



Directions of impact of Scottish independence on migration: A survey of experts

The outcome of the 2014 Scottish referendum on the constitutional future of the United Kingdom (UK) may have noticeable impact on future migration to and from Scotland. This briefing addresses some of the issues that are currently being investigated by the ESRC Centre for Population Change, examining the possible effects of Scottish independence on internal and international migration. In particular, it presents selected results of an expert survey on future migration trends which have been used to inform forecasts of migration into and out of Scotland, especially with regard to their uncertainty.

Key Points

- A majority of experts believe that if Scotland becomes independent, migration from the rest of the United Kingdom will slightly decrease, but flows in the opposite direction will remain quite similar to the current ones.
- An independent Scotland might attract a higher number of international migrants, and also – to a lesser extent – generate a higher number of emigrants.
- If Scotland remains a constituent part of the United Kingdom, which a majority of experts consider to be the most likely scenario, migration trends are not expected to change much.
- There is a considerable variation between experts, which contributes to the uncertainty of forecasts of future migration to and from Scotland.

Introduction

This material complements CPC Briefing Paper 16, “Forecasting migration in Scotland: Potential impact of independence on the future trends”, devoted to forecasting migration into and out of Scotland in the run-up to the 2014 constitutional referendum.

As one key element of the forecast uncertainty is associated with expert opinion, this paper presents the main factors behind the expert views which have been used in forecasting. In particular, it presents selected results of an expert survey, carried out in

Figure 1 – Expert views on the changes in migration from the rest of the UK to Scotland, by group

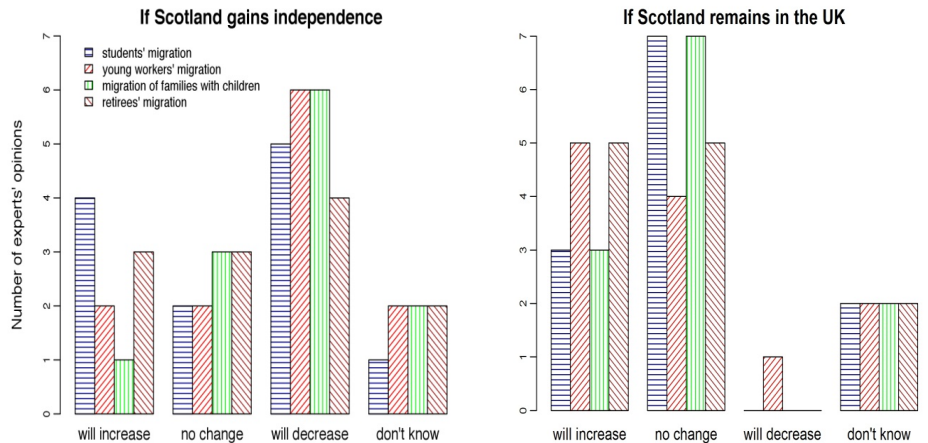
the summer of 2013, which were used alongside quantitative statistical data to aid in forecasting the future of Scottish migration under various constitutional scenarios. Four migration flows related to Scotland are analysed: immigration from and emigration to the rest of the UK, as well as immigration from and emigration to all other countries.

In the survey, 12 selected experts who work closely with population and migration data were asked about a number of key questions, which included a subjective assessment of the probability of Scotland gaining independence following the 2014 referendum, and a suite of questions on the expected direction of change of different components (students, young workers, families with children, retirees) of the four migration streams, with a horizon of 2021. Many migration forecasts use only aggregate migration flows, yet the experts point to the importance of analysing migration in relation to differentiated drivers of mobility. As such, the findings presented here provide insights into some sources of uncertainty of the forecasts of Scottish migration.

Expected changes to Scottish migration flows

a) Expert views on the probability of Scottish independence

The subjective probabilities of independence have been indicated by eleven experts, a majority of whom have indicated a rather small perceived likelihood of full Scottish sovereignty after 2014. The vast majority



of experts thought that the probability of a referendum outcome in favour of independence was smaller than 30 per cent (3 in 10), and only one expert thought the probability was greater than 50 per cent (5 in 10). It is worth stressing that these probabilities are not the same as the predictions of the outcome of the referendum, which are used in the forecasts of Scottish migration, but are included to provide context for answers to the remaining questions.

b) Migration between Scotland and the rest of the UK

According to the results of the expert survey, if Scotland gains independence, the number of migrants from the rest of the UK will – more likely than not – decrease for all four groups: students, young workers, families with children, and retirees. The bimodal distribution for students, as well as qualitative comments provided by the

experts, reflect uncertainty surrounding tuition fees and higher education financing mechanisms. On the contrary, if Scotland remains in the UK, the respective numbers of migrants will likely increase or not change, as shown in figure 1.

In terms of the flows in the opposite direction, as shown in figure 2, there is a general expectation that migration from Scotland to the rest of the UK will largely remain the same, or even slightly decrease for most of the groups, except for young workers, where instead it is expected to increase.

