



BRIEFING PAPER

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Migration Statistics

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The underlying data to the charts in this briefing are available as an [Excel file](#).

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Summary

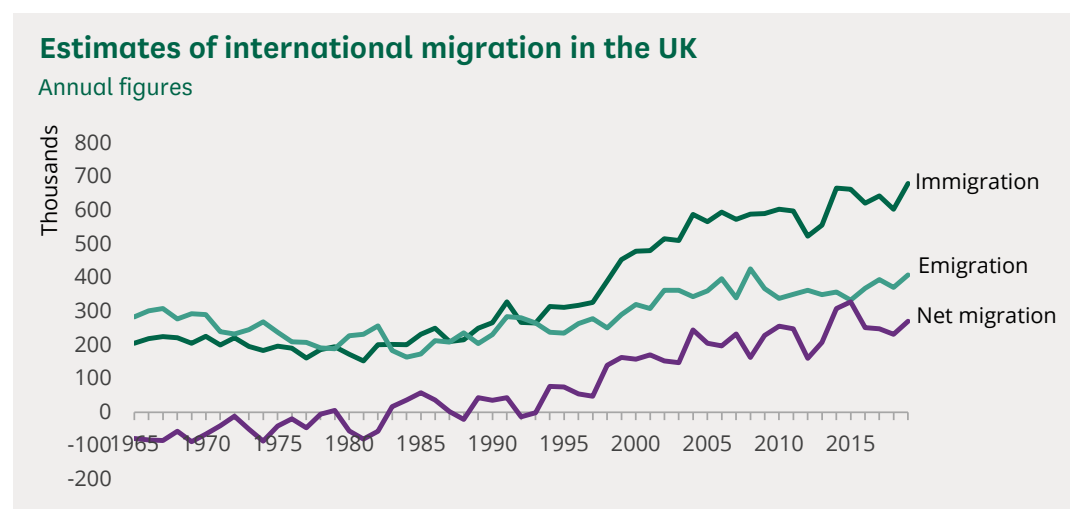
There are two main ways of measuring the migration of people: 1) flows across an international border, and 2) the stock of people living in a particular country who are not nationals of that country or who were born abroad. In the year ending **March 2020**:

- **715,000 people migrated into the UK** and **403,000 people emigrated from it**, leaving a **net migration figure of 363,000**. This represents the balance of long-term migrants moving in and out of the country.¹

In the year ending **December 2019**:

- 6.2 million people were living in the UK who had the nationality of a different country (9% of the total population)²,
- 3.7 million EU nationals (excluding UK) were living in the UK, and
- 994,000 UK nationals were living in EU countries, excluding Ireland.³

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.



Sources: ONS Annual Abstract of Statistics (various editions); [Long-Term International Migration Estimates, 2 series](#) (LTIM calendar year); [Migration Statistics Quarterly Report](#), August 2020

Notes: These are the latest, revised estimates and may be different to those published in previous versions.

This briefing paper 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 ONS, [Provisional long-term international migration estimates](#). Note: Long-term means that they migrated for a period of 12 months or more. The numbers do not add up due to rounding.

² This does not include people who had dual nationality where one of the nationalities was British.

³ There were 277,000 British-born people living in Ireland in 2017 but this number cannot be added to the EU total since that captures people with British nationality.

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 who is on the move and how national populations are changing due to the movement of people.

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.⁴

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 automatically became citizens of the country in which they now 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 answer may express a sense of cultural affiliation rather than their actual legal

⁴ This is the United Nations recommended definition of a migrant.

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 used by the United Nations (UN).⁵

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 come 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.⁶

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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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”.⁷ In this sense, asylum seekers can be counted as a subset of migrants and 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.⁸

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 the year ending March 2020, 44,574 people applied for asylum in the UK and 20,331 grants of asylum or leave to remain were made.⁹ In the same year, immigration was approximately 715,000, meaning that the number of asylum seekers was equivalent to around 6% of immigration.¹⁰

⁷ 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.

⁸ United Nations Glossary of Migration Related Terms, [Migrant/Migration](#)

⁹ This excludes refugees who were resettled directly from another country

¹⁰ These figures are calculated using the Home Office’s [Asylum statistics](#). Note that some new asylum claims will be made by people who have already been living in the UK for some time so are not necessarily ‘new’ immigrants in that year. The ONS produces a separate estimate of the percentage of immigration accounted for by asylum seekers [Table 1.01 Components and Adjustments](#) of its [Long-Term International Migration](#).

2. Flows to and from the UK

The most comprehensive estimates of long-term migration to and from the UK come from the ONS's long-term international migration (LTIM) series. These are official statistics which provide the headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration.

