



BRIEFING PAPER

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Migration Statistics

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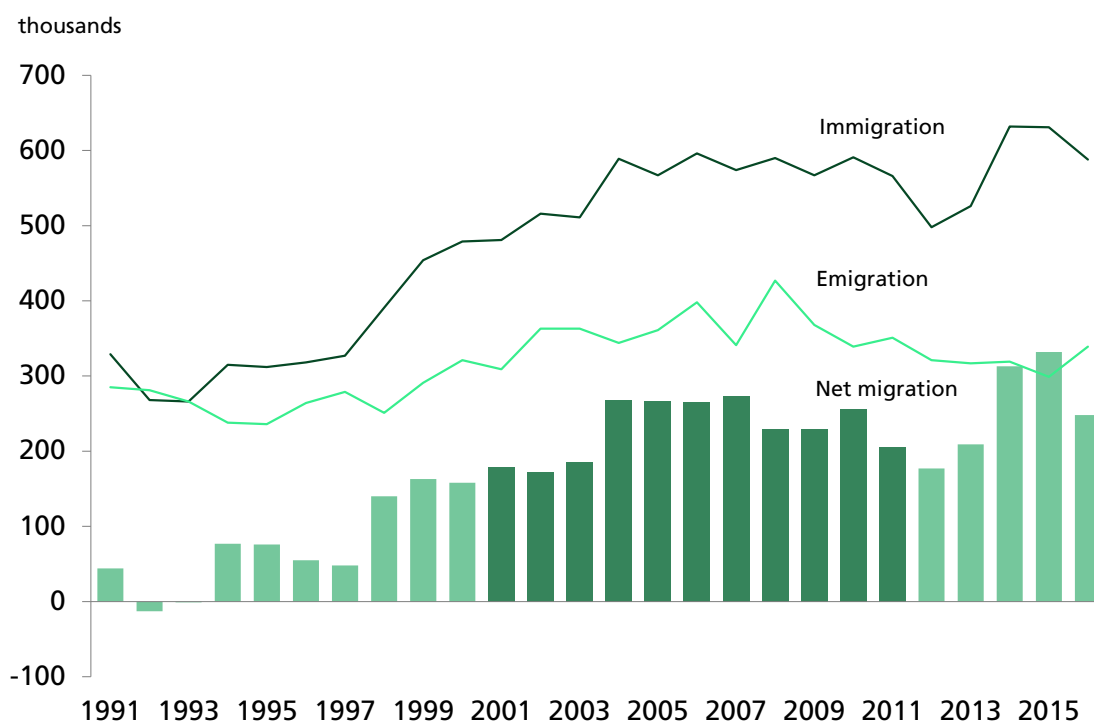
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Summary

The number of people migrating to the UK has been greater than the number emigrating since 1994. For much of the twentieth century, the numbers migrating to and from the UK were roughly in balance, and from the 1960s to the early 1990s the number of emigrants was often greater than the number of immigrants. Over the last twenty five years, both immigration and emigration have increased to historically high levels, with immigration exceeding emigration by more than 100,000 in every year since 1998.

Long-term international migration in the UK



This note explains the concepts and methods used in measuring migration. It contains current and historical data on immigration, emigration and net migration in the UK. It sets out the most recent estimates of the UK's foreign national and foreign born populations, and includes international comparisons of migration and migrant populations in European Union countries.

1. Understanding migration statistics

What do migration statistics measure? The idea of people moving to live in different parts of the world seems straightforward, but defining what that means in such a way that it can be consistently measured raises difficult questions. Who counts as a migrant? Who is foreign to a given country? Under what circumstances can someone be said to have changed the country in which they live?

For many of these questions there is no definitive answer and the most appropriate answer depends upon the nature of the data that is available. This means there is no single measure of migration. Instead, there are several different measures that, taken together, can be used to build up a picture of how national populations are changing due to the movement of people around the world. Understanding migration therefore means understanding the different ways migration can be measured and the definitions that apply in each case.

1.1 Who is a migrant?

A migrant can be broadly defined as a person who changes their country of usual residence. Conventionally, there are three different ways of making this definition more precise.

A migrant can be:

- Someone whose country of birth is different to their country of residence.
- Someone whose nationality is different to their country of residence.
- Someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence.¹

Each of these definitions has its strengths and weaknesses.

The first definition is consistent and objective, but it classifies as migrants people who were born abroad but who are nevertheless nationals of the country in which they live (e.g. children born to armed forces personnel stationed in foreign countries).

The second definition excludes nationals born abroad, but it also excludes people who have recently changed their country of residence and acquired the nationality of their new home country. There is also the possibility that when a person is asked their nationality, their self-reported answer may express a sense of cultural affiliation rather than

¹ This is the United Nations recommended definition of a migrant.

their actual legal status; a problem that does not arise when asking someone their country of birth.

The third definition is objective but it poses problems of measurement. People's intentions regarding their length of stay in a country are subject to change: those people who intend to stay longer than a year may leave more quickly, while those who initially intend a short stay may become permanent residents. This definition is also somewhat arbitrary; as the number of people meeting it would change were the minimum period of residence longer or shorter than a year.²

In practice, each of these definitions is used in certain circumstances, depending on the data in question.

1.2 Stocks and flows

In migration statistics, stocks refer to the number of migrants usually resident in a country during a particular period, while flows refer to the number of people changing their country of usual residence during a particular period. Immigration and emigration are therefore flow measurements, recording the number of people entering and leaving the country on a long-term basis.

Statistics on stocks and flows are based on different definitions of a migrant. Stocks are normally measured as the number of people whose country of birth or nationality is different from that of the country in which they live (the first two definitions above). Flows are normally measured as the number of people changing their country of residence for at least a year (the third definition).

In the UK, data on stocks and flows comes from different sources. Stocks are measured through surveys of the resident population, while flows are measured primarily through surveys of passengers arriving and leaving the country.³

1.3 Net migration

Net migration is the measure of the net flow of migrants into or out of a country. Put simply, it is the difference between immigration and emigration: the number of people moving to live in a particular country minus the number of people moving out of that country to live elsewhere. If more people are arriving than leaving, net migration is a positive number, which means net immigration. If more people are leaving than arriving, net migration is a negative number, which means net emigration.

² For a detailed analysis of the different definitions of a migrant see: [Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences](#), Dr Bridget Anderson & Dr Scott Blinder, Oxford Migration Observatory, 1 Aug 2014.

³ Stocks are measured through the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS), which aggregates and supplements LFS data to improve statistical accuracy. Flows are measured primarily through the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which surveys passengers at UK ports, with additional data on migration to and from Northern Ireland and Home Office data on asylum seekers.

It is important to recognise that net migration does not by itself indicate the full extent of population change. It is only a part of the picture. If immigration and emigration are roughly equal, net migration will be low irrespective of how many people arrive and leave.

1.4 The difference between migrants and asylum seekers

A migrant is someone who changes their country of usual residence. An asylum seeker is someone who does so “from fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, social group, or political opinion”.⁴ In this sense, asylum seekers are generally counted as a subset of migrants and are included in official estimates of migrant stocks and flows.

However, the United Nations Glossary of Migration Related Terms says:

The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant worker as a “person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.” From this a broader definition of migrants follows:

“The term ‘migrant’ in article 1.1 (a) should be understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling factor.”

This definition indicates that migrant does not refer to refugees, displaced or others forced or compelled to leave their homes. Migrants are people who make choices about when to leave and where to go, even though these choices are sometimes extremely constrained. Indeed, some scholars make a distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration. While certain refugee movements face neither external obstacles to free movement nor is impelled by urgent needs and a lack of alternative means of satisfying them in the country of present residence, others may blend into the extreme of relocation entirely uncontrolled by the people on the move.⁵

So while asylum seekers are a component of migration, as measured in official statistics, it is not strictly correct under United Nations definitions to use the term migrant to refer to an asylum seeker or refugee.

In 2016, there were 30,747 applications for asylum in the UK, covering 39,357 people comprising asylum seekers and their dependants. In the same year, immigration was approximately 589,000. The ONS estimates that asylum seekers were around 6.0% of immigration in 2016.⁶

⁴ This definition is taken from Article 1 of the [UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#). The complete definition is longer and more technical, but it is broadly consistent with the definition given here.

⁵ United Nations Glossary of Migration Related Terms, [Migrant/Migration](#)

⁶ See [Table 1.01 Components and Adjustments](#) in the ONS [Long-Term International Migration](#) estimates.

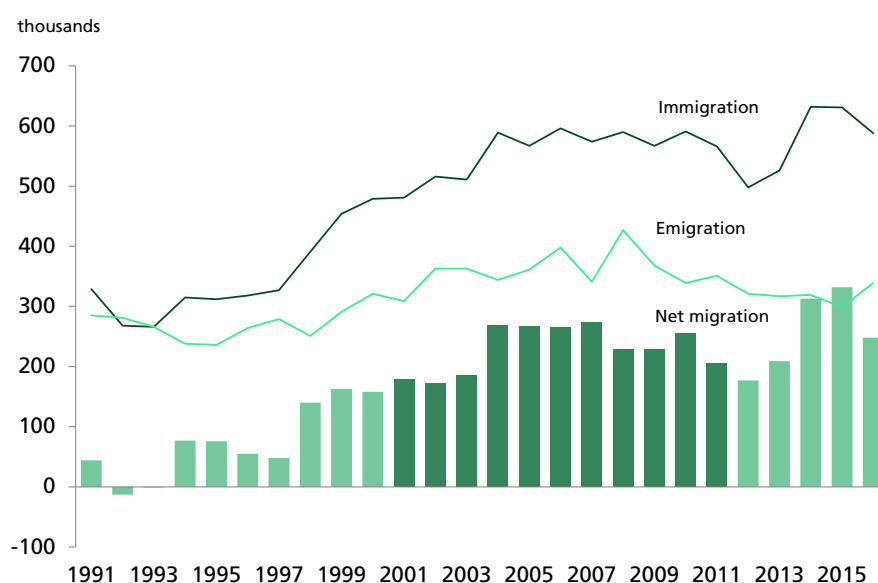
2. Migration in the UK

The most comprehensive estimates of long-term migration to and from the UK come from the ONS long-term international migration (LTIM) series, which provides the headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration.

