

# Yorkshire and Humber's internal migration exchanges

Has the region experienced significant changes in its aggregate migration exchanges with other parts of the country in the twenty-first century? Is the region losing human capital to the south in net terms? Which regions does the region gain most migrants from and lose most migrants to? This article provides answers to these questions by using Office of National Statistics time series data extracted from patient registers held by health authorities.



Whilst international migration has tended to grab the recent news headlines with the influx of workers to many regions in the UK from the Eastern European accession (A8) countries and a steady drip of refugees and asylum seekers, internal migration has received relatively less attention, despite doing far more in many places to change the structure and composition of local populations.

The continued north-south drift of population observed in the latter half of the twentieth century (Stillwell *et al.*, 1992; Champion, 1999), partly resulting from the decline of traditional industrial activities, has led to both reactionary

responses from policy makers in terms of resource provision (particularly housing) in the south, but also increases in funding from central government directed towards northern areas (particularly cities) which has intended to improve socio-economic conditions in these areas and thus reduce some of the exodus to the south.

This article considers internal migration trends for Yorkshire and the Humber in recent years and linkages with other regions in England and Wales are examined at a time when the global economic downturn of recent months is likely to result in a major decline in migration propensities in the future.

## Patient register data

Data on internal migration in the UK are not extensive for inter-censal years, but the Office of National Statistics (ONS) now produces statistics based on comparison of the patient registers from one year to the next held by health authorities across the country. This procedure provides data on migration

flows between local authority districts which are inflated for certain missing values using patient re-registration counts collated from the NHS Central Register (NHSCR).

Are the patient register data robust and reliable? In the past, one of the main drawbacks identified with the NHSCR data was the underrepresentation of certain groups – in particular young males who may put off re-registering with a new doctor after they move home. Comparison of age-specific in-migration and out-migration data from the patient registers and the 2001 Census for a similar time period allows a reliability assessment to be made (Figure 1).

The greatest differences occur in the younger age groups with a difference of around 2,000 individuals estimated migrating into Yorkshire and the Humber in the 16-19 age group – the patient register data estimating fewer flows than might be expected according to the Census.

Whilst there are these small differences, the close correlation between the census and patient register data across most age groups gives confidence that, in other years, propensities and patterns shown by the patient register (especially for older age groups) are likely to be relatively accurate.

## Time series migration trends

So what trends in migration has Yorkshire and the Humber experienced over the last few years? Figure 2 shows the net migration balances between Yorkshire and Humber and the other nine regions in England and Wales between 1999 and 2006. Where the rate is positive, Yorkshire and the Humber has been a net gainer of population from the region in question; where it is negative, it has been a net loser.

In 1999, Yorkshire and the Humber was gaining most migrants from the North East and losing most to the East Midlands. Over the eight year period shown in the graph, both the gains from the North East and the losses to the East Midlands have decreased steadily so that by 2006, the net gain from the North East has been eliminated whilst the loss to the East Midlands is well under half that of the 1999 level.

There are, however, some notable changes in the net balances between the region and London, the South East and East of England. In 1999, Yorkshire and the Humber was a net loser of population to all of these regions, albeit only marginally. By 2002, this had changed to a net gain, and by 2004 a considerable net gain from all three. In fact in 2004 the region was gaining from all regions in the south as well as the North East.

