

Population movement and the socio-economic complexion of communities

Recent claims of an ‘urban renaissance’ have suggested that cities are magnets for younger and better-qualified people who can sustain urban economic growth and community development. This study by Newcastle University analysed population movement over the year prior to the 2001 Census to discover whether 27 large British cities attracted more people from elsewhere in the country than they lost. It also looked in more detail at population movement within three city regions. The study found that:

- Almost half the 27 cities gained population as a result of moves within the UK in the 2000-01 period, but cities that lost population included all of the largest half-dozen British cities and many of the smaller cities outside England’s southern and eastern regions.
- London saw many more higher managerial and professional people arriving than leaving, but most cities were less successful at attracting and/or keeping this key group than movers in general.
- Nine of the 27 cities saw a net gain of people through longer-distance exchanges of movers, and ten received more people from the rest of their city regions than they lost.
- Cities making the strongest gains from longer-distance movement were characterised by local job growth, more graduates, higher life expectancy and lower religious adherence.
- Cities suffering the highest losses to the rest of their own city region tended to be those that were also least attractive for longer-distance moves. Such population loss could threaten these cities’ tax base, and housing market weakness become a risk. Population turnover was generally greater in the stronger cities.
- Students moving longer distances from home to university boosted 22 of the 27 cities’ populations. Most provincial cities appeared to lose out from the moves of recent graduates, weakening their growth potential.
- A more detailed analysis of three city regions (London, Birmingham and Bristol) showed that population movement was marginally reinforcing the social differences among localities.
- The researchers conclude that the continuing focus of UK population movement patterns on London – especially for younger and highly skilled people – remains a challenge for policy, adding to the labour-market and housing-market pressures there while denuding other parts of the country of talent.



Background

As in other advanced countries, British cities declined in the latter twentieth century, but an 'urban renaissance' is now widely claimed. De-industrialisation has run its course, while there is growth in finance and other knowledge-based industries that favour cities. Regeneration schemes and image promotion have contributed to shifts in attitudes to cities as places to live. Yet the evidence for this recovery is unclear. Some cities still seem to be struggling, and many are losing residents to surrounding areas or further afield. If this exodus is mainly of higher-income people, then cities' human and social capital is threatened. At the same time, the gulf between rich and poor areas in the residential kaleidoscope of cities may be widening.

This study used the most detailed Census information ever on population movement to assess the experience of larger cities in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The focus was on 27 of Britain's largest urban areas, together with their wider city regions (see 'About the project'). The analyses covered people who moved between each city and the rest of the UK in the 12 months before the Census. Movers were categorised by age and by socio-economic status.

Gainers and losers

Almost half the 27 cities gained population as a result of moves within the UK in the 2000-01 period, some at rates which would amount to a 5 per cent growth if continued for a decade. However, none of the largest half-dozen cities grew in this way, nor did many smaller cities outside the south and east of the country. The picture was thus rather mixed, though it represented an overall improvement for urban Britain compared with that shown by previous Censuses.