For this series, the ONS uses the UN recommended definition of a long-term international migrant. That is someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence.

The LTIM estimates are based on three sources of data: the International Passenger Survey (IPS), data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on international migration through Northern Ireland, and Home Office data on asylum seekers and “switchers” – people who remain in the UK for a longer or shorter period than they originally anticipated, thus falling into or out of the definition of a migrant.⁷

Chart 1: Long-term international migration in the UK



Sources: [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#); [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#)

Chart 1 shows LTIM estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration in the UK from 1991 to 2016. During this period immigration increased 79%, rising from 329,000 in 1991 to 589,000 in 2016. Emigration increased between 1991 and 2008, but subsequently fell to around 340,000 in 2016, compared with 285,000 in 1991.

⁷ Further information on the methodology for the LTIM and IPS estimates is available in the ONS guide: [Methodology to estimate Long-Term International Migration](#)

Immigration has grown faster than emigration, leading to an increase in net migration from an annual average of 37,000 in the period 1991 to 1995 to an annual average of 256,000 in the period 2012 to 2016.

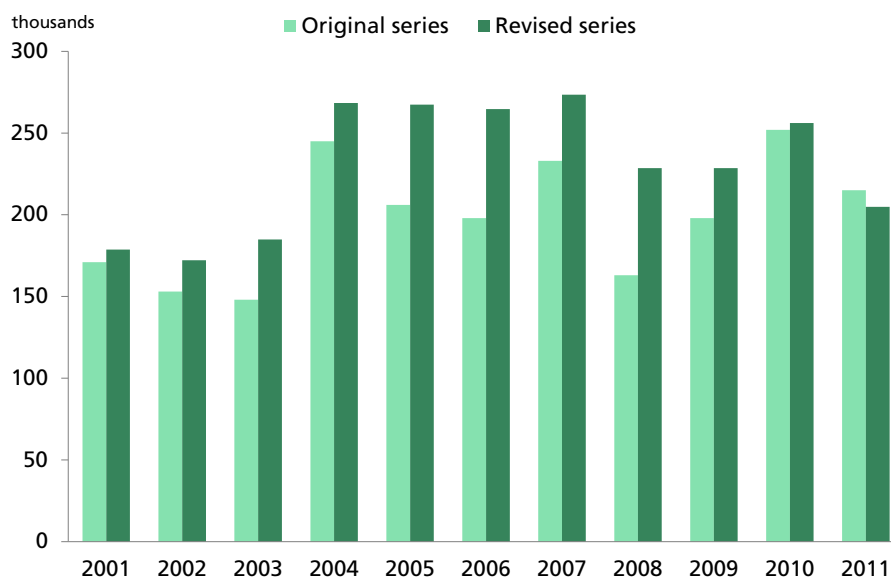
Net migration estimates for the years 2001 to 2011 have been revised (see Section 2.1. below). These revised estimates are shown in a darker colour. Estimates of immigration and emigration in these years are unrevised and are not consistent with the revised net figures.

2.1 Revisions to net migration

The results of the 2011 Census showed that the population of England and Wales was larger than expected, given the recorded number of births and deaths and the estimated level of net migration during the decade since the last Census in 2001. The Census-based mid-year population estimate for England and Wales in 2011 was 464,000 higher than the equivalent estimate rolled forward from the 2001 Census. The ONS identified several possible causes for the difference but considered that the “largest single cause is most likely to be underestimation of long-term immigration from central and eastern Europe in the middle part of the decade”.⁸

As a result, in April 2014 the ONS published a revised set of net migration estimates for the United Kingdom for the period 2001 to 2011. Total net migration during this period is now estimated to have been 346,000 higher than was previously thought – the original estimate of 2.18 million having been revised to 2.53 million. The difference between the original and revised estimates of net migration in each calendar year are set out in Chart 2.

Chart 2: Original and revised estimates of net migration, 2001-11



Source: [ONS, Quality of Long-Term International Migration Estimates, 2001-11](#)

⁸ ONS, [Methods used to revise the national population estimates for mid-2002 to mid-2010](#), 13 Dec 2012

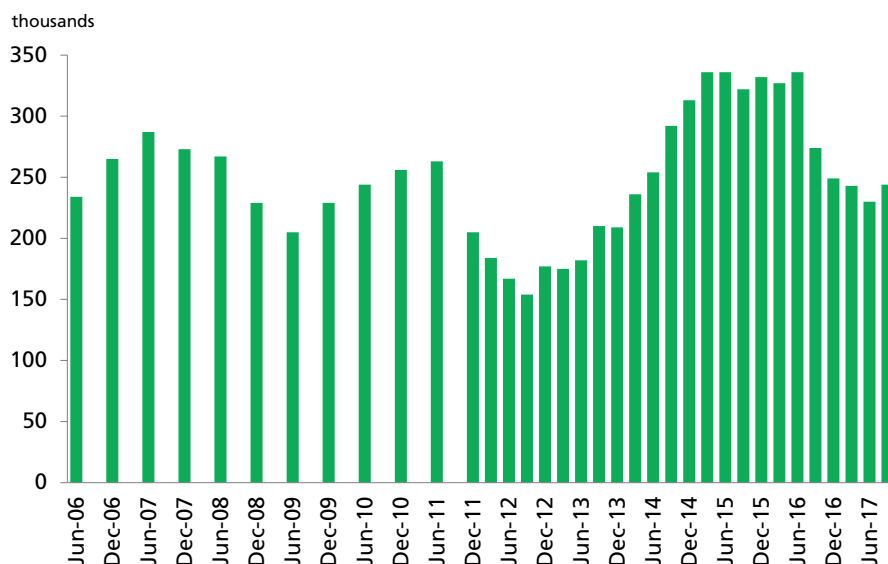
Because the underestimation of net migration was identified indirectly from the Census, the ONS was unable to revise estimates of immigration and emigration as components of net migration during the same period. This means the revised estimates of net migration for the period 2001-2011 are not consistent with the available estimates of immigration and emigration in the same period. The ONS recommends that users of migration statistics should continue using the original LTIM series for immigration and emigration but should bear in mind that the headline net migration estimates have now been revised.

2.2 The net migration target

Under the 2010 Coalition Government, the Home Office said that it aimed to reduce net migration “from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands” by the end of the 2010 Parliament.⁹ Following the 2015 General Election, then Prime Minister David Cameron said the new Conservative government still aimed to reduce net migration to this level.¹⁰ On 20 July 2016, Prime Minister Theresa May said she remained firm in her belief “that we need to bring net migration down to sustainable levels, and the Government believe that that means tens of thousands”.¹¹

During the 2005 Parliament average annual net migration was around 247,000 a year; so the Government would need to reduce net migration by around 150,000 from its level before the net migration target was introduced to achieve net migration of less than 100,000. So how has net migration changed since 2010?

Chart 3: Net migration, Years ending each quarter



Source: [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#)

⁹ [HC Deb 23 Nov 2010 C169](#)

¹⁰ Prime Minister’s Office, [PM speech on immigration](#), 21 May 2015

¹¹ [HC Deb 20 Jul 2016 C826](#)

LTIM estimates of net migration are produced quarterly, with detailed breakdowns of the figures produced for migration in each calendar year. Chart 3 shows estimates of net migration in the years ending each quarter, from the year ending June 2006 to the year ending September 2017.¹²

Consistent estimates for years ending March and September are only available from 2012, which is why there are some gaps in the chart. It is important to understand that each of these migration estimates is based on data for the preceding twelve months, so even though estimates are produced quarterly, each quarterly estimate shares data with the preceding and subsequent estimates. Only estimates in discrete twelve month periods are fully independent of one another (as in Chart 1).

The periods within which migration is estimated do not correspond precisely to the dates of general elections. However, using the closest corresponding migration estimates (from the year ending June 2006 to the year ending June 2010), average annual net migration during the 2005 Parliament was around 247,000 a year, reaching a high of 287,000 in the year ending June 2007, and a low of 205,000 in the year ending June 2009.

Net migration increased during the first year of the 2010 Parliament, reaching 263,000 in the year ending June 2011. Following this peak, net migration then fell over the next five quarters, reaching 154,000 in the year ending September 2012. This was the lowest estimate of net migration in any twelve month period since the year ending December 1998. Compared with annual average net migration during the 2005 Parliament, net migration fell by around 93,000.

Since then, net migration has risen again. It reached 336,000 in the year ending March 2015, and remained above 320,000 until the year ending September 2016 when it fell to 273,000. Since then net migration has continued to fall reaching 244,000 in the year ending September 2017.

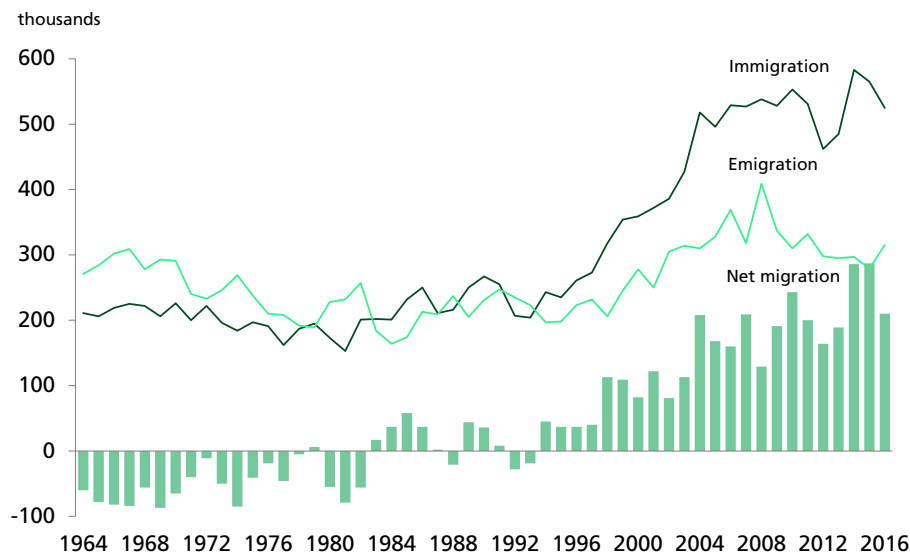
2.3 Historic migration estimates

The LTIM series begins in 1991. Estimates of annual migration before this date are available from 1964, based on just the International Passenger Survey. IPS estimates are considered less robust than the LTIM estimates (which incorporate other sources of data), but the IPS is the principal source of data for the LTIM estimates and the ONS publishes a series based purely on IPS data that shows migration trends over a longer period. Note that this series does not reflect the revisions to net migration since the 2011 Census (see Section 2.1 above).