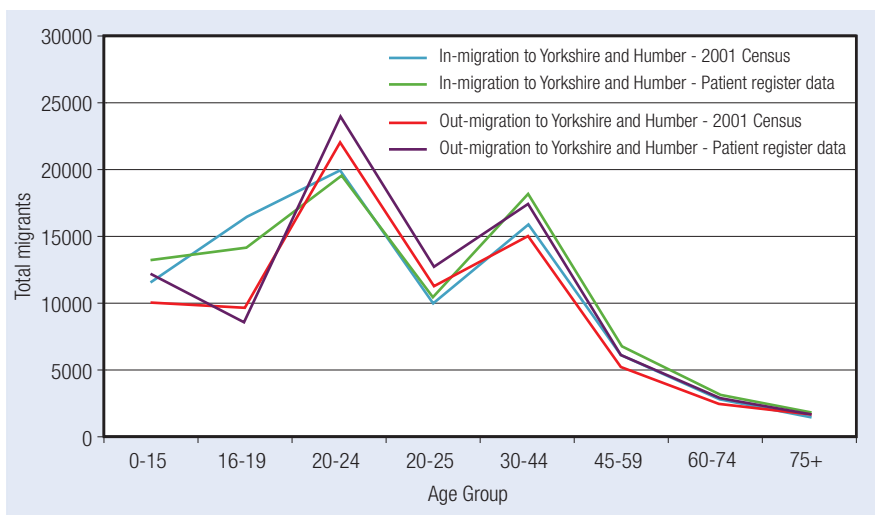
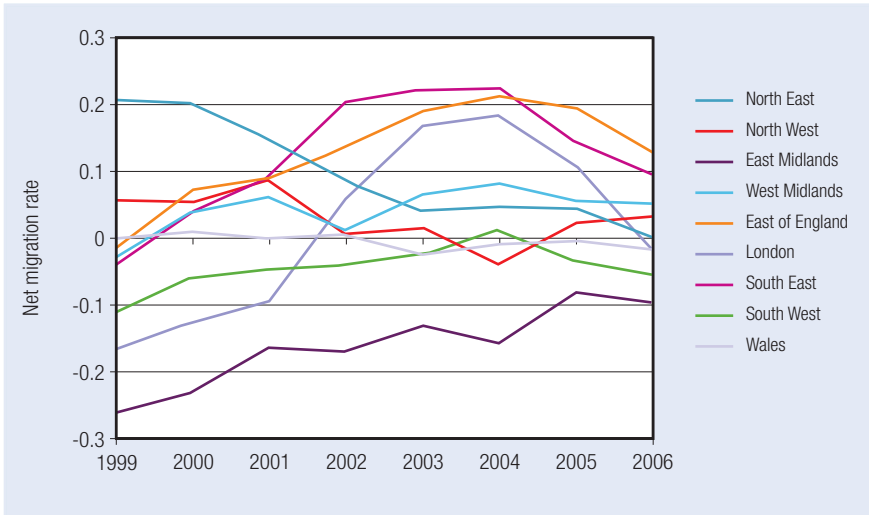


Figure 1. Gross in and out-migration flows from the 2001 Census and patient registers



**Figure 2. Net migration rates between Yorkshire and Humber and other regions in England and Wales, 1999-2006**

After the peak of 2004, this net gain declined virtually across the board, but most noticeably, the net gains from London once again reverted to a net loss by 2006.

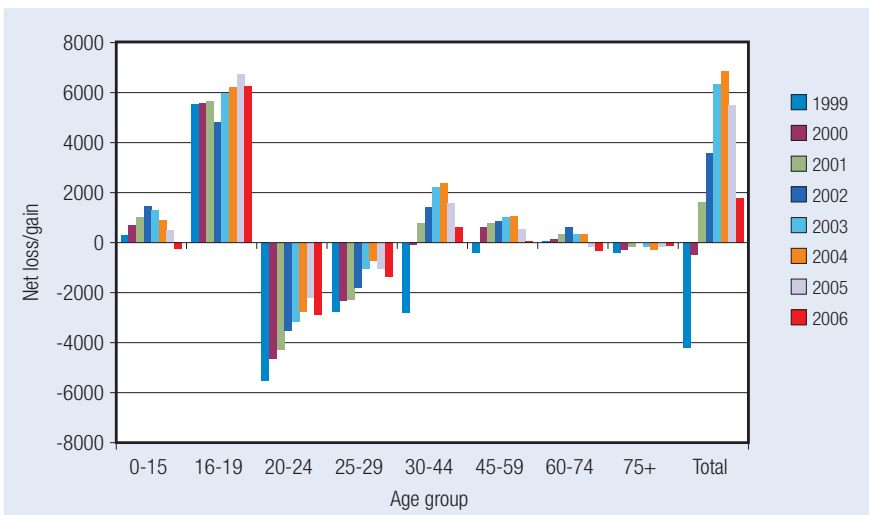
So, since 2001, the region has had a positive net migration balance, attracting more migrants in aggregate than it has been losing, but what are the demographic characteristics of the migrants that have been attracted to the region over this period compared with those that are moving away? Figure 3 throws some light on this by breaking down the total net flows into eight age groups associated with key stages in the life course.

