deprived neighbourhoods have less stable populations, whether they are poorly connected to the wider housing market through movements of people in and out, and whether they are losing better qualified individuals through net movement out of the area. The study, by Nick Bailey and Mark Livingston at the University of Glasgow, challenges several conventional wisdoms about deprived areas. The study found that:**

- Deprived areas were not inherently unstable places. They did not have markedly higher population turnover than non-deprived areas.
- Neighbourhood demographics, not neighbourhood deprivation, determined population turnover. The highest turnover was in areas with concentrations of young adults (aged 19–29) and households with very young children (aged 0–4). Once differences in the composition of population were taken into account, deprived areas had only slightly higher turnover than the average.
- Deprived areas appeared well connected to the wider housing market in general. Around half of all their incoming or outgoing population came from or went to non-deprived areas. In city regions with a higher concentration of deprived areas, however, the proportion of people moving to or from non-deprived areas was much lower.
- Deprived areas saw a net loss of better qualified individuals through movement away, but the scale of that loss was small on average. There was only weak evidence to support the contention that ‘those who get on, get out’.
- Deprived areas saw a net inwards movement of the 19–29 age group, but a net outwards movement of all other age groups, especially 30–44 and those under 18.
- There was little evidence for any thresholds beyond which increasing deprivation was accompanied by more rapid increases in instability, disconnection from non-deprived neighbourhoods, or decline in the area. Population turnover increased more sharply for the most deprived 2 or 4 per cent of areas, but the scale of this effect was still small.



## Background

Using data from the 2001 Census, this study looked at inward and outward flows of population for small areas or neighbourhoods in England and Scotland. The average population of these areas was 1,500 and 750 respectively.

The Census provides a unique opportunity to study these population dynamics, as it captures information on all people who moved in the year before the Census. It therefore provides data on inward and outward movement of population and hence net flows of people for every neighbourhood in the country. The study examined three dimensions in particular:

- **area stability** – measured for all areas through gross turnover of population (the number of people moving in and out each year);
- **area connection** – measured for deprived areas by the proportion of people who came from or went to non-deprived areas;
- **area change** – measured for all areas through the impact of net flows of population on the social mix of an area (whether these flows increased or decreased the proportion of the population with low levels of qualifications).

## Area stability

High turnover of population is not necessarily a problem for a neighbourhood. For deprived areas, however, it is usually seen as such. This is primarily because high turnover is associated with disruption of social ties or community networks, and hence with the risk of a loss of informal social control. Some people have come to see population turnover as almost a defining feature of deprived areas. The reasoning is that the nature of the neighbourhoods – the neighbourhood context – makes people more likely to leave. In turn, this is seen as fuelling the cycle of decline.

This study shows that gross turnover was only slightly higher in the most deprived areas than the average. In England, gross turnover averaged 23 per cent in the most deprived decile compared with 21 per cent overall. In Scotland, there was no significant difference by deprivation. Looking at individual neighbourhoods rather than averages, there was enormous variation in levels of population turnover among neighbourhoods with the same level of deprivation. The social composition or mix of people living in an area had the greatest influence on gross population turnover. In particular, neighbourhoods with high proportions of young adults (19–29) and very young children (0–4) were most likely to have high turnover. Once differences in composition

were taken into account, the level of deprivation had only a very modest impact on turnover. Demographics, not deprivation, drove population turnover.

There was some evidence that turnover levels rose more rapidly for the most deprived 2 or 4 per cent of neighbourhoods. Even here, the effect of neighbourhood context remained small in relation to factors connected to the composition of the population. The relationship between population turnover and deprivation varied among regions within England. In the North, the Midlands and the South outside London, the highest turnover was found in the most deprived neighbourhoods. In London, the highest turnover was found in the more affluent neighbourhoods.

## Area connection

Part of the problem that deprived individuals and areas are seen as suffering from is social isolation, leading to difficulties of access to information (on employment opportunities for example). Isolation may also be a factor behind the tendency for deprived areas to become stigmatised. In this study, the connections between areas provided by population flows were examined from this perspective.

On average, areas in the most deprived decile had more self-contained flows of population. Of those people who started from a deprived area in England, 44 per cent moved to the same or another deprived area. Of those who moved to a deprived area in England, 47 per cent came from a deprived area. In Scotland, the figures were 48 and 53 per cent respectively. These figures were higher than for any other decile.

At the same time, these figures also show that over half of all movers in deprived areas came from or went to a non-deprived area. With an average of 12 per cent of the population of deprived areas moving in a year, this means that around 6 per cent of the population of deprived areas changed in that time. In this sense, deprived areas did not appear isolated – they were a functioning part of the housing system.

In city regions with high concentrations of deprivation, a much higher proportion of moves occurred between deprived areas. In Liverpool city region, 35 per cent of the neighbourhoods are categorised as deprived (compared with 10 per cent nationally). Here, 62 per cent of moves for deprived areas were from one deprived area to another (compared with 46 per cent nationally). This is likely to have significant impacts on the context for local regeneration programmes.

## Area change

A challenge for area-based initiatives is that deprived areas have a continually changing population because of inward and outward movement of people. In particular, there is an argument that many initiatives fail to reduce the concentration of deprivation in an area because 'those who get on, get out'. As those who move away tend to be replaced by people with higher levels of need, the composition of the area remains the same. In other words, population flows act to continually reinforce spatial segregation.