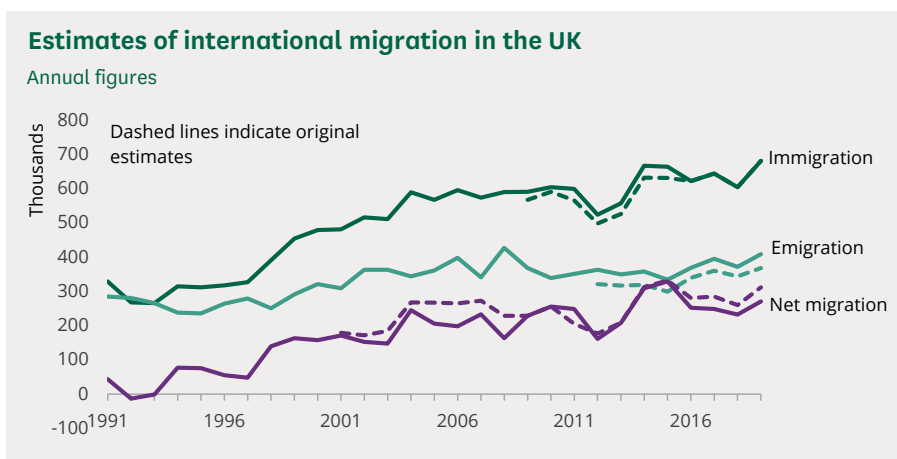
For this series, the ONS uses the UN recommended definition of a long-term international migrant. That is someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence.

2.1 Immigration, emigration, and net migration

The chart shows LTIM estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration in the UK from 1991 to 2020. During this period **immigration** increased 117%, rising from 329,000 in 1991 to **715,000 in the year ending March 2020**.

Emigration increased between 1991 and 2008, but subsequently fell to around 299,000 in 2015, compared with 285,000 in 1991. **In the year ending March 2020, emigration was 403,000.**

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 266,000 in the period 2015 to 2019. **Net migration was estimated to be 313,000 in the year ending March 2020.**



Link to [quarterly report](#) and [LTIM data](#).

Notes: a) The ONS revised net migration between 2001 and 2011 following the 2011 Census. However, it did not revise immigration or emigration, so these do not match up with net migration during that period.

b) Emigration and immigration were revised (where applicable) between 2009 and 2019; as a result, net migration was revised as well.

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.¹¹

2.2 Revisions to net migration

The ONS has made two major revisions to its original estimates in the last few years.

The first revision came after the 2011 Census, which showed that the population of England and Wales was 464,000 higher than expected.¹² The ONS concluded 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”.¹³

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. It could not revise immigration and emigration, so these do not sum to the revised net migration estimates between 2001 and 2011.

The second major revision came in August 2019 and consisted of two preliminary adjustments to the series since 2008. One was to increase the estimate of non-EU emigration during this period by around 25,000 per year. This was done after analysis of the Home Office’s exit checks data showed a higher proportion of non-EU students leaving after completing their studies than was estimated using the International Passenger Survey, even with its previous adjustments.

The other was to increase EU immigration by around 35,000 in each year between 2011 and 2016. The ONS did this following analysis of National Insurance Number (NiNo) registration and activity which suggested that just over half (53%) of non-UK arrivals during this period became long-term migrants. This proportion was then applied to the number of EU8 nationals registering for NiNos during that period and the resulting estimate of long-term migration was 48% higher than the number that had been estimated previously using the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Based on this, the ONS has adjusted the EU8 non-student inflow upwards by 48% between 2011 and 2016.