It is clear to see that the largest (and increasing) numbers of in-migrants are found in the 16-19 age group. This is unsurprising considering the number of large higher education institutions based in the region's major cities and the expansion in numbers attending higher education.

The annual gains in the student age group, however, are offset by significant losses in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups. Thus, whilst the region attracts large numbers of students to some of the UK's finest higher education institutions, the bad news is that it fails to retain a large number of these students after they finish their studies.

On the other hand, the good news is that the net losses of young adults in their twenties are gradually declining. Of course, not all of the out-migrants will be students, but a large number will be and any increased retention of young, economically active individuals (students or not), can be viewed positively.

Furthermore, when this reduction of outmigration is set against a backdrop of gradually increasing in-migration in the 16-19 group, it can be speculated that the region is beginning to provide more opportunities for the young and economically active, encouraging fewer of them to move away.



**Figure 3. Yorkshire and Humber net migration losses and gains by age, 1999-2006**

Whilst the region is starting to retain more of its young adult migrants, many are still leaving and so the next question is: where are they going to? Figure 4 gives an overview of net migration for a combined 20-24 and 25-29 age group over the time period.

It is clear to see that London remains the preferred location for young out-migrants. This is no surprise as, for decades, the capital has pulled in young migrants from all regions in the UK with its many tertiary and quaternary sector job opportunities and socio-cultural attractions.

However, the strong pull of the capital appears to have weakened between 2002 and 2005, when there was a sharp drop in the net out-migration balance from Yorkshire and the Humber, although the net rate of loss had increased again by 2006. The South East, East of England and the North West have also been net gainers of 20-29 year olds over this period, although the latter has remained relatively steady, with the two more southern regions following a similar trend to London, albeit at a lower rate over all years.

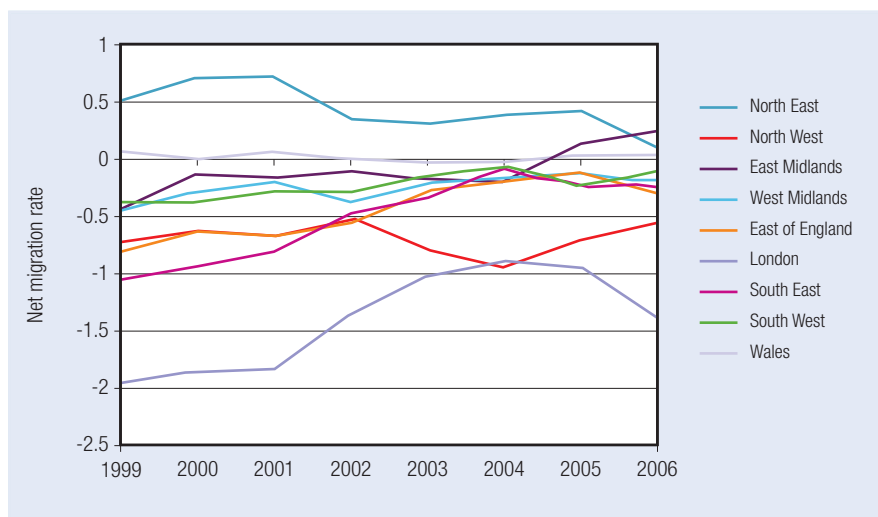
It appears, then, that whilst the north-south drift of population has reversed at the aggregate level, for the younger sections of the population, the south, and London especially, remain a big pull, attracting more migrants from the Yorkshire and Humberside than are drawn in the opposite direction although the rate has decreased from the level it once was in 1999.