Chart 4 shows IPS estimates of long-term international migration from 1964 to 2016. Between 1964 and 1983 the UK experienced a period of almost continuous net emigration, with net inward migration occurring only in 1979, when net migration was around 6,000.

¹² These are the revised estimates, as explained in Section 2.1 above.

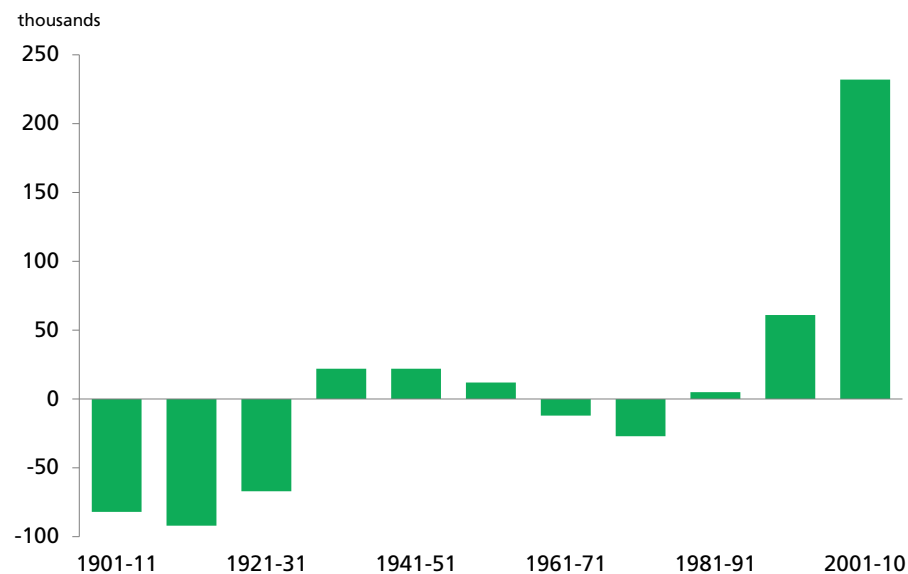
Chart 4: IPS estimates of international migration in the UK



Sources: [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#); [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#); ONS Annual Abstract of Statistics

There was no systematic attempt to measure the extent of international migration before the introduction of the IPS in 1964. Before then, the extent of international migration can only be loosely estimated from census data, by measuring the proportion of population change that is not attributable to recorded births and deaths. Specifically, the change in the population due to the difference between the number of births and deaths is subtracted from the total observed change in the population and the remainder is assumed to be due to migration. This figure is then averaged over the period between the two censuses to estimate average annual net migration. These estimates are therefore produced indirectly and should be treated with some caution.

Chart 5: Estimated average annual net migration to the UK



Source: ONS Annual Abstract of Statistics 2004, [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#)

During the first three decades of the twentieth century the UK experienced net emigration of around 80,000 a year. For the next three decades, from 1931 to 1961, the flow of migration turned inward, with average net immigration of around 19,000 a year. Net emigration returned between 1961 and 1981, but at lower levels than earlier in the century, averaging around 20,000 a year. After 1991, annual net migration began to increase, reaching levels of greater than 100,000 a year in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as recorded in the LTIM and IPS estimates.

2.4 From which countries do people migrate to the UK?

The origin of migrants coming to the UK is recorded in three different ways: by nationality, country of birth, and country of last residence. The first indicates the legal status of migrants, the second records their historical origins, while the third identifies the geographical sources of migration to the UK. Table 1 shows immigration to the UK in 2016, broken down by these categories.

Table 1: Immigration by nationality, country of birth, and country of last residence, 2016

	000s			%		
	Nationality	Country of birth	Country of last residence	Nationality	Country of birth	Country of last residence
United Kingdom	74	63	0	12.6%	10.7%	0.0%
European Union	249	239	273	42.3%	40.6%	46.3%
EU15	132	123	160	22.4%	20.9%	27.2%
EU8	48	46	46	8.1%	7.8%	7.8%
EU Other	70	69	67	11.9%	11.7%	11.4%
Non European Union	265	287	316	45.0%	48.7%	53.7%
Other Europe	16	18	19	2.7%	3.1%	3.2%
Asia	163	174	178	27.7%	29.5%	30.2%
Rest of the World	85	94	119	14.4%	16.0%	20.2%
Total	589	589	589	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: See Background to Table 1 in the Appendix.

Source: [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#)

In 2016, 13% of people migrating to the UK were British nationals, 42% were nationals of other EU countries, and 45% were nationals of non-EU countries. This means a little under half of migrants entering the UK in 2016 were subject to immigration control.

Charts 6-8 below shows trends in immigration and net migration by nationality from 1991 to 2017. The data in these charts does not reflect the revisions to net migration since the 2011 Census, so estimates of immigration and net migration of EU nationals in the period 2004 to 2008 are likely to be underestimates (see Section 2.1 above).

Chart 6: Immigration to the UK by nationality

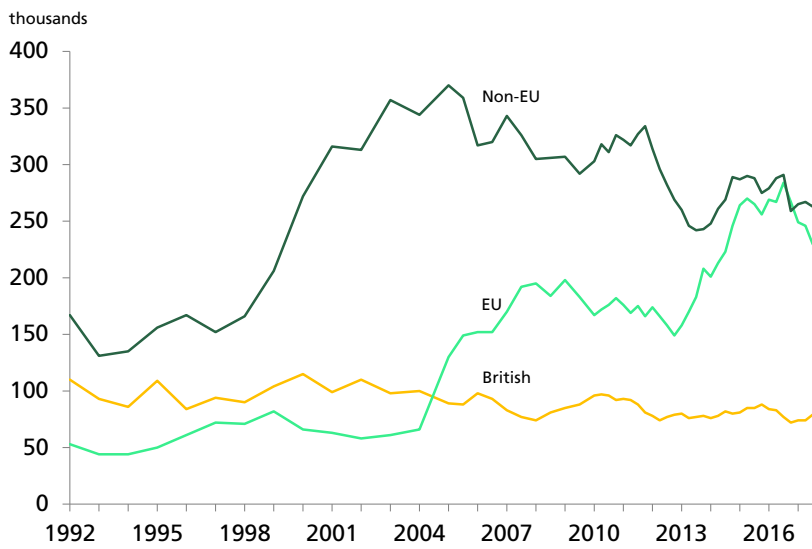


Chart 7: Emigration from the UK by nationality

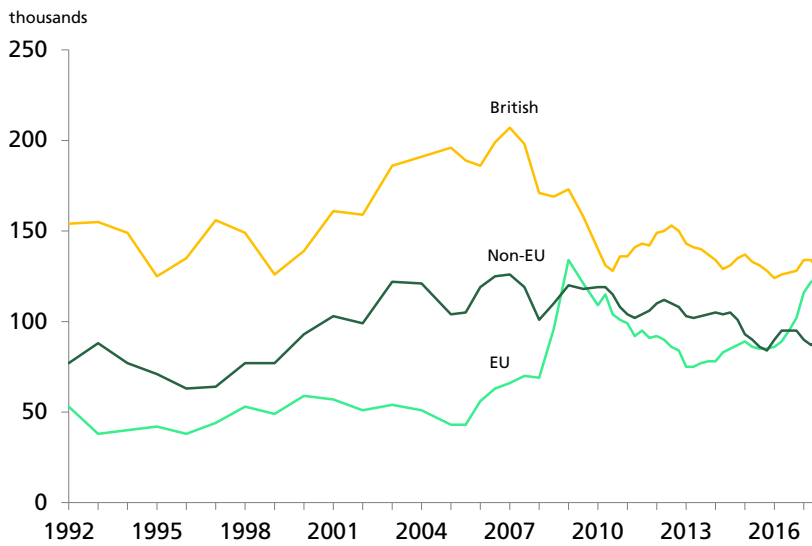
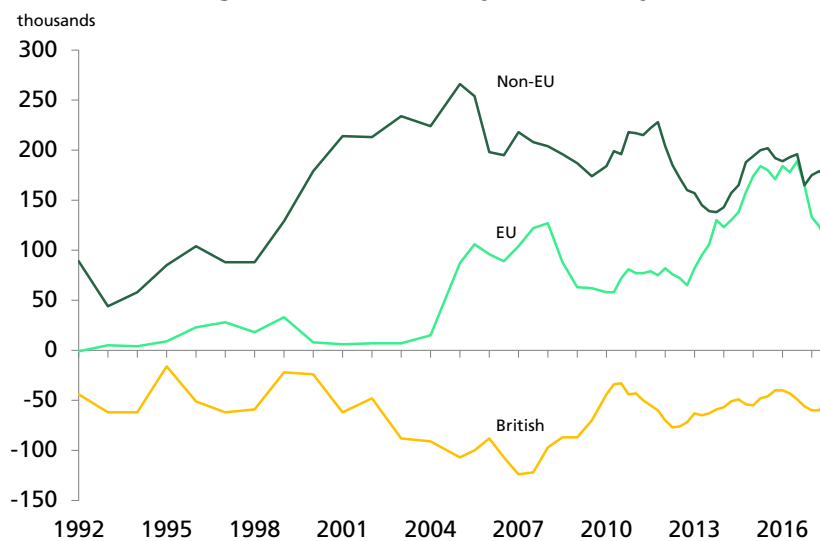


Chart 8: Net migration in the UK by nationality



Note: Years ending each quarter. Sources: [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#); [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#)

Net inward migration of non-EU nationals fell during the first half of the last Parliament, as the criteria for obtaining student, family and work visas were tightened with the aim of reducing non-EU net migration.