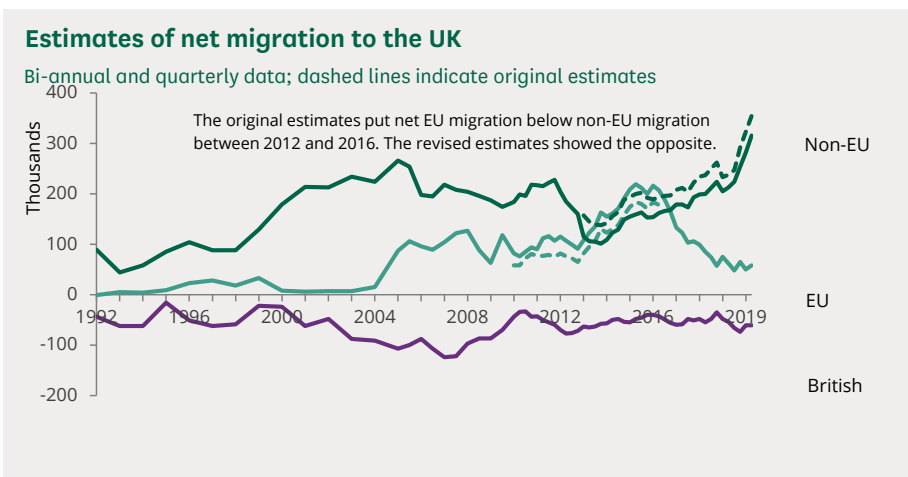
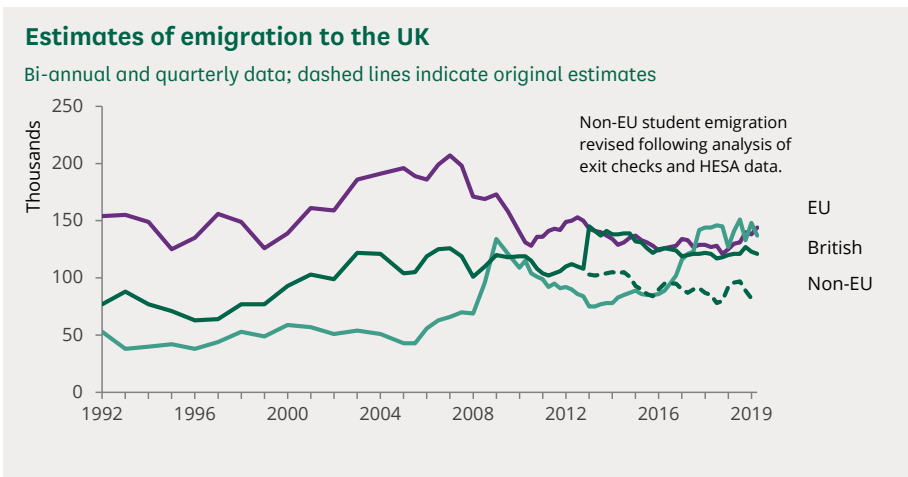
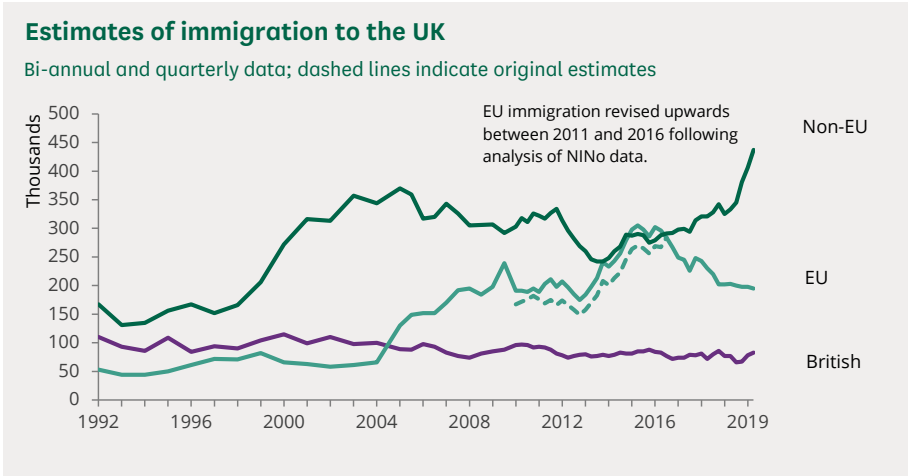
The recent revisions were made as part of the ONS’s programme of work to understand the difference between migration data sources. For more information see the ONS’s [overview of the transformation programme](#).

The charts on the next page show flows by nationality grouping, with the original estimates represented by dashed lines.

¹¹ Further information on the methodology for the LTIM and IPS estimates is available in the ONS guide: [Methodology to estimate Long-Term International Migration](#)

¹² This is based on the recorded number of births and deaths and the estimated level of net migration during the decade since the last Census in 2001.

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



Source: ONS, [Provisional long-term international migration estimates, year ending March 2020](#)

Notes: NiNo = National insurance number; HESA = Higher Education Statistics Agency.

In August 2019, the UK Statistics Authority reclassified the ONS's long-term international migration statistics as 'experimental statistics' where previously they had been 'national statistics'. Experimental statistics are not expected to have completed stringent checks for robustness and accuracy. The ONS itself suggested the re-designation so as to be able to make changes to the series more freely. The current revisions are 'cautious', meaning that the ONS acknowledges that they are likely only a partial correction to the inaccuracy of the IPS estimates.

Deputy National Statistician Iain Bell said of the change:

"We have confidence in our overall assessment of migration trends but recognise that development will be ongoing as we look to more data sources as set out in our workplan. We have asked the Office for Statistics Regulation to support our reclassification of international migration statistics to Experimental Statistics during this period of development and innovation to meet the public good." ([Statement from the ONS on the reclassification of international migration statistics](#), 21 August 2019)

The recent revisions came as part of the ONS's programme of work to transform migration statistics. The programme intends to reduce reliance on the IPS and to eventually use administrative data as the basis for migration estimates instead. The timetable of the transformation programme has been altered by the suspension of the IPS due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Library's Insight, '[Migration statistics: What is changing and why?](#)' explains further.

2.3 The net migration target

Under the 2010 Coalition Government, the Home Secretary announced a policy to reduce net migration "from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands" by the end of the 2010 Parliament.¹⁴ Following the 2015 General Election, then Prime Minister David Cameron said the new Conservative government still aimed to reduce net migration to this level.¹⁵

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".¹⁶

The 2018 Government white paper on the UK's future immigration system reaffirmed the policy to bring net migration down to below 100,000 people per year.

