# Introduction

Internal migration is defined as residential moves between local authorities and regions in England and Wales, as well as moves to or from the rest of the UK (Scotland and Northern Ireland).

Over the last 15 years there has been an increase in the overall (all age) net migration towards predominantly rural areas[[1]](#endnote-1)[[2]](#footnote-1).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish counts of moves between local authorities by age. It excludes moves within a single local authority, as well as international moves into or out of the UK. The statistics are based on a combination of several administrative datasets and represent the best available source of information on internal migration. This dataset was published every year until 2020 when it was discontinued as part consolidating population outputs ahead of the release of the 2021 Census.

However, as the Census 2021 asked participants about their address on Census Day compared to one year ago, it is possible to use this to understand internal migration for the latest possible time period, though there are a few differences and caveats to note:

As the Census is a self-report survey asked of people in their address as at Census Day in the UK, we cannot see where people have moved if they moved out the UK. As such, we can see how many people moved to the area from outside of the UK, but we cannot tell how many people moved from West Sussex to abroad.

Unlike the ONS internal moves dataset, the Census tells us any change in address, even if it occurred within the same local authority. An address change, even local, may be unsettling for some older people.

For both datasets, this is a snapshot of where someone lives one year and again the next. It does not account for the number of times people move within the year.

A benefit of using Census data is that it is possible to see moves at a much smaller geographical level (Middle-layer Super Output Area, MSOA), unlike the ONS internal migration dataset which is only available at local authority level. Local authorities are more difficult to classify as urban/rural as there are many different types of area within them. However, the MSOA data is for all ages rather than those aged 65+ and so it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions.

Irrespective of dataset, the reason for moving, and the context of who will be locally available to provide support for those in need, is unknown. We do not know if someone moves to an area to be closer to family/friends for example.

Finally, the 2021 Census was conducted during a time of unprecedented uncertainty as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic which changed many people’s behaviours and circumstances. It is possible that the movement of people does not reflect the typical pattern of change we might expect in the county. However, it is our best, most up to date, picture of what is happening; and we can make some assumptions that some areas will experience more inflowing older people with care needs than others based on this data. Where possible we have compared to previous years, though it is slightly different to the usual internal migration dataset provided by ONS.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/population-statistics-for-rural-england/d-internal-migration> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Local authorities usually cover vast areas (West Sussex is around 2,000 square kilometres, ranging from 33km2 in Worthing to 786km2 in Chichester. Within these local authorities there will be many different types of neighbourhoods and communities, some of which urban and some very rural. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)