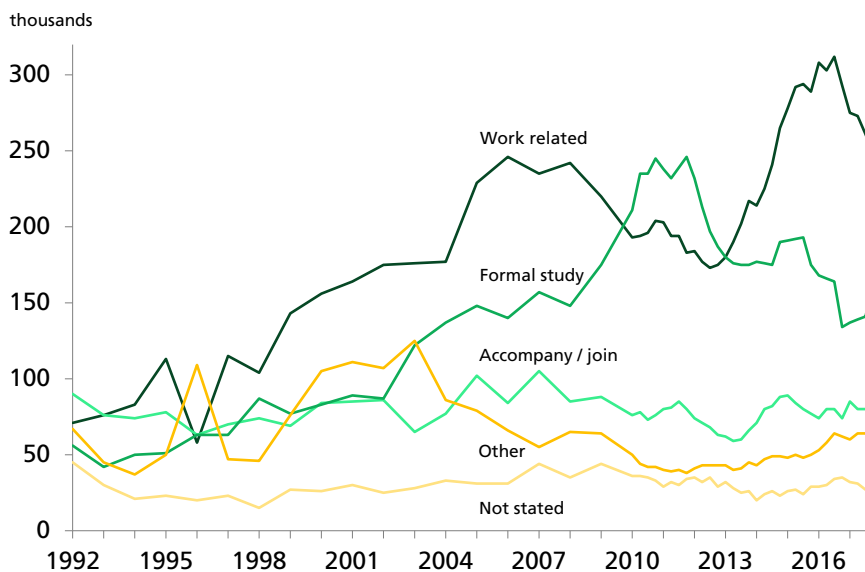
Net migration of non-EU nationals fell to 138,000 in the year ending September 2013, which was its lowest level since 1998. However, net migration of non-EU nationals began to increase after that, reaching 201,000 in the year ending June 2015, which was broadly the same level as at the start of the last Parliament, when net migration of non-EU nationals was 196,000 in the year ending June 2010. Net migration of non-EU nationals in the year ending September 2017 was 205,000.

Net migration of EU nationals rose from 65,000 in the year ending September 2012 to 189,000 in the year ending June 2016, but fell to 90,000 in the year ending September 2017. This is the lowest level since the year ending December 2012. Emigration of EU nationals was higher than emigration of British nationals for the first time in the year ending September 2017.

2.5 Why do people migrate to the UK?

Chart 9 shows ONS estimates of immigration broken down by main reason for immigration.

Chart 9: Immigration to the UK by main reason



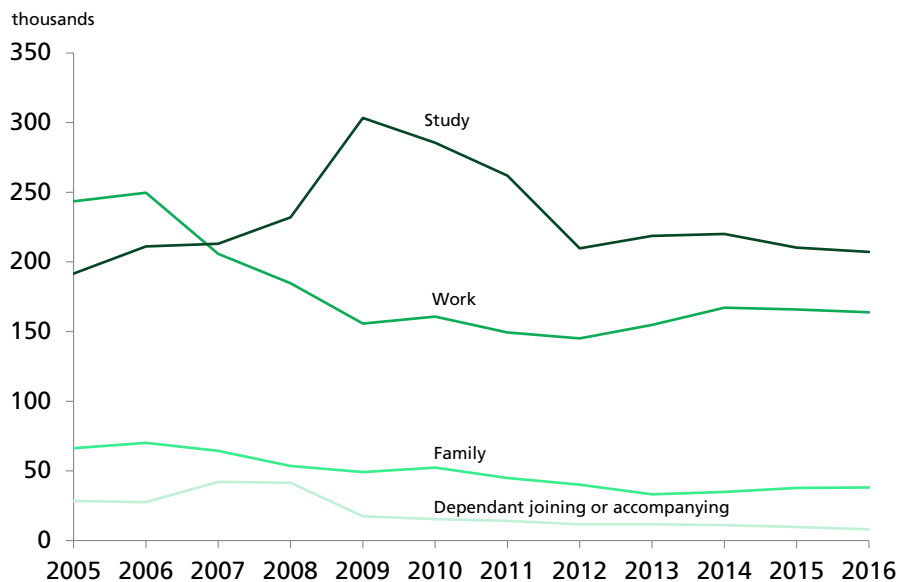
Note: Years ending each quarter. Sources: [ONS Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series \(LTIM calendar year\)](#); [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#)

In the year ending September 2017, work was the most common main reason for immigration, while formal study was the second most common main reason. Study was the most common main reason for immigration during the period 2009-12, and the reduction in the number of people migrating to the UK to study since then reflects a reduction in the number of Tier 4 student visas issued to students from outside the EEA and Switzerland.

Chart 10 shows longer-term visas issued by broad category in each year from 2005 to 2016. These are visas granted to nationals of countries

outside the EEA and Switzerland that grant leave to remain in the UK for longer periods, for the purposes of work, study and family relationships.

Chart 10: Longer-term entry clearance visas granted by broad visa category



Source: [Home Office Immigration Statistics, January to March 2017, Table vi_01_q](#)

These figures exclude short-term visas such as visitor visas, transit visas, and other temporary visas. Similarly, the category for “study” excludes student visitor visas, which allow people to study in the UK on courses for up to eleven months, because people staying the UK for less than a year are not counted as migrants.

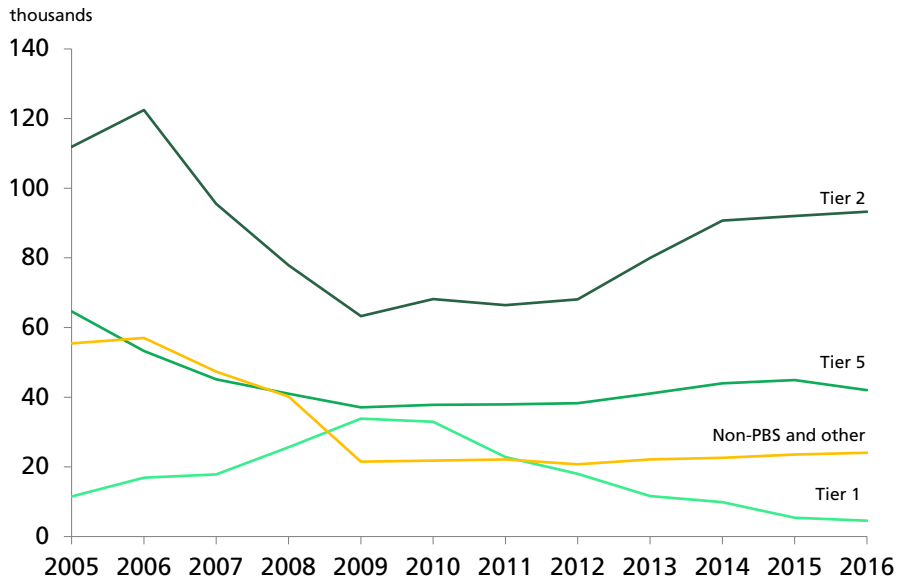
The category for “family” covers cases where an individual has been granted a visa on the basis of their relationship to a person settled in the UK or a British citizen, while the category for “dependant joining or accompanying” covers cases where dependants have been granted a visa on the basis of their relationship with another migrant, who is not a settled person or British citizen. Each of the categories includes all people granted a visa in that category, whether a main applicant or a dependant.

As the chart shows, the number of study visas granted has fallen since 2009 as a result of changes to the Tier 4 study route introduced by the Coalition Government at the start of the last Parliament. The number of family visas granted has also fallen.¹³

Chart 11 shows visas in the work category broken down by the tiers of the points-based system (or their pre-PBS equivalent categories) from 2005 to 2016.

¹³ An overview of the immigration policies introduced during the 2010-15 Parliament aimed at reducing immigration and net migration can be found in the Commons Library briefing [Immigration and asylum: changes made by the Coalition Government 2010 - 2015](#)

Chart 11: Work visas granted by tiers of the points-based system or pre-PBS equivalent category



Source: [Home Office Immigration Statistics, January to March 2017, Table vi.01.q](#)

Tier 2 visas are the largest category of work visas, with around 93,000 work visas granted to main applicants and dependants in Tier 2 in 2016. These are visas for sponsored skilled workers with a job offer.

Tier 5 visas are the second largest category, with around 42,000 visas granted in 2016. These are visas for temporary workers.

Tier 1 visas are for high skilled or high value migrants, including entrepreneurs, investors and migrants with exceptional talents in science, humanities, engineering, medicine, digital technology or the arts. By its nature this is the smallest category of work visas, with around 4,500 visas granted in 2016.¹⁴

¹⁴ Further information on the categories of the points-based system can be found in the House of Commons briefing [The UK's points-based system for immigration](#).

3. Migrants living in the UK

There are fewer foreign nationals living in the UK than there are people born in other countries. Between January 2016 and December 2016 there were approximately 6.0 million people with non-British nationality living in the UK and 9.2 million people who were born abroad. This difference is typical of countries with established migrant populations, as many long-term migrants acquire citizenship in their new home country over time.

The only migrant group that is larger by nationality than by country of birth are migrants from the eight “accession” countries that joined the EU in May 2004. This is because children of accession migrants born in the UK retain their accession nationality. Tables 2 and 3 show estimates of the foreign national and foreign born population in each nation and region of the UK.

The UK’s migrant population is concentrated in London. Around 36% of people living in the UK who were born abroad live in the capital city. Similarly, around 38% of people living in London were born outside the UK, compared with 14% for the UK as a whole.

After London, the English regions with the highest proportions of their population born abroad were the West Midlands (13.1%), the South East (13.1%), and the East of England (13.0%). In each of these regions the proportion of people born abroad was lower than for England as a whole (15.4%), where the percentage was pulled up by London.

Of all the nations and regions of the UK, the North East had the lowest proportion of its population born abroad (5.8%), followed by Wales (6.0%), Northern Ireland (7.6%), and Scotland (8.6%).