"The UK's future border and immigration system [...] must create strong borders, protect the vulnerable, enforce the rules and control the numbers and type of people coming to live and work here, in line with the continued commitment to reduce annual net migration to sustainable levels as set out in the Conservative Party manifesto, rather

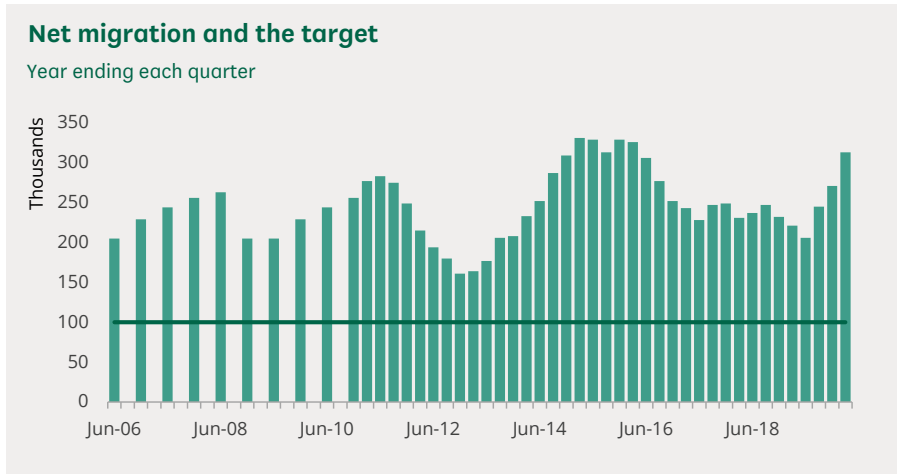
¹⁴ [HC Deb 23 Nov 2010 C169](#)

¹⁵ Prime Minister's Office, [PM speech on immigration](#), 21 May 2015

¹⁶ [HC Deb 20 Jul 2016 C826](#)

than the hundreds of thousands we have consistently seen over the last two decades.”¹⁷

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. The chart below shows net migration since 2010.



Source: ONS, [Provisional long-term international migration estimates, year ending March 2020](#)

LTIM estimates of net migration are produced quarterly, with detailed breakdowns of the figures produced for migration in each calendar year. The chart shows estimates of net migration in the years ending each quarter, from the year ending June 2006 to the year ending March 2020.¹⁸

Consistent estimates for years ending in each quarter 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 includes 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.

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

¹⁷ HM Government, [The UK’s future skills-based immigration system](#), p.8

¹⁸ These are the revised estimates, as explained in Section 2.1 above.

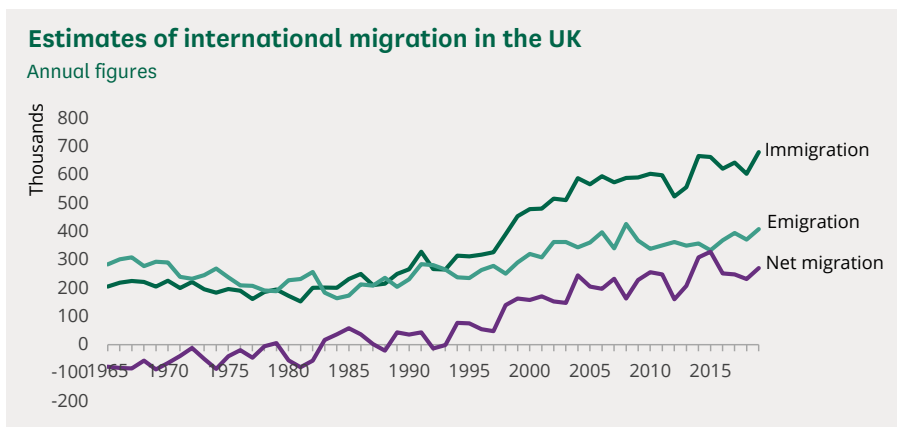
migration in any twelve-month period since the year ending December 1998. Compared with annual average net migration during the 2005 Parliament, net migration fell by around 93,000.

Since then, net migration has risen again, reaching over 300,000 in both of the calendar years 2014 and 2015. Net migration was 313,000 to the year ending March 2020.

2.4 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. 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 2.2 above).

