

Revised Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) – Benefits and Implications of the change in methodology in 2010

Background

Following a review of the NIPS in 2008/9 NISRA statisticians have taken over the collection, production and publication of the NIPS tourism statistical series. NIPS tourism statistics are now deemed official statistics as they meet the required criteria.

Differences

There are a number of differences between the old and new NIPS which are listed below;

Sampling frame

The old NIPS used a “quota” based sampling frame which had a number of limitations, namely, interviewer discretion, potential to miss key groups and no way of saying who or how many people have been missed. Every route was set a monthly quota.

The new NIPS applies a systematic random sampling frame, where every 5th person is stopped at allocated shifts. Shifts are set quarterly and are stratified by am/pm and weekend/weekday at each port. This sampling frame is also used in the International Passenger Survey.

Definitions

As part of the review of NIPS NISRA recommended the definitions used in the NIPS follow those as set out the 2008 International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (IRTS2008). The purpose of the IRTS2008 is to strengthen countries methodological and operational foundations of tourism statistics in an integrated manner including enhancement of their coherence with other official statistics and further development of tourism satellite accounts. IRTS provides the comprehensive methodological framework for collection and compilation of tourism statistics in all countries irrespective of level of development of their statistical systems.

The main changes between the old definitions and the new definitions are set out below;

- Usual environment - Exclude all trips involving overnight stays undertaken routinely on a weekly or more frequent basis.
- Reason for visit - Following discussions with NITB the categories for reason for visit vary from those listed in the IRTS2008 – the variation is to meet the specific needs of the NITB. (Holiday/**short break**/leisure/recreation)

- Incentive trip - To be included under Business trip and not Holiday, leisure and recreational as recommended in the IRTS2008, reason being the NITB promote incentive trips under the umbrella of business tourism.
- Mode of transport - Mode on which the greatest distance travelled within NI/ROI

Weighting/Grossing

The old NIPS used monthly data from the individual air and sea ports to weight the survey. The new NIPS uses official final CAA monthly air passenger figures and the sea passengers are provided by the individual sea ports.

Collection and production of NIPS estimates

The old NIPS was carried out by a combination of permanent and temporary NITB interviewers, the analysis was carried out by NITB research officers. The new NIPS interviews are conducted by NISRA interviewers and all analysis is carried out by NISRA statisticians.

Benefits

The outputs of the NIPS are now classified as official tourism statistics and will adhere to the principals and protocols as detailed in the Code (see below) and will be assessed and monitored by the UK Statistics Authority.

The Code sets out eight principles;

1. Meeting user needs
2. Impartiality and objectivity
3. Integrity
4. Sound methods and assured quality
5. Confidentiality
6. Proportionate burden
7. Resources
8. Frankness and accessibility

and 3 protocols

1. User engagement
2. Release practices
3. The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

By bringing NIPS statistics under the banner of official statistics all users will be confident on the **quality, robustness** and **integrity** of the NIPS statistics.

The methodology applied and definitional changes to the NIPS are in line with international best practice and are a move towards the harmonisation of tourism statistics. Some of the benefits of “flow” methodology when compared with previous “quota” based methodology are;

- robust, systematic, consistent rules,
- easy to audit,
- no interviewer discretion allowed in selecting respondents,

- flexible sampling fraction,
- over and sub sampling possible,
- options for modular approach and
- all interviewers are using CAPI, which allows for built in quality assurance checks.

In addition to the above, NISRA have calculated the associated confidence intervals for trips and expenditure. These are beneficial to users in the interpretation of NIPS estimates.

Implications for NIPS time series

The methodological/definitional improvements made to the NIPS have the potential to lead to different estimates from the old NIPS and therefore cause discontinuities in the time series. In order to measure any changes in the estimates, the existing survey was run in parallel to the new survey for the first three quarters of 2010. Following analysis of the parallel run NISRA recommend not to use the estimates from the parallel run of the old series in 2010 to construct the time series given the concerns about the quality of the data during this period.

Further analysis of estimates from old series (up to Q4 2009) and new series (Q1 – Q4 2010) led to the conclusion that the time series, for visitor **numbers, nights and expenditure**, can be formed by using the estimates from the old survey up to Q4 2009 and estimates from the new survey from Q1 2010. (This work was carried out in conjunction with Office for National Statistics and a technical paper detailing the statistical tests is available.)

NISRA recommend;

- the time series for visitor numbers, nights and expenditure should be formed by using the estimates from the old survey up to Q4 2009 and the estimates from the new survey from Q1 2010;
- all published tables and charts showing these top level time series should clearly show that there has been a change in survey methodology between Q4 2009 and Q1 2010;
- the time series of market and purpose of visit is not level enough and **therefore comparisons at market and purpose of visit between old and new NIPS should not be made**. NISRA will investigate these levels further when more data becomes available.

NISRA have also carried out initial analysis to produce a seasonally adjustment of the series and will publish the outputs when more data is available and resources permit. The seasonally adjusted data would provide extra information about the short-term movement in the series.