Table 2: Estimated population of the UK by nationality, 2016

Nation/Region	000s					%				
	British	EU15	EU8	EU28	Non EU	British	EU15	EU8	EU28	Non EU
England	49,085	1,429	1,350	3,188	2,228	90.0%	2.6%	2.5%	5.8%	4.1%
North East	2,501	15	24	46	55	96.1%	0.6%	0.9%	1.8%	2.1%
North West	6,645	102	133	256	204	93.5%	1.4%	1.9%	3.6%	2.9%
Yorkshire & Humbs	4,994	59	139	210	143	93.3%	1.1%	2.6%	3.9%	2.7%
East Midlands	4,278	75	146	241	119	92.2%	1.6%	3.1%	5.2%	2.6%
West Midlands	5,229	80	135	254	233	91.5%	1.4%	2.4%	4.4%	4.1%
East	5,497	137	182	363	188	90.9%	2.3%	3.0%	6.0%	3.1%
London	6,719	667	321	1,173	868	76.7%	7.6%	3.7%	13.4%	9.9%
South East	8,141	204	176	438	299	91.7%	2.3%	2.0%	4.9%	3.4%
South West	5,080	91	95	208	119	93.9%	1.7%	1.8%	3.8%	2.2%
Wales	2,947	25	42	78	47	95.9%	0.8%	1.4%	2.5%	1.5%
Scotland	4,958	72	124	209	128	93.6%	1.4%	2.3%	3.9%	2.4%
Northern Ireland	1,720	37	53	98	23	93.4%	2.0%	2.9%	5.3%	1.2%
United Kingdom	58,710	1,563	1,569	3,572	2,425	90.7%	2.4%	2.4%	5.5%	3.7%

Table 3: Estimated population of the UK by country of birth, 2016

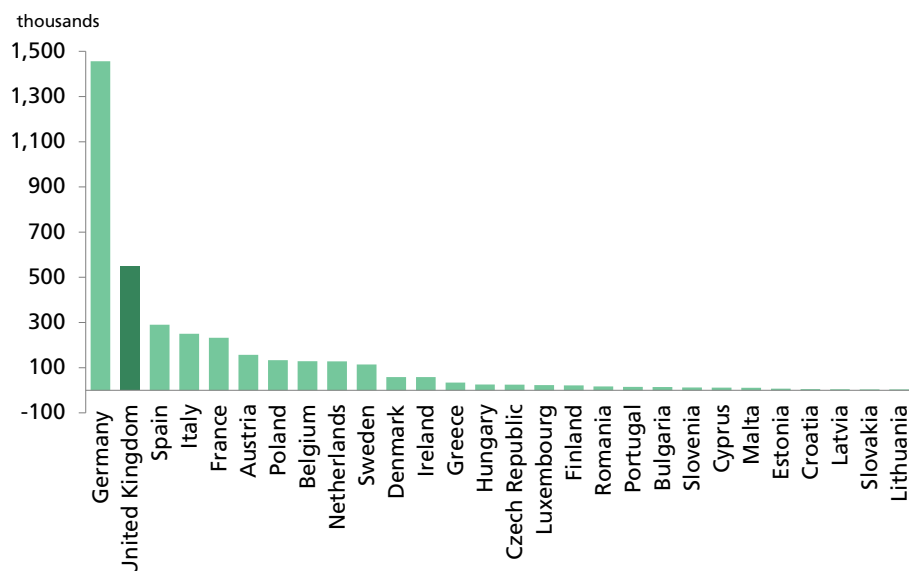
Nation/Region	000s					%				
	UK	EU15	EU8	EU28	Non EU	UK	EU15	EU8	EU28	Non EU
England	46,127	1,424	1,243	3,129	5,244	84.6%	2.6%	2.3%	5.7%	9.6%
North East	2,450	21	23	52	100	94.1%	0.8%	0.9%	2.0%	3.8%
North West	6,426	113	124	259	420	90.4%	1.6%	1.7%	3.6%	5.9%
Yorkshire & Humbs	4,835	66	125	207	306	90.4%	1.2%	2.3%	3.9%	5.7%
East Midlands	4,109	83	136	244	285	88.5%	1.8%	2.9%	5.3%	6.1%
West Midlands	4,967	94	123	257	492	86.9%	1.6%	2.2%	4.5%	8.6%
East	5,263	155	169	373	412	87.0%	2.6%	2.8%	6.2%	6.8%
London	5,448	544	296	1,042	2,268	62.2%	6.2%	3.4%	11.9%	25.9%
South East	7,716	227	161	460	701	86.9%	2.6%	1.8%	5.2%	7.9%
South West	4,913	120	87	237	260	90.8%	2.2%	1.6%	4.4%	4.8%
Wales	2,889	37	38	87	96	94.0%	1.2%	1.2%	2.8%	3.1%
Scotland	4,838	89	113	218	239	91.4%	1.7%	2.1%	4.1%	4.5%
Northern Ireland	1,701	46	49	103	37	92.4%	2.5%	2.7%	5.6%	2.0%
United Kingdom	55,554	1,596	1,443	3,537	5,616	85.8%	2.5%	2.2%	5.5%	8.7%

Note: Figures may not sum due to independent rounding. See Background to Tables 2-3 in the Appendix. Source: [ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality 2016](#)

4. Migration in EU countries

Data that allows for international comparisons of migration flows in European Union countries is available from the European statistics agency, Eurostat. Each country in the EU has its own way of recording and measuring migration flows depending on its administrative arrangements. EU countries have applied a common statistical definition to measures of migration since 2008.¹⁵ However, because of differences in recording practices, not all countries are able to comply with this definition in all of their statistics, so some caution is warranted in using this data to make comparisons between countries, especially where differences are small or where national methodologies significantly depart from the common EU definition.¹⁶

Chart 12: Immigration of foreign nationals, EU countries, 2015



Source: Eurostat, [migr_imm1ctz](#)

The United Kingdom is among the EU countries with the largest inflows of foreign nationals, but it is not unique. In 2015, the EU countries with the largest inflows of foreign nationals were Germany (1,460,000), the UK (548,000), Spain (290,000) and Italy (250,000).

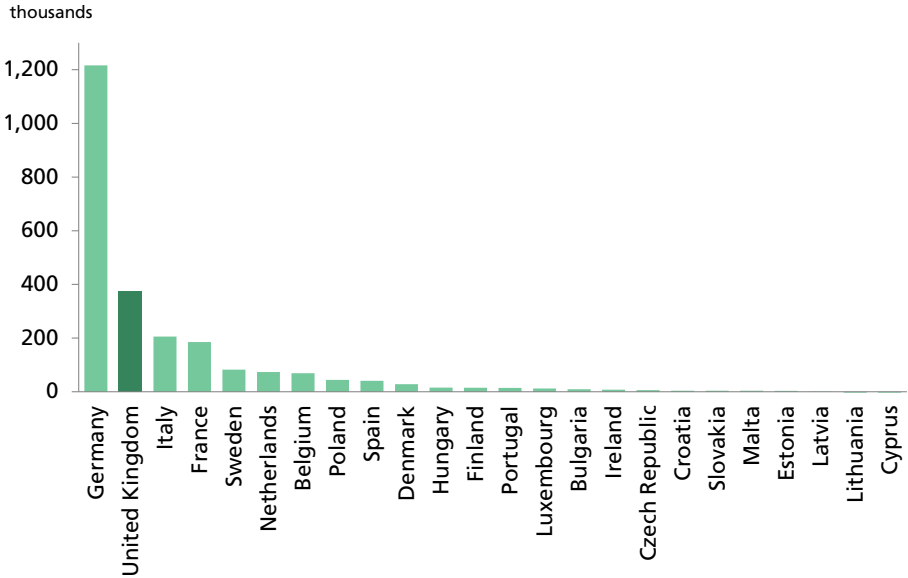
In terms of net migration (those arriving minus those leaving) the countries with the largest net inflows of foreign nationals were Germany (1,220,000), the UK (373,000), Italy (205,000) and France

¹⁵ Since 2008, the collection of data on migration in EU countries has been based on [EU Regulation 0862/2007](#). This defines a core set of statistics on international migration flows, foreign population stocks, the acquisition of citizenship, asylum and measures against illegal entry and stay. Although Member States are able to continue to use any appropriate data according to national availability and practice, the statistics collected under the Regulation must be based on common definitions and concepts.

¹⁶ Details of exactly how migration statistics are compiled in each EU country and the extent to which they comply with Regulation 0862/2007 are available in the [Eurostat metadata](#) and can be accessed through the [Eurostat online database](#).

(185,000). The UK is one of four EU countries with net inward migration of foreign nationals in the hundreds of thousands.

Chart 13: Net migration of foreign nationals, EU countries, 2015



Notes: 1. Data was unavailable for four EU28 countries: Austria, Greece, Romania and Slovenia. Source: Eurostat, [migr_imm1ctz](#) and [migr_emi1ctz](#)

Germany has experienced rising levels of inward migration of foreign nationals in recent years. In 2009 immigration of foreign nationals in Germany was around 267,000, while net migration of foreign nationals was around 101,000. By 2015, immigration of foreign nationals had increased to 1.46 million, with net migration of foreign nationals rising to 1.22 million.