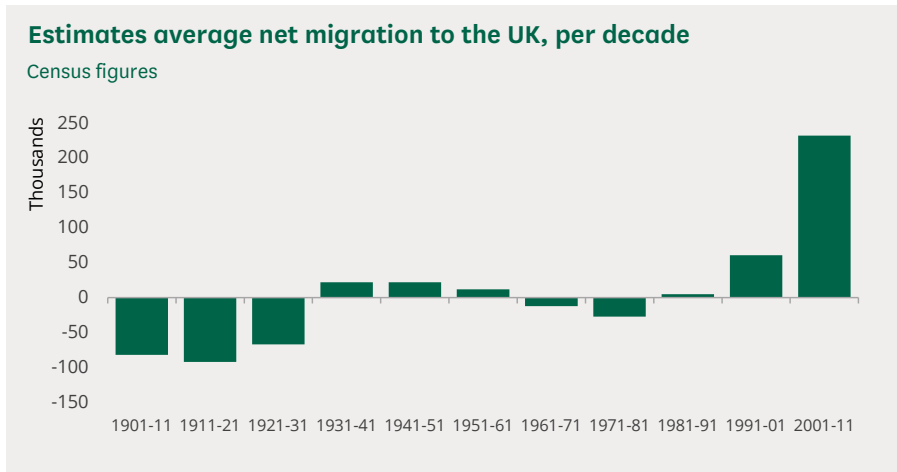
The chart shows IPS estimates of long-term international migration from 1964 to 2020. Between 1964 and 1983 the UK experienced a period of almost continuous net emigration, with net inward migration occurring only in 1979, when net migration was around 6,000.



Sources: ONS Annual Abstract of Statistics (various editions); [Long-Term International Migration Estimates, 2 series](#) (LTIM calendar year); [Provisional long-term international migration estimates, year ending March 2020](#)

Notes: These are the latest, revised estimates and may be different to those published in previous versions.

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.



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

Note: There was no census in 1941. ONS Abstract of statistics is not available online.

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.

2.5 Which countries do migrants come from?

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.

In the year ending December 2019, 11% of people migrating to the UK were British nationals, 29% were nationals of other EU countries, and 60% were nationals of non-EU countries. This means that nearly two-thirds of migrants entering the UK in that year were subject to immigration control.

The charts on **page 9** show trends in immigration and net migration by nationality from 1991 to 2019. 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).

Net inward migration of non-EU nationals fell during the first half of the 2010-15 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. It began to

increase after that, reaching 282,000 in the year ending December 2019. This was the highest level ever recorded.¹⁹

Net migration of EU nationals was 49,000 in the year ending September 2019. The previous quarter's estimate was 48,000, which was the lowest level recorded since 2003. The highest estimate of EU net migration was 219,000 in the year ending March 2015.²⁰

The ONS also produces estimates of migration by country of birth and last residence. The table below shows immigration to the UK in 2019 (the latest year for which data are available), broken down by these categories.

Immigration to the UK by country of last residence, country or birth, and nationality, 2019						
Thousands						
	Number			Percentage		
	Nationality	Country of birth	Country of last residence	Nationality	Country of birth	Country of last residence
United Kingdom	78	68	n/a	11%	10%	n/a
European Union	198	178	208	29%	26%	31%
EU15	114	95	131	17%	14%	19%
EU8	32	30	28	5%	4%	4%
EU2	50	52	46	7%	8%	7%
EU Other	1	1	3	0%	0%	0%
Non EU	406	435	473	60%	64%	69%
Other Europe	19	19	25	3%	3%	4%
Asia	286	299	310	42%	44%	46%
Rest of the World	100	116	139	15%	17%	20%
Total	681	681	681	100%	100%	100%

Source: ONS [Provisional long-term international migration estimates](#); Long-Term International Migration Estimates 2 series (LTIM calendar year): [tables 2.02 and 2.03](#).

Notes: 1. Figures for thousands are rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum due to independent rounding.

2. See Appendix 8.1 for country groupings.

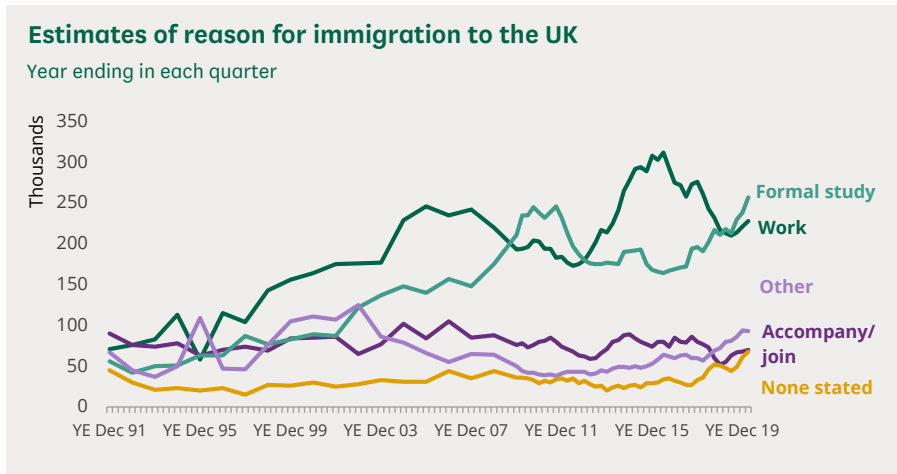
2.6 Why do people migrate to the UK?