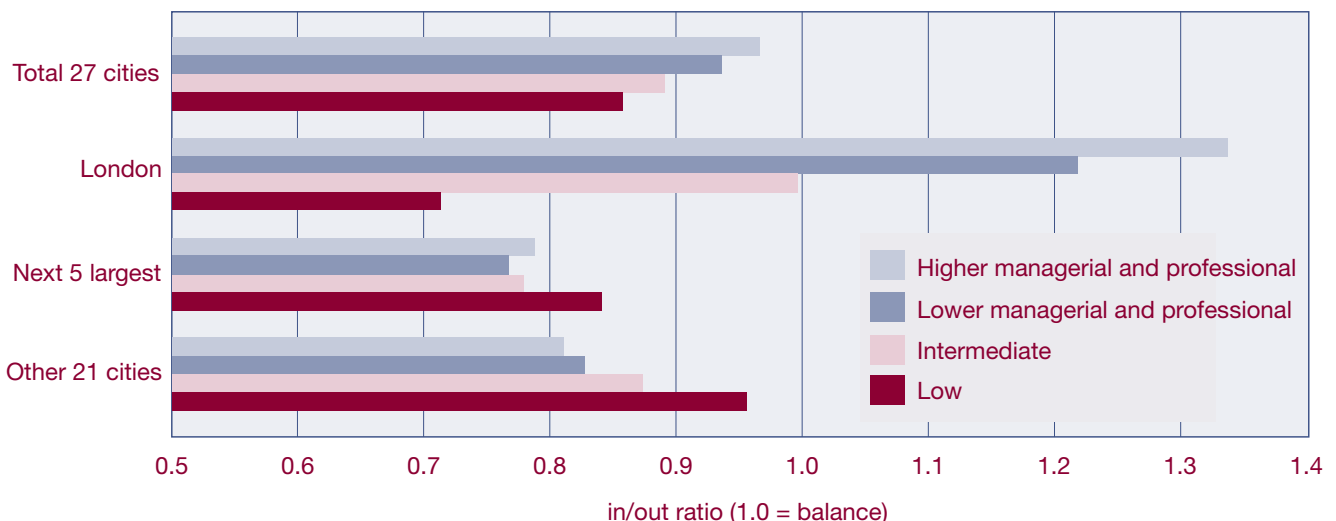
London lost more people than any other city through these moves of people within the UK. The capital accounted for most of the 63,000 people lost through population movement by the 27 cities in aggregate. The wider picture (provided by non-Census data) was of this exodus from London accelerating. However, this was more than offset by a surplus of births over deaths and by gains through people moving in from abroad.

Occupational groupings of movers

The 'human capital' that cities gained or lost through population movement varied according to the skills levels of the people concerned. Research on previous Censuses had found that cities experienced the highest loss of people for the more skilled groups and the lowest for lower skilled groups. The picture in 2000-01 was more encouraging for the 27 cities. As a whole, the highest ratio of inwards to outwards movement was for the higher managerial and professional group, with a progressive decrease in this ratio according to skill level (see Figure 1). Taken together, the 27 cities were better at attracting and retaining the higher echelons of their workforce.

This was not the case, however, for the majority of the 27 cities when taken separately. London had a very high inwards to outwards ratio for the higher managerial and professional group and a progressive drop in ratios downwards through the skill levels. However, the other two categories of cities shown in Figure 1 ('other large' and 'others') had inwards to outwards ratios for the higher managerial and professional group of only around 0.8 (i.e. eight people arriving for every ten leaving). They also had more success in attracting and retaining the lowest skilled people rather than the highest.

Figure 1: Ratios of inwards to outwards movers, by broad occupational group, for 27 cities grouped by urban area population size



As for the cities individually, only six of the other 26 paralleled London in having a higher inwards to outwards ratio for the higher managerial and professional group than for all other skill groups. However, the gulf between London and all other cities in the net inflow of highly skilled people was huge. At the other extreme, seven cities had inwards to outwards ratios for the higher managerial and professional group that showed that fewer than two highly skilled people moved in for every three who left.

Longer-distance exchanges of movers

Longer-distance exchanges of people with the rest of the UK beyond their city region accounted for three-quarters of the gross inward and outward population flows of the 27 cities in the 12 months prior to the 2001 Census. To the extent that this involved people moving beyond the cities' main commuting zones, these moves were crucial to the volume and quality of human capital that the cities could draw on.

Even when including the net movement of full-time students, only one-third of the 27 cities recorded a net inflow from beyond their city regions. In terms of movers classified as higher managerial and professional at the Census, just four cities had a positive balance. Most of the cities seemed most attractive to the low-skill category, rather than the higher managerial and professional group, who were the most mobile element of the labour force.

The cities most likely to gain longer-distance movers shared certain characteristics. They had strong labour markets, with local job growth and more graduates than average, for example. They also exhibited certain quality of life and cultural features, such as higher life expectancy, less religious adherence and fewer black and minority ethnic residents. Some of these factors are recognised driving forces for moving, while others are a reflection of those who 'get up and go' to more flourishing cities.