5. Migrants living in EU countries

Table 4 shows Eurostat estimates of the number foreign national and foreign born migrants living in EU28 countries on 1 January 2016. The figures are presented both as counts and as a percentage of each country's total population.¹⁷

Table 4: Migrant populations of EU28 countries, as at 1 Jan 2016

	FOREIGN NATIONAL		FOREIGN BORN		Total
	Number	As % of population	Number	As % of population	
Austria	1,256,873	14.5%	1,583,787	18.2%	8,690,076
Belgium	1,333,243	11.8%	1,849,287	16.3%	11,311,117
Bulgaria	78,058	1.1%	137,815	1.9%	7,153,784
Croatia	43,287	1.0%	552,577	13.2%	4,190,669
Cyprus	147,268	17.4%	178,859	21.1%	848,319
Czech Republic	476,346	4.5%	433,290	4.1%	10,553,843
Denmark	463,147	8.1%	637,619	11.2%	5,707,251
Estonia	198,251	15.1%	193,859	14.7%	1,315,944
Finland	229,765	4.2%	337,162	6.1%	5,487,308
France	4,408,563	6.6%	7,902,783	11.8%	66,759,950
Germany	8,651,958	10.5%	11,555,717	14.1%	82,175,684
Greece	798,357	7.4%	1,220,395	11.3%	10,783,748
Hungary	156,606	1.6%	504,302	5.1%	9,830,485
Ireland	586,826	12.4%	798,564	16.9%	4,724,720
Italy	5,026,153	8.3%	5,907,452	9.7%	60,665,551
Latvia	288,946	14.7%	258,889	13.1%	1,968,957
Lithuania	18,682	0.6%	129,706	4.5%	2,888,558
Luxembourg	269,175	46.7%	260,573	45.2%	576,249
Malta	30,923	7.1%	45,880	10.6%	434,403
Netherlands	900,501	5.3%	2,056,523	12.1%	16,979,120
Poland	155,533	0.4%	633,238	1.7%	37,967,209
Portugal	388,731	3.8%	872,927	8.4%	10,341,330
Romania	107,235	0.5%	359,622	1.8%	19,760,314
Slovakia	65,840	1.2%	181,642	3.3%	5,426,252
Slovenia	107,766	5.2%	241,203	11.7%	2,064,188
Spain	4,418,158	9.5%	5,919,157	12.7%	46,445,828
Sweden	782,833	7.9%	1,676,264	17.0%	9,851,017
United Kingdom	5,684,047	8.7%	8,752,305	13.4%	65,382,556

Source: Eurostat, [migr_pop1ctz](#) and [migr_pop3ctb](#)

The EU countries with the largest number of foreign national residents in January 2015 were Germany (8.7 million), the UK (5.7 million), Italy (5.0 million), Spain (4.4 million), and France (4.4 million).

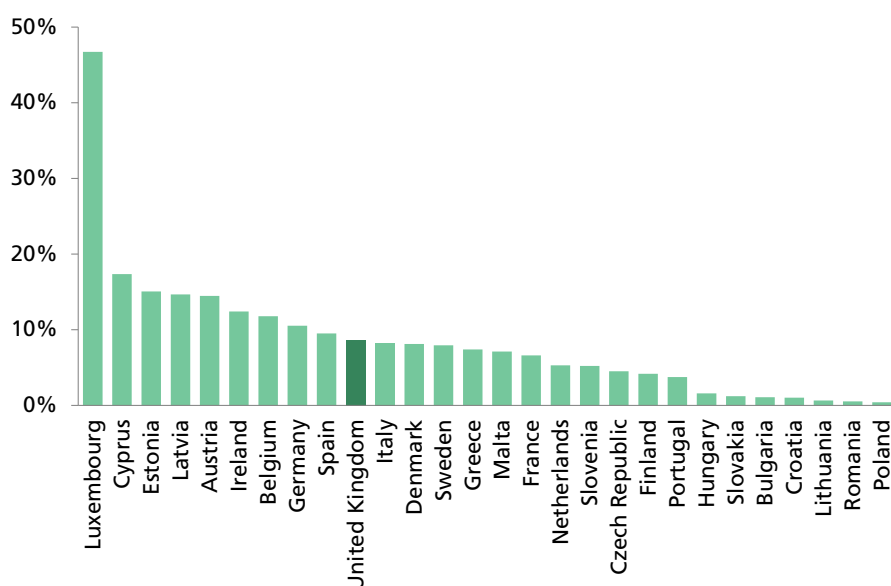
¹⁷ Note that these are estimates of the size of each country's migrant population on 1 Jan 2016, so the estimates given here for the UK differs slightly from those provided in Section 3.

The countries with largest number of foreign born residents were Germany (11.6 million), the UK (8.8 million), France (7.9 million), Spain (5.9 million), and Italy (5.9 million).

The countries with the smallest foreign national population were Lithuania (19,000), Malta (31,000), and Croatia (43,000); while the countries with the smallest foreign born populations were Malta (46,000), Lithuania (130,000), and Bulgaria (138,000).

When measured as a proportion of the total population, foreign nationals were 8.7% of the UK population, which places the UK 10th among the 28 EU countries on this measure. Foreign born people were 13.4% of the UK population, which places the UK 9th among EU countries on this measure.

Chart 14: Foreign nationals as a percentage of total population in EU28 countries, 1 Jan 2016



Source: Eurostat, [migr_pop1ctz](#) and [migr_pop3ctb](#)

The countries with the largest number of foreign nationals as a proportion of the population were Luxembourg (46.7%), Cyprus (17.4%), Estonia (15.1%), and Latvia (14.7%). Those with the smallest proportion of foreign nationals were Poland (0.4%), Romania (0.5%), Lithuania (0.6%), Croatia (1.0%), and Bulgaria (1.1%).

The countries with the largest number of foreign born residents as a proportion of the population were Luxembourg (45.2%), Cyprus (21.1%), Austria (18.2%), Sweden (17.0%) and Ireland (16.9%). Those with the smallest proportion were Poland (1.7%), Romania (1.8%), Bulgaria (1.9%) and Slovakia (3.3%).

6. Migration between the UK and other EU countries

How many EU migrants are living in the UK, and how does this compare with the number of British migrants living in other EU countries?

The available data suggests that in **2011** there were around **0.9 million** British nationals living in other EU countries, while in **2016** there were around **3.6 million** EU nationals living in the UK.

6.1 How many EU migrants live in the UK?

2011 Census estimates

The most accurate source of data on the UK population is the decennial Census. The most recent Census results showed that in March 2011 there were **2.68 million** people born in other EU countries living in the UK.¹⁸ This estimate covers all countries that were EU member states in 2011, so it does not include a small number of people born in Croatia, which joined the EU in July 2013.

It is important to understand that in this context “living in the UK” means the usually resident population of the UK, which are those people who on Census day were in the UK and had stayed or intended to stay for twelve months or more, or who had a UK address but were living abroad for less than twelve months.

In measuring the migrant population, the Census asked people about their country of birth and not their nationality. The Census questionnaires in England, Wales and Northern Ireland did ask respondents about passports they held, and this can be used as a proxy for nationality, but the question on passports was not asked in Scotland.

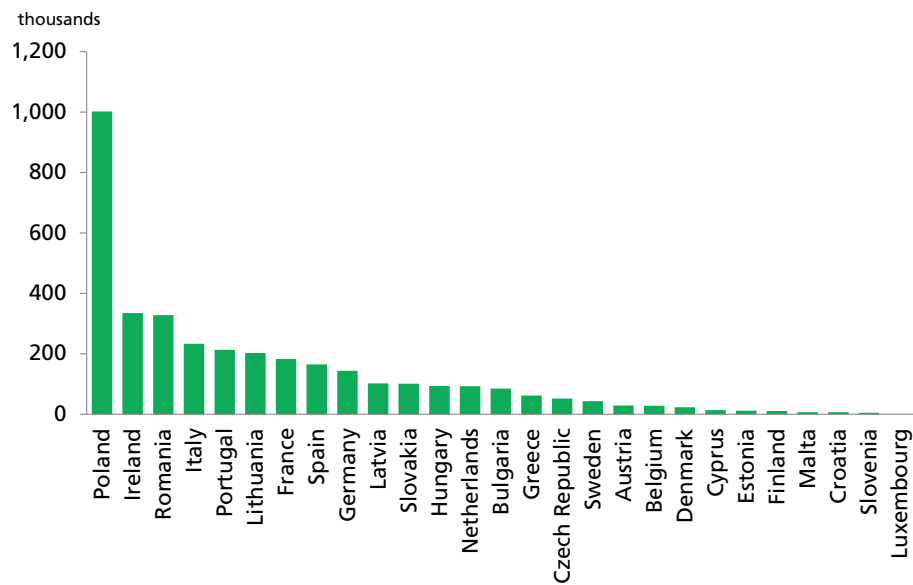
Labour Force Survey estimates

The most recent estimates of the EU migrant population of the UK are available from the Labour Force Survey, and are published in an ONS annual statistical release on ‘Population by Country of Birth and Nationality’. According to these figures, in 2016 there were around **3.54 million** people born in other EU countries living in the UK, and around **3.57 million** people who were nationals of other EU countries living in the UK.¹⁹

Chart 15 shows the estimated number of EU nationals living in the UK in 2016 broken down by nationality. The EU countries with the largest number of nationals living in the UK were Poland (1,002,000), Ireland (335,000), Romania (328,000), Italy (233,000), and Portugal (213,000).

¹⁸ ONS, [2011 Census, Key Statistics and Quick Statistics for local authorities in the United Kingdom - Part 1](#), Table QS203UK

¹⁹ ONS, [Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, 2016](#), Tables 1.1 and 2.1

Chart 15: EU nationals living in the UK by nationality, 2016

Source: ONS, [ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality 2016](#), Tables C-D

These estimates are based on the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) and its annualised equivalent, the Annual Population Survey (APS). These surveys are designed to represent the usually resident household population of the UK, excluding some people in communal establishments.

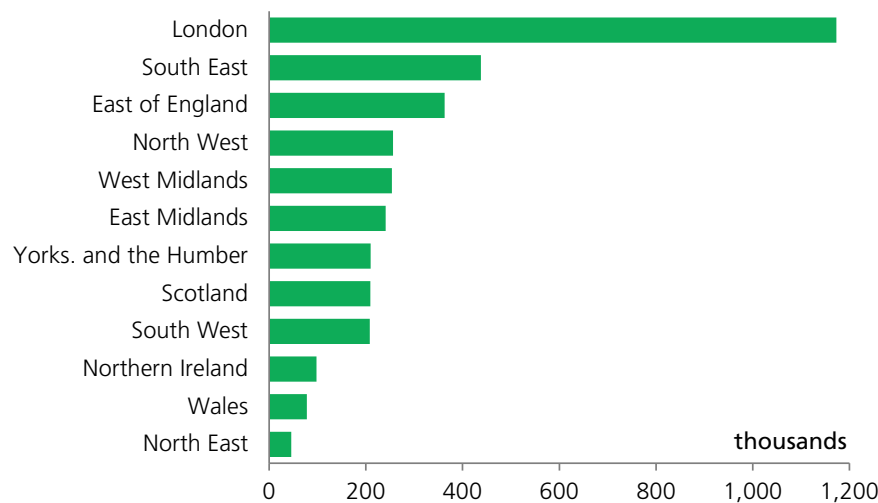
One feature of the LFS is that respondents do not need to be usually resident at the time they complete the survey. However, the sample is weighted to represent just the usually resident population. In that sense LFS estimates do not reflect short-term migration.