In the year ending March 2020, formal study was the most common main reason for immigration (36%), while work was the second most common main reason (32%).

The chart below shows ONS estimates of immigration broken down by main reason for immigration. The fall in work-related migration since June 2016 is accounted for by a fall in EU nationals migrating to look for work.

¹⁹ Please note that in 2019 the non-EU net migration estimates from 2012 onwards were revised downwards. Before this revision, the estimates of non-EU migration were around 30,000 higher in each year.

²⁰ The EU net migration estimates were also revised in 2019, with the result that the estimates for the period 2009-2016 rose.

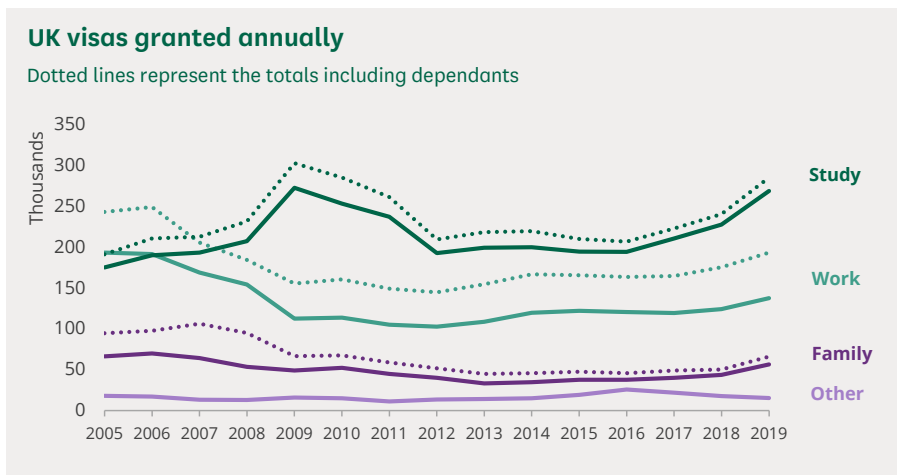


Note: Years ending each quarter. Link to [Provisional long-term international migration estimates, year ending March 2020](#) and [LTIM data](#).

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.

Another way of capturing reason for migration is to look at visa statistics, although these only capture non-EU and non-British migration (around half of all long-term migration to the UK).

The chart below shows longer-term visas issued by broad category in each year from 2005 to 2019. These are visas granted to nationals of countries outside the EEA and Switzerland.²¹



Sources: Home Office, [Immigration statistics quarterly September 2020](#): tables Vis_D02, Asy_D02, Asy_D04.

Notes: a) Excludes 'Other- temporary (mainly tourist visas)' and 'Student visitor/ Short-term study'.

b) Other includes grants of asylum and resettled persons, as well as 'Other temporary visas'.

These figures exclude short-term visas such as visitor visas, transit visas, and other temporary visas. Similarly, the category for "study" excludes

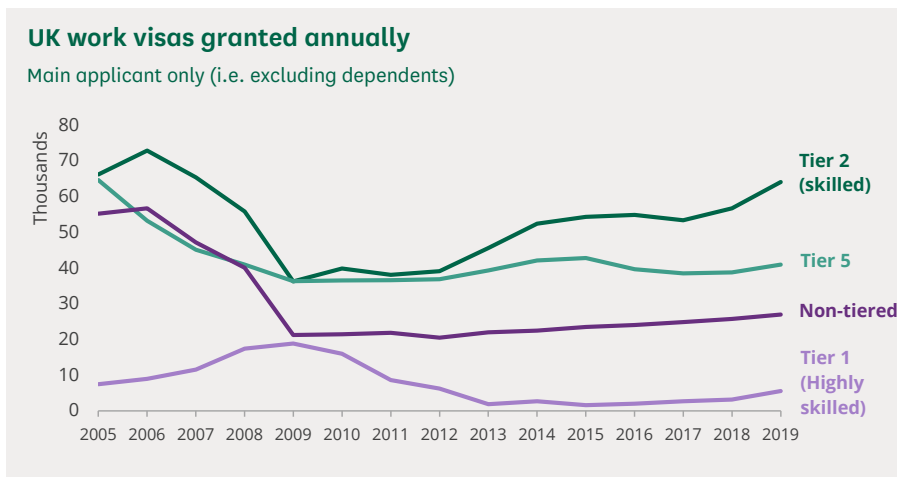
²¹ Section 7 contains more information about students in migration statistics.

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.²²

The chart shows visas in the work category broken down by the tiers of the ‘points-based system’ (or their pre-tiered system equivalent categories) from 2005 to 2019. Note that the statistics still use the terminology ‘points-based system’ to refer to the tiered visa system introduced in 2008. The visa tiers that are still open cannot currently be said to be ‘points-based’ in terms of how applicants are chosen. In February 2020, the Government announced its intention to introduce a true ‘points-based’ element of selection into the Tier 2 (General).²³



Sources: Home Office, Immigration statistics quarterly December 2019: [Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes](#) table Vis_D02; [Immigration statistics quarterly September 2020](#), tables vi_06_q and vi_06_q_w.