The movement of recent university graduates played a part in these patterns, but exactly how much cannot be gauged because they were not identifiable in the Census. London's high inwards to outwards ratio for the higher managerial and professional group will have stemmed partly from being a magnet for other cities' graduates seeking their first career-level job. Most other cities draw in students, but many would gain greater benefits if they could retain more of their universities' graduates.

Migration between cities and the rest of their city region

Although shorter-distance movement did not necessarily alter the human capital available to a city, it did – along with longer-distance moves – affect a city's population size and socio-economic profile. In the pre-Census year, 17 of the 27 cities showed decentralisation through more people moving out of the city to its surrounding region than moving into the city.

Seven cities registered net gains of higher managerial and professional people from their city region; these were mainly smaller cities like Norwich, Northampton and Portsmouth. Some smaller cities, however, saw strong local decentralisation of this high-skill group, including Coventry, Middlesbrough and Stoke, as did Birmingham and Nottingham among the larger cities. London also recorded more of this group moving out to the rest of its city region than moving into it, in stark contrast to its large gain from the rest of the UK.

Net outwards movement of people to the surrounding city region was most problematic for cities which were also losing people to the rest of the UK. Without substantial growth, for example through people moving in from abroad, the tax base of these cities is threatened by such population losses, and housing market failure becomes a real risk.

Population movement in three case study city regions

The evidence from London, Birmingham and Bristol was that movement of people within these city regions was contributing to a more general process of socio-economic polarisation. To generalise, those parts of a city region with more high-skill residents tended to see higher net inwards movement of high-skilled people than of other groups. There was a similar reinforcing pattern for localities with more lower-skill residents. Though this tendency was relatively weak, this single year's pattern – if repeated many times over – would produce a substantial widening in differences between localities.

In searching for the driving forces for these patterns of movement within the city regions, further analysis was more successful for London than for the other two city regions. In London, the localities most attractive to the higher managerial and professional group were characterised by having families as residents, high household income, a rising employment rate, labour force up-skilling, low religious affiliation, a larger proportion of unoccupied dwellings, a faster-growing minority ethnic share of the population and more open space. This group largely shunned areas with students, as did people

moving within the city region in general; such localities were among the main reception areas for people moving in from the rest of the UK and overseas.

Conclusion

Compared with the latter twentieth century, the balance sheet of inward and outward movers has improved for Britain's larger cities. Even so, the 2001 Census showed many of these cities continuing to lose people – and more skilled and wealthy people in particular – through their exchanges of movers with the rest of the UK. This suggests that policies designed to reinforce the economic transformation of cities and improve their attractiveness as places to live may need to be pursued even more imaginatively and energetically.

This research was restricted to one year's flows of movers; issues concerning the longer-term role of population movement merit investigation. The study also identified ways in which the Census could be made more useful for this type of analysis of population movement. In particular, much more definitive results on the impact of population flows could be obtained if the Census included a question on economic position one year ago, or even simply one on whether a person was a full-time student then.

About the project

This study was one of several supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2001 Census Programme. It was undertaken at Newcastle University's Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) by Tony Champion and Mike Coombes, with Colin Wymer and Simon Raybould helping with data preparation, analysis and presentation. The research was based almost entirely on data from the 2001 Census. This data is Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

The occupation-based migration data analysed was collapsed into four skill types: higher managerial and professional, lower managerial and professional, intermediate, and low. This data is provided for 'moving group reference persons'; a moving group is one person moving on their own, or two or more people who lived at the same previous address before moving together to share a usual address at the time of the Census.

The 27 cities in the study were selected on the basis of the population size of their built-up areas, and being the centre of a city region (as defined by CURDS). They were: Birmingham, Bradford, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Derby, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Northampton, Norwich, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Preston, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton and Stoke. Each city was defined according to the best fit of local authorities to its primary urban area. The distinction between a city's longer and shorter-distance migration exchanges was made on the basis of whether or not the move crossed the city region boundary.

For further information

The full report, **Migration and socioeconomic change: A 2001 Census analysis of Britain's larger cities** by Tony Champion, Mike Coombes, Simon Raybould and Colin Wymer, is published for the Foundation by The Policy Press (ISBN 978 1 84742 003 9, price £12.95). You can also download the report free from www.jrf.org.uk.

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