Where do EU nationals live in the UK?

Chart 16 shows the estimated number of EU nationals living in each country and region of the UK in 2016. Around a third (33%) of EU nationals living in the UK were living in London, which was around 1.2 million people.

Outside London, the three regions with the largest EU national populations were the South East (438,000), the East of England (363,000), and the North West (256,000).

The countries and regions of the UK with the smallest EU national populations were the North East (46,000), Wales (78,000) and Northern Ireland (98,000).

Chart 16: EU nationals by country and region of the UK, 2016

Source: ONS, [ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality 2016](#), Table 2.1

In which industries do EU nationals work?

Table 5 shows estimates of the number of EU migrants employed in the UK by the industry section in their main job. These estimates are taken from the quarterly Labour Force Survey for Q1 2017.

Table 5: EU national workers by industry, Q1 2017

Industry section in main job	Number of EU national workers in section (000s)	EU national workers as % of all workers in section
Manufacturing	335	11.5%
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	305	7.4%
Accommodation and food services	248	14.2%
Health and social work	211	5.0%
Construction	202	8.7%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	191	8.1%
Transport and storage	163	10.5%
Education	149	4.5%
Administrative and support services	144	9.3%
Information and communication	77	5.8%
Financial and insurance activities	70	5.8%
Other service activities	44	4.9%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	43	5.3%
Public administration and defence	40	2.1%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	28	7.4%
Water supply, sewerage, waste	19	8.2%
Households as employers	15	25.7%
Real estate activities	10	2.7%
Electricity, gas, air conditioning supply	<10	3.1%
Mining and quarrying	<10	3.8%
Extraterritorial organisations	<10	6.9%
All in employment	2,308	7.3%

Notes: The figures show the industry section of EU national workers in their main job. They are estimates from survey data and are approximate. The Labour Force Survey covers the UK household population and excludes people living in some communal establishments.
Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey, Q1 2017

In this quarter there were an estimated 2.3 million EU nationals working in the UK. Of these, around 335,000 were working in manufacturing, 305,000 were working in wholesale, retail, or repair of vehicles, 248,000 were working in accommodation and food services, 211,000 were working in health and social work activities, and 202,000 were working in construction.

Within the broad industry sections shown in Table 5, the industry divisions with the largest numbers of EU national workers were retail (203,000), food and beverage service activities (186,000), education (149,000), manufacture of food products (116,000), human health activities (106,000), and construction of buildings (105,000).

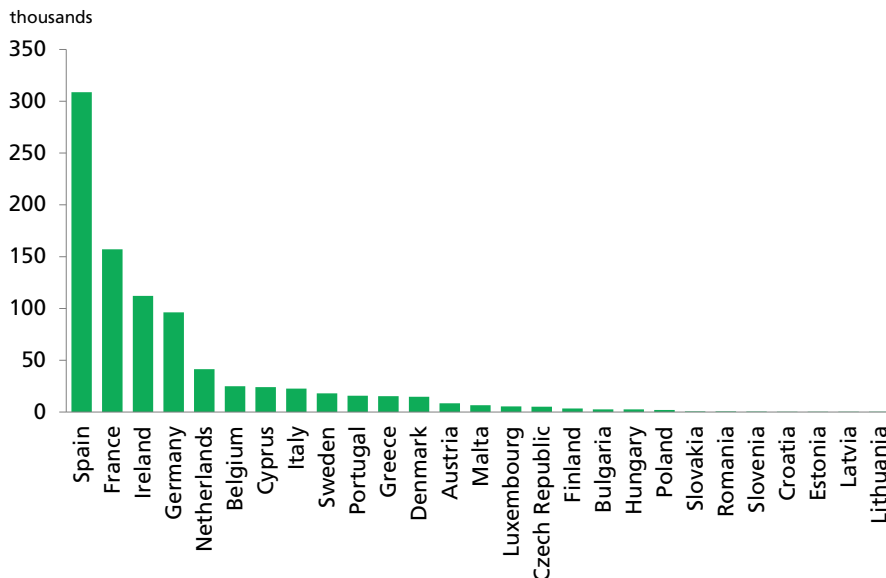
6.2 How many British migrants live in other EU countries?

Office for National Statistics estimates for 2011

The most accurate estimates of the number of British nationals living in other EU countries were published by the ONS in January 2017. These figures are based on the 2010 to 2011 round of censuses in Europe and other data from European statistical offices.

Based on this data, the ONS estimates that there were around **890,000 British nationals** living in other EU countries in 2011, and around **1.14 million people born in the UK** living in other EU countries in 2011.

Chart 17: British nationals living in other EU28 countries, 2011



Notes: Figures are from Eurostat except in the case of Netherlands, Romania, and Lithuania. See the ONS article linked below for further information on sources.

Source: ONS, [What information is there on British migrants living in Europe?: Jan 2017](#)

Chart 17 shows the estimated number of British nationals living in other EU countries in 2011. The EU countries with the largest British national populations were Spain (309,000), France (157,000), Ireland (112,000), Germany (96,000), and Netherlands (41,000). Three quarters (80%) of British nationals living in other EU countries were living in these top five countries.

United Nations estimates for 2015

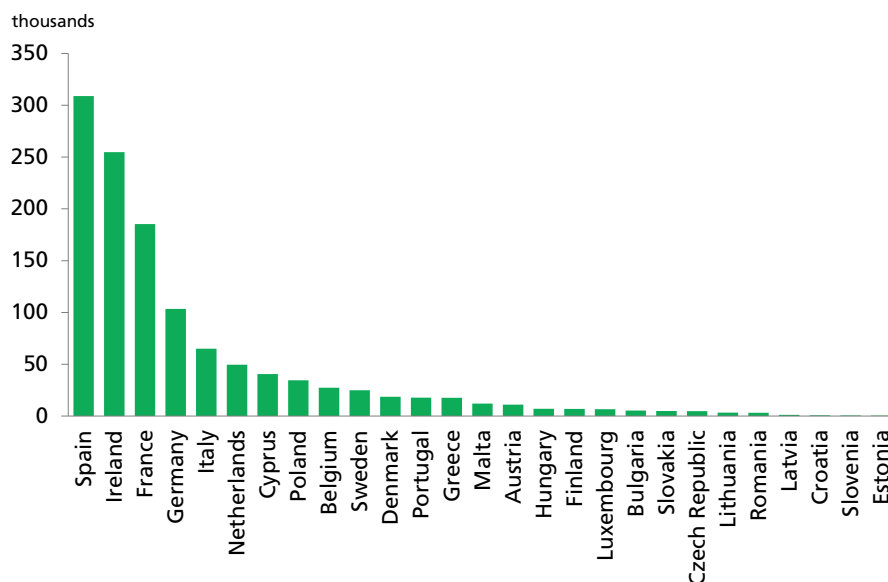
An alternative source of estimates for the number of British migrants living in other EU countries is the United Nations Global Migration Database. According to this data, there were an estimated **1.22 million British migrants** living in other EU countries in 2015.²⁰

The United Nations dataset is based on estimates from national censuses and population surveys, which have been rolled forward to account for population growth among migrant stocks in years since the last available data.

One issue with the United Nations dataset is that, because different countries use different definitions of the migrant population in their official statistics, aggregating figures for migrants in different countries necessarily involves combining some figures that are not strictly comparable, mixing estimates based on country of birth with estimates based on nationality.

The ONS has pointed out that this approach may lead to an estimate of the number of British migrants living in other EU countries that is not an accurate reflection of the number of British nationals living in those countries, because the United Nations uses data on country of birth rather than nationality for 25 of the 27 other EU countries. The ONS believes “it is better to use the more detailed census data in order to estimate the number of British citizens living abroad”.²¹ This data is shown above.

Chart 18: British migrants living in other EU28 countries, 2015



Notes: Figures for British migrants living in Belgium and Czech Republic refer to British nationals, while figures for all other EU28 countries refer to people born in the UK.

Source: United Nations Global Migration Database, [International migrant stock by destination and origin](#), Table 16

²⁰ United Nations Global Migration Database, [International migrant stock by destination and origin](#), Table 16

²¹ ONS, [What information is there on British migrants living in Europe?: Jan 2017](#)

Chart 18 shows United Nations estimates of the number of British migrants living in other EU28 countries in 2015. The EU countries with the largest British migrant populations were Spain (309,000), Ireland (255,000), France (185,000), Germany (103,000), and Italy (65,000). Three quarters (75%) of British migrants living in other EU countries were living in these top five countries.

7. Students in migration statistics

7.1 Are students included in official estimates of net migration?

Under the United Nations definition, a long-term international migrant is someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least one year. In the UK, estimates of long-term international migration are based on what respondents to the International Passenger Survey (IPS) say is their intended length of stay in the UK or abroad.

So students who come to the UK to study on courses lasting longer than one year are included in official estimates of net migration, while students studying on courses that are shorter than one year are typically not included, unless they expect to remain in the UK for other reasons.

Students who would not typically be counted in estimates of net migration include those who come to the UK on short-term study visas, which allow adult nationals of countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland to visit the UK for up to six months for short courses or academic research, or up to eleven months for English language courses.²² People coming to the UK on these short-term study visas are only counted as long-term international migrants in official migration estimates if their intended length of stay in the UK is longer than one year.

7.2 Could students be excluded from estimates of net migration?

Strictly speaking, students cannot be removed from estimates of net migration because the figure that results from excluding students is **not net migration**. Net migration is an objective demographic quantity, which represents the change in the population that is explained by migration.