Notes: The data up to 2019 Q1 is from the previous version of the Immigration statistics quarterly report, last released June 2019. In this previous format, Tiers of visa also included their pre-tiered system equivalent.

In order to achieve continuity, the following categories in the current statistics have been aggregated:

* Tier 1 = 'Tier 1 (High value)', 'International Graduate Scheme', and 'ECAA Business Person';

²² 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](#)

²³ Home Office, [The UK's points-based immigration system: policy statement](#), 19 February 2020

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- * Tier 2 = 'Tier 2 (Skilled)', 'Ministers of religion or missionary', and 'Work Permit Holders';
- * Tier 5 = 'Tier 5 (Youth mobility and temporary worker)', 'Working holidaymakers', 'Religious workers', and 'Private servants in Diplomatic Households';
- * Non-tiered = 'Domestic workers in Private Households', 'Innovator', 'Start-up', 'UK Ancestry', and 'Other permit free employment'. Non-tiered mainly consists of Domestic workers in private households visas, which are valid for six months, and UK Ancestry visas, which are valid for 5 years.

Tier 2 visas are the largest category of work visas, with around 114,000 work visas granted to main applicants and dependants in 2019. These are visas for sponsored skilled workers with a job offer.

Tier 5 visas are the second largest category, with around 44,000 visas (including dependents) granted in 2019. 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. This is the smallest broad category of work visa, with around 9,000 visas granted in 2019.²⁴

²⁴ 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 foreign-born people living in the UK. In 2019 there were approximately **6.2 million people with non-British nationality living in the UK** and **9.5 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.

In 2019 there were slightly more migrants with nationality of an EU country (besides the UK) than there were people who were born in an EU country. This is a change from two years previously, when this pattern was observed only for EU8 countries. These figures could suggest a rise in people acquiring the nationality of another EU country while continuing to live in the UK.

There are many more people in the UK who were born in a non-EU country (5.8 million) than there are nationals of non-EU countries (2.5 million).

The UK's migrant population is concentrated in London. Around 35% of people living in the UK who were born abroad live in the capital city. Similarly, around 37% 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 South East (13.4%), the West Midlands (13.9%), the East (12.9%), and the East Midlands (12.7%). In each of these regions the proportion of people born abroad was lower than for England as a whole (15.5%), which is skewed 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 (6.5%), Northern Ireland (7.0%), and Scotland (9.3%).

Estimated resident population of the UK, by country of birth, 2019

Thousands

Nation/Region	Number					%				
	UK	EU27	EU14	EU8	Non-EU	UK	EU27	EU14	EU8	Non-EU
England	46,977	3,214	1,487	1,113	5,434	84%	6%	3%	2%	10%
North East	2,469	55	32	16	97	94%	2%	1%	1%	4%
North West	6,509	258	115	111	453	90%	4%	2%	2%	6%
Yorkshire & Hum.	4,903	209	76	103	313	90%	4%	1%	2%	6%
East Midlands	4,149	275	74	146	329	87%	6%	2%	3%	7%
West Midlands	5,030	294	108	123	521	86%	5%	2%	2%	9%
East	5,393	376	156	158	420	87%	6%	3%	3%	7%
London	5,659	1,055	552	241	2,262	63%	12%	6%	3%	25%
South East	7,848	452	252	132	763	87%	5%	3%	1%	8%
South West	5,017	239	123	84	277	91%	4%	2%	2%	5%
Wales	2,914	80	40	30	121	94%	3%	1%	1%	4%
Scotland	4,881	235	91	121	267	91%	4%	2%	2%	5%
Northern Ireland	1,730	87	44	38	44	93%	5%	2%	2%	2%
United Kingdom	56,502	3,616	1,662	1,303	5,866	86%	5%	3%	2%	9%

Estimated resident population of the UK, by nationality, 2019

Thousands

Nation/Region	Number					Percentage				
	British	EU27	EU14	EU8	Non-EU	British	EU27	EU14	EU8	Non-EU
England	50,040	3,323	1,537	1,221	2,264	90%	6%	3%	2%	4%
North East	2,520	45	23	17	56	96%	2%	1%	1%	2%
North West	6,734	264	115	118	221	93%	4%	2%	2%	3%
Yorks. & Humb.	5,065	205	59	116	155	93%	4%	1%	2%	3%
East Midlands	4,320	304	82	167	129	91%	6%	2%	4%	3%
West Midlands	5,293	315	115	137	237	91%	5%	2%	2%	4%
East	5,619	381	144	180	188	91%	6%	2%	3%	3%
London	6,972	1,146	663	246	862	78%	13%	7%	3%	10%
South East	8,326	443	239	146	293	92%	5%	3%	2%	3%
South West	5,191	220	98	93	122	94%	4%	2%	2%	2%
Wales	2,975	74	31	35	65	96%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Scotland	4,995	234	79	134	154	93%	4%	1%	2%	3%
Northern Ireland	1,749	84	39	39	28	94%	5%	2%	2%	2%
United Kingdom	59,759	3,715	1,687	1,429	2,511	91%	6%	3%	2%	4%