For each neighbourhood, the study measured how net migration flows changed the proportion of people with lower educational attainment. Educational attainment was chosen primarily because of its strong correlations with income, employment status and deprivation, but also because it is an individual characteristic which changes relatively slowly.

The analyses showed that net migration did tend to reinforce segregation, but the overall scale of this was small. For the most deprived decile of areas in England, net flows of population in the year leading up to the Census effectively raised the proportion of people with lower qualifications by 0.11 per cent (from an initial level of 72 per cent). On average, net population flows reduced the proportion with lower qualifications nationally by 0.01 per cent (through inwards movement from the rest of the UK). So the gap between the most deprived decile and the average grew by 0.12 per cent.

To put this into context, the effect of population movement would have been entirely offset if 1.2 residents in deprived areas (per thousand population) had raised their educational attainment from the lower to the higher-level qualifications group. Alternatively, it would have been entirely offset if deprived areas had managed to attract 1.7 more residents with higher educational qualifications (per thousand population).

Deprived areas also saw a net inwards movement of the 19–29 age group and a net outwards movement of all other age groups, especially 30–44 and those under 18. This suggests that deprived areas play a particular role as a first or early home for many young adults, who will spend only a short period of time there.

## Variations among deprived neighbourhoods

Use of the term 'deprived area' can be problematic because it may encourage people to think of such areas as similar to each other, and as different from 'non-deprived areas'. This research has challenged that image. First, it has stressed the differences among deprived areas. Deprived areas varied enormously in terms of their stability, for example, reflecting differences in social composition. Their dynamics of population flows also varied by level of deprivation; the most deprived areas had higher turnover and lower rates of connection between areas, for example.

Second, the analyses did not show evidence of a distinct threshold level of deprivation beyond which the dynamics of population flow suddenly changed. Turnover rose more sharply for the most deprived two or four per cent of neighbourhoods, but rates of area connection and change declined quite steadily as deprivation rose. Looking at migration flows, the stress was on the similarities or continuities between deprived and non-deprived areas rather than the differences.

## Variations between regions, city regions and local authorities

Comparing the North of England to the South, deprived areas tended to be more stable and to have lower rates of connection between areas through population flow. They were also more likely to see population loss and rising deprivation as a result of net movement flows.

Within each region, there were further differences between city regions. In the North, deprived neighbourhoods in Leeds and Manchester city regions had higher connection rates through movement between areas, and more of them had their population growing and deprivation falling through population turnover. Similar areas in Bradford, Hull, Liverpool and Middlesbrough city regions tended to have lower area connection rates, less population growth and deprivation rising through movement of population.

## Conclusion

The researchers conclude that the findings from this study have a number of important implications for policy on neighbourhood areas. The analyses showed very clearly that the most important factor driving population turnover was the demographic composition of a neighbourhood. Policies aiming to promote mixed, balanced or sustainable communities may need to pay greater attention to ensuring that neighbourhoods contain a reasonable range of population ages and household types, and hence appropriate sizes and types of housing. The findings highlight a potential risk that policies designed to promote income or tenure mix may inadvertently exacerbate problems of population turnover if they target single people or couples through the development of starter homes.

Policy could do more to recognise the diversity of problems that deprived areas face. The context for regeneration appears more challenging in the most deprived areas and in those areas located in authorities with high concentrations of deprivation. Central and local government's allocation of resources may need to give greater recognition to this, through more differentiated policy programmes.

The study results support the idea that area-based initiatives can have a role in tackling concentrations of deprivation, as these areas do not appear to be the 'leaky buckets' that some have feared. On the other hand, this raises new questions about why the impacts of area-based approaches have not been greater in the past.

The complex patterns of population dynamics in different places reinforce the importance of local analysis of the nature of the challenges that each neighbourhood faces, and locally developed strategies to address these challenges. This suggests that the emphasis placed on strategic regeneration partnerships in both English and Scottish policy frameworks is an appropriate one, provided that they have the necessary analytical capabilities.

## About the project

The study, by Nick Bailey and Mark Livingston of the Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice at the University of Glasgow, was part of a programme of work funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the 2001 Census. The analysis was based on 'neighbourhoods' defined in terms of Super Output Areas (England) and Datazones (Scotland). The study took census data from: the Census Area Statistics, including specially commissioned tables on migration; the Sample of Anonymised Records, including the Controlled Access Microdata Sample; and the Origin-Destination Matrices for migration. It also drew on data from the 2004 Indices of Multiple Deprivation for England and Scotland as well as other sources.

The study focused on the population living in private households at the 2001 Census. It excluded those living in communal establishments at that time, since their locational decisions were unlikely to be based on neighbourhood factors in most cases. It also excluded people who were living outside the UK one year before the Census. The report draws on Census data. This is Crown copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Queen's Printer for Scotland.

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## For further information

The full report, **Population turnover and area deprivation** by Nick Bailey and Mark Livingston, is published for the Foundation by The Policy Press (ISBN 978 1 84742 975 0, price £12.95). You can also download the report free from [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk). The migration data for this study is available to download from the website of the Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice at [www.scrsj.ac.uk](http://www.scrsj.ac.uk).

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