But if the region is losing so many migrants in their early twenties but still gaining migrants overall, who, apart from student migrants, is the region attracting to create an overall net gain and where are these migrants coming from? These questions are partially answered by Figure 3, which shows positive balances in the 0-15, 30-44 and 45-59 age groups.

These are the groups that are contributing most to the net gain of population. It is rare for migrants between the ages of 0-15 to move without a parent, and it is common for the parents of children aged 0-15 to fall into the 30-44 age bracket.

Figure 5 shows that from 2001 onwards, the region from which Yorkshire and Humber was gaining most 30-44 year olds (and correspondingly the 0-15 year olds – not shown) is London. We may conjecture that many of these migrants are returnees, coming back to the region after an economically motivated move to the capital at some earlier stage in their careers. These moves may be in order to raise families in a region where housing and the general cost of living are cheaper than in the capital.

Stillwell, J.C.H., Rees, P. and Boden, P. (1992) Internal migration trends: an overview, In Stillwell, J.C.H., Rees, P. and Boden, P. (eds.) *Migration Processes and Patterns Volume 2: Population Redistribution in the United Kingdom*, Belhaven Press, London, pp. 28-55.



**Figure 4. Net migration rates between Yorkshire and Humber and other regions in England and Wales for the 20-29 age group, 1999-2006**

**Conclusions**

This analysis of regional migration flows data derived from patient register data has revealed a number of key trends in migration over the eight years from 1999 to 2006. The region has transferred from one of net loss to one of net gain over this period, but the gains have not been across all age ranges.

Over the period, the region has gained a large and increasing number of migrants in their late teens, the age group that comprises by far the largest number of migrants to the region. In contrast, a significant number of migrants in their twenties leave Yorkshire and Humber for regions in the south, particularly London, but a trend of key importance is the decline since 1999 in the net losses on this age group.

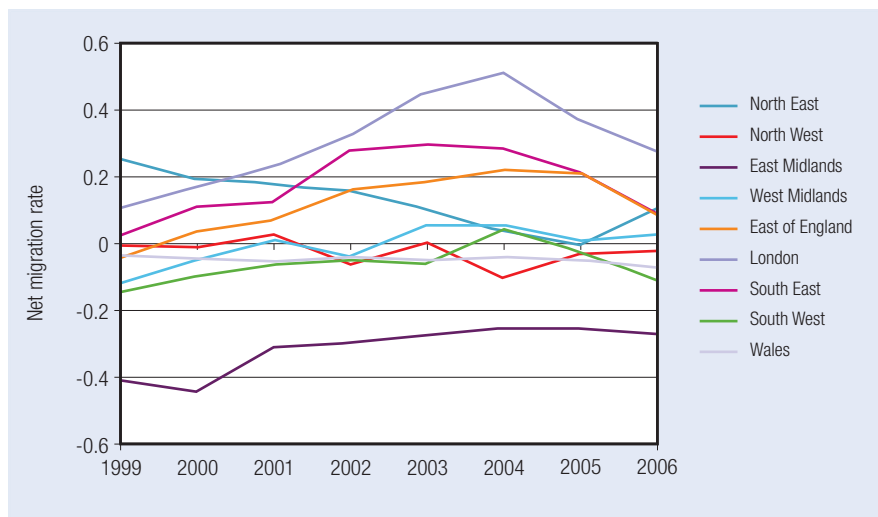
Yorkshire and Humber has seen a rise and fall in the net gains of migrants in family ages over the period, with an

increasing rate of gain from London until 2004, perhaps representing a return migration.

Overall, these migration trends are positive for Yorkshire and Humber; it is continuing to attract students and families whilst managing to retain more of its human capital. It is likely that this reduction in net out-migrants in their twenties is the primary reason for the decline in the region's population turnover rate since 2000, its exchanges in both directions with other regions. We will explore the issue of turnover further in a subsequent paper that will focus on flows taking place between local authority districts in the region since 1999.

**References**

Champion, A.G. (1999) Migration and British cities in the 1990s, *National Institute Economic Review*, 170(1): 60-77.



**Figure 5. Net migration rates between Yorkshire and Humber and other regions in England and Wales for the 30-44 age group, 1999-2006**