Figure 2 – Expert views on the changes in migration from Scotland to the rest of the UK, by group

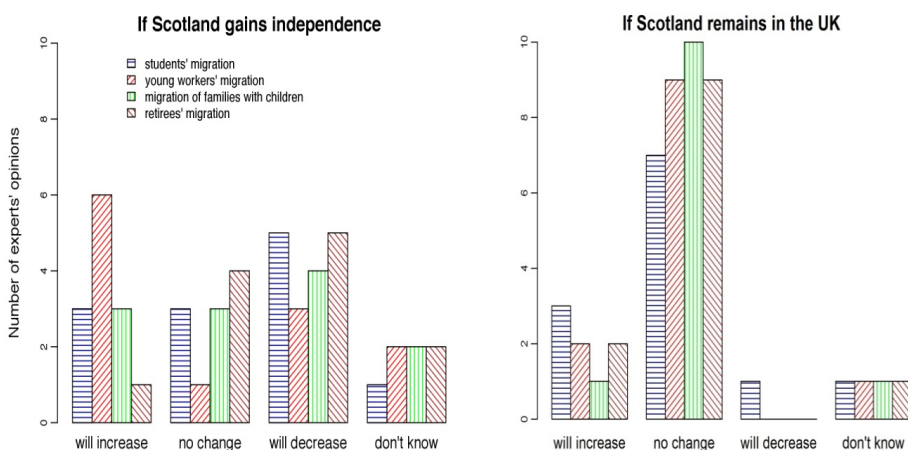


Figure 3 – Expert views on the changes in international immigration to Scotland, by group

If Scotland remains in the UK, a majority of experts believe that the number of migrants from Scotland to the rest of the UK will hardly change.

c) International migration to and from Scotland

In terms of international migration, a majority of experts believe that the number of immigrants to Scotland will increase for most migrant groups, with a slight exception for families with children, as shown in figure 3. The rationale is that an independent Scottish government could enact a less restrictive approach to migration than the current UK policy framework. On the other hand, if Scotland remains in the UK, most experts expect that the number of migrants will remain the same, particularly for young workers, families with children, and retirees.

As presented in figure 4, under the Scottish independence scenario, the majority of experts point to a possible increase in international emigration of students and young workers, with largely no difference for families with children and retirees. On the other hand, emigration from Scotland, if it remains part of the UK, is expected to be similar to what it was before.

Discussion and policy implications

The presented results indicate that the impact of Scottish independence on migration may largely depend on the

group of migrants in question, with the migration of students and young workers being potentially the most sensitive to the constitutional change. These findings are of policy interest given the potentially differing policies towards migration that could emerge between Scotland and the rest of the UK, especially if Scotland is able to shape its own migration policy.

However, not surprisingly, the expert answers also revealed higher uncertainty – and a wider spread of views – under the scenario of Scottish independence.

This expert uncertainty is a crucial component of the forecast errors presented before (CPC Briefing Paper 16), and any political and policy strategies and decisions need to take the forecast uncertainty into account.

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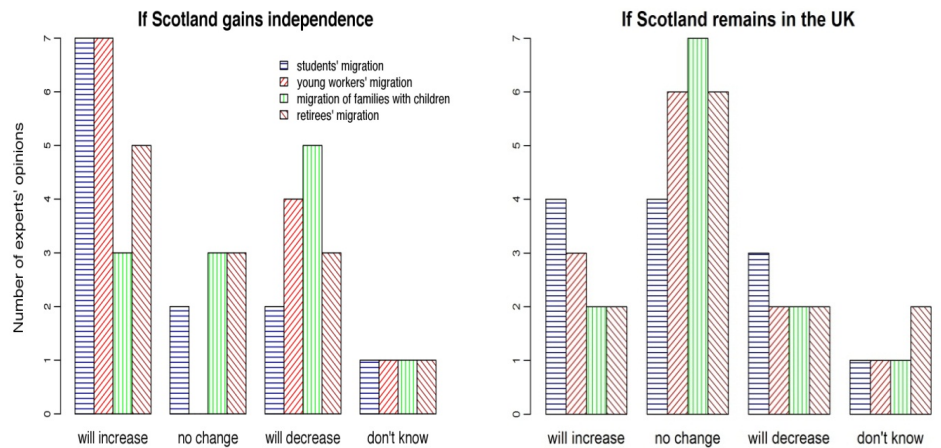
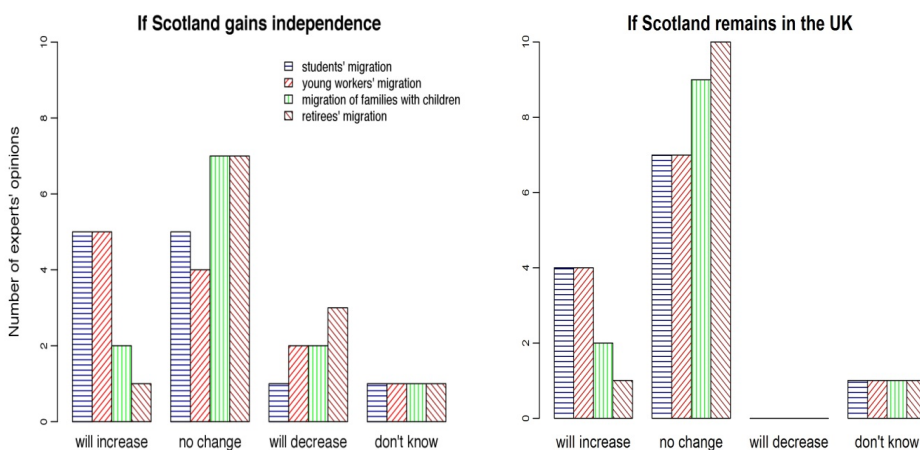


Figure 4 – Expert views on the changes in international emigration from Scotland, by group



Authors

Han Lin Shang
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Jakub Bijak
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Arkadiusz Wiśniowski
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Edited by Becki Dey
(University of Southampton, CPC)

ESRC Centre for Population Change
Building 58, Room 2043
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
University of Southampton
SO17 1BJ

Office: +44(0)2380592579

www.cpc.ac.uk