The change in the size of a population over a given period is made up of two principal components:

- **Natural change:** the number of births minus the number of deaths
- **Net migration:** the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants

Population change in a given period is equal to natural change plus net migration during that period.²³

Because population estimates are produced annually, it makes sense to define migrants as people who change their country of usual residence for a period of at least one year, because that means people are

²² Home Office, [Short-term study visas](#)

²³ Statistical adjustments may also be included as a third component for reconciliation.

counted as members of the resident population of a country for the same number of years that they are usually resident in that country.

Removing specific groups from this time-based definition of migration breaks the mathematical relationships that underpin the population estimates and produces a figure that is not equal to net migration in the demographic sense.

7.3 Should students be included in the net migration target?

As Home Secretary, Theresa May made an explicit commitment to “reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands” in November 2010.²⁴ Since then there has been a debate about whether students should be included within that target.

Chart 9 on page 14 above shows estimates of immigration to the UK by main reason for migration from 1991 to 2017. As that chart shows “formal study” was the most common main reason for immigration during the period 2009-12. The reduction in the number of people migrating to the UK to study since then reflects a reduction in the number of Tier 4 student visas issued to students from outside the EEA and Switzerland.²⁵

In the year ending September 2017, around 578,000 people immigrated into the UK. Of these, around 163,000 (28%) migrated mainly for formal study. Students are therefore still a large component of immigration, even though the number of people migrating mainly for work is now larger.

Those who argue that students should be removed from the net migration target point out that while students are around a quarter of immigration, the public does not tend to think of students as migrants.²⁶

Conversely, those who argue that students should be included in the net migration target stress that it only makes sense to discount student migration in so far as students return to their home countries after completing their studies, and if everyone who migrated to the UK to study left the UK at the end of their studies, the contribution of these migrants to net migration would be zero over the long term.

²⁴ Home Secretary, HC Deb, 23 November 2010, col 169

²⁵ See Chart 10 on page 15.

²⁶ See [“Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding Public Opinion on Immigration in Britain”](#), Oxford Migration Observatory, 16 October 2011

7.4 How much do international students contribute to net migration?

The International Passenger Survey, which is the principal source of data used to produce the long-term international migration estimates, has asked migrants about their main reason for migration since 1991.

However, as a person who migrates to the UK in order to study may leave in order to work, or to join their family, it is not possible to estimate net migration of students using just this data.

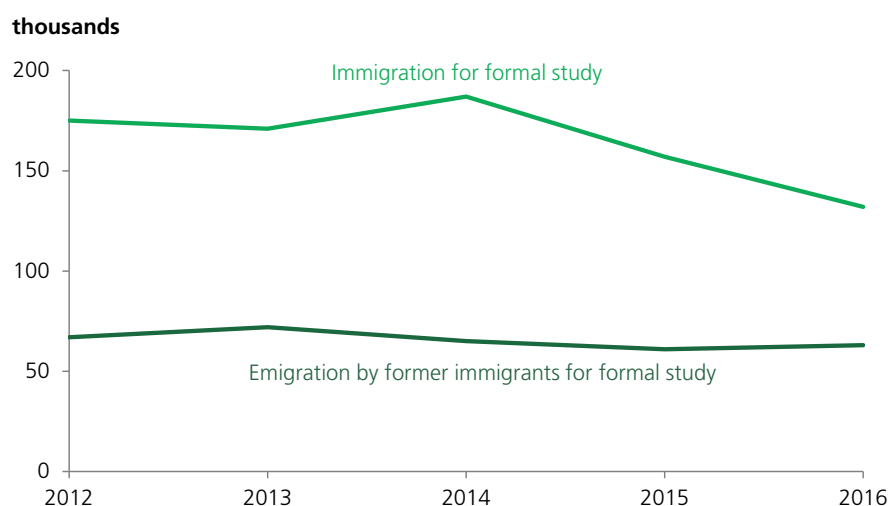
In 2012, the ONS added a question to the IPS asking all emigrants who were former immigrants their main reason for coming to the UK when they originally immigrated.

In principle, this makes it possible to estimate the net migration of people who come to the UK mainly to study. However, the estimates of emigration by former student immigrants are experimental, and **the ONS advises against using them to calculate net migration of international students.**²⁷

Chart 19 and Table 6 below show the currently available data on the immigration and emigration of people who come to the UK to study. These figures are estimated directly from the International Passenger Survey and differ slightly from the figures shown in Chart 9 as they have not been adjusted in light of other sources.

It is not possible to estimate the percentage of students who remain in the UK after completing their studies from this data, as the data on outflows relates to inflows in a different period.

Chart 19: Immigration and emigration of people who migrate to the UK to study



Notes: A. Figures on emigration by former immigrants whose original reason for immigration was formal study are experimental. B. Figures for 2016 are provisional.

Source: [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#), Tables 3 and 4

²⁷ ONS, [What's happening with international student migration?](#), 24 August 2017

Table 6: Immigration and emigration of people who migrate to the UK to study by nationality, 000s

Year	Immigration by people whose main reason for migration was formal study				Emigration by former immigrants whose main reason for immigration was formal study			
	British	EU	Non-EU	Total	British	EU	Non-EU	Total
2012	8	28	139	175	3	15	49	67
2013	9	40	122	171	4	18	50	72
2014	5	48	134	187	2	19	44	65
2015	9	36	112	157	4	15	43	61
2016	7	32	92	132	2	21	40	63

Note: Figures on emigration by former immigrants whose original reason for immigration was formal study are experimental.

Source: [ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, February 2018](#), Tables 3 and 4

But comparing the inflows and outflows of people migrating to the UK to study during the period for which data is available suggests that the number of emigrants who originally migrated to the UK in order to study was less than half the number of immigrants coming to study during the same period.

However, in August 2017 the Home Office published its first analysis of data from a new system of exit checks which was introduced in April 2015. This analysis focussed on the departure of international students from **non-EU countries**, who require a visa to study in the UK.²⁸

The exit checks data showed that the proportion of international student migrants from non-EU countries that left the UK after completing their studies was higher than the IPS implied.

According to an ONS analysis of the exit checks data:

- Exit checks data showed that 69% of the international students who immigrated on a long-term visa (12 months or more) and whose visa or extension of leave to study expired in 2016 to 2017, left the UK. A further 26% extended their visas to remain in the UK for further study or for other reasons such as work. The remainder have no identified record of departure or extension, or appeared to depart after their visa had expired.
- Exit checks data following up non-EU former students who departed in 2015 and 2016 indicated that 77% emigrated long-term after their studies (didn't return within 12 months); 15% returned on a short-term visit visa and departed again within 12 months; and 6% returned on a long-term visa (12 months or more) for work or other reasons.²⁹

²⁸ Home Office, [Second report on statistics being collected under the exit checks programme](#), 24 August 2017

²⁹ ONS, [What's happening with international student migration?](#), 24 August 2017

On the basis of this analysis, the ONS concluded:

We now know that there is strong evidence to suggest that the International Passenger Survey (IPS) is likely to underestimate student emigration, therefore any attempt to estimate the contribution that students make to net migration is likely to be an overestimate. There is evidence to suggest that for this particular group of immigrants, their intentions (as stated to the IPS) don't accurately reflect their actual migration patterns.³⁰

ONS said that while this research provides evidence that the IPS underestimates student emigration, it does not provide evidence to suggest these findings affect total net migration figures.

The ONS investigated why IPS estimates of emigration by former student immigrants may not properly capture emigration of international students.

In order for an IPS respondent who is leaving the UK to be counted as an emigrant who previously immigrated to study, they must:

- Have previously immigrated to study
- Have lived in the UK for twelve months or more
- Be leaving the UK for twelve months or more

The ONS identified three reasons why someone meeting these criteria may not be properly recorded as such by the IPS:

- 1 Students may be likely to overstate their intentions to return to the UK compared with actual behaviour.
- 2 When departing, students may say that they have been in the UK for a shorter time than they actually have.
- 3 Emigrating former students may state a different reason for previously immigrating to the UK.³¹

The ONS said it is undertaking further research to better understand student migration, and is looking at what administrative sources of data may be linked to provide further information on what students do after their studies.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

8. Appendix

8.1 Background to Table 1

In this table, estimates for the European Union do not include the UK, which is listed separately.

- The EU15 consists of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, the Irish Republic, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.
- The EU8 consists of the Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- EU Other consists of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, and Romania.
- The EU25 consists of the EU15 and EU8 groupings, plus Malta and Cyprus.
- The EU27 consists of the EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania.
- The EU28 consists of the EU27 plus Croatia.

A complete list of countries in each of the non-EU categories can be found in the ONS release on country groupings used in the International Passenger Survey.³²

8.2 Background to Tables 2-3

The estimates in these tables are based on the Annual Population Survey (APS) which combines data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) with various sample boosts. It should be noted that the LFS:

- Excludes students in halls who do not have a UK resident parent.
- Excludes people in most other types of communal establishments (e.g. hotels, boarding houses, hostels, mobile home sites, etc.)
- Is grossed to population estimates of those living in private households that only include migrants staying for 12 months or more. An adjustment is made for those who live in some NHS accommodation and halls of residence whose parents live in the UK. For this reason the sum of those born in the UK and outside the UK may not agree with the published population estimate.
- Records nationality only once. Where a respondent has dual nationality, the first-stated nationality is recorded.

³² ONS, [International Passenger Survey 3.25, country of birth - current and old country groupings, UK](#)

The LFS weighting does not adjust for non-response bias by nationality or country of birth, which means it does not assume people are more or less likely to participate in the survey depending on their nationality or country of birth.

In Table 2, the category for UK nationals consists of just British nationals, apart from in Northern Ireland where it consists of British and Irish nationals. People born in Northern Ireland have the right to British and/or Irish nationality. Therefore in this nationality table, British and Irish nationalities have been combined for Northern Ireland, and this estimate has been placed in the British column.

Estimates for the European Union do not include those of British nationality, who are shown separately in the tables. European Union estimates are shown for the EU15, the EU27, and the EU8.³³

³³ For a full explanation of these geographies, see Background to Table 1 above.

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