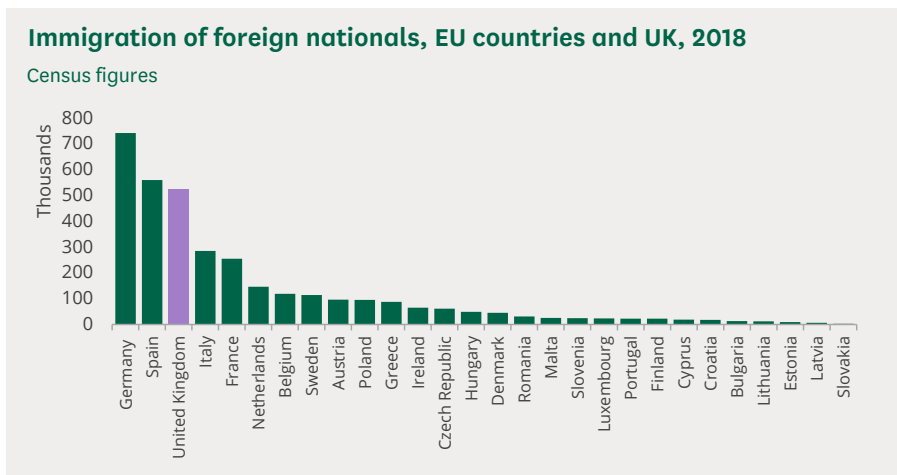
Source: [ONS Population by Country of Birth and Nationality December 2019](#)

Note: Figures may not sum due to independent rounding. See 'Background to Tables in Section 3' in the Appendix.

4. Flows to and from EU countries

Data that allow for international comparisons of migration flows in European Union countries are 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 2008.²⁵ 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.²⁶



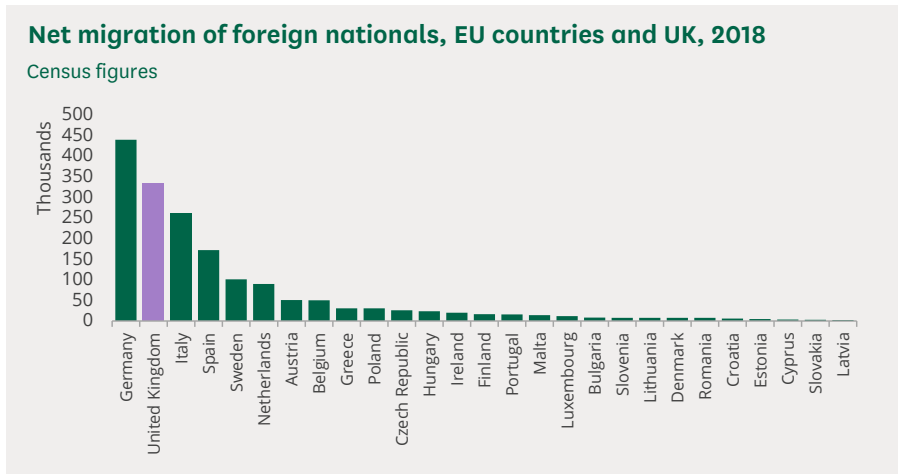
Source: Eurostat, [Immigration by sex, age group and citizenship](#) [migr_imm1ctz]

The United Kingdom is among the countries with the largest inflows of foreign nationals, but it is not unique. In 2018, the EU countries with the largest inflows of foreign nationals were Germany (743,000), Spain (560,000), the UK (527,000), Italy (286,000) and France (255,000).

In terms of net migration (those arriving minus those leaving) the countries with the largest net inflows of foreign nationals were Germany (440,000), the UK (333,000), Italy (261,000) and Spain (172,000). The UK is one of five EU countries with net inward migration of foreign nationals in the hundreds of thousands.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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](#).



Source: Eurostat, Immigration by sex, age group and citizenship [[migr_imm1ctz](#)] and Emigration by sex, age group and citizenship [[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. It fell in 2018 to immigration of 743,000 and net migration of 440,000, less than half of the 2015 figure.

5. Migrants living in EU countries

The table below shows Eurostat estimates of the number foreign national and foreign born migrants living in EU28 countries on 1 January 2019. The figures are presented both as counts and as a percentage of each country's total population.²⁷

Foreign national and foreign-born population of EU countries, as at 1 January 2019

Thousands

	FOREIGN NATIONAL		FOREIGN BORN		Total
	Number	As % of population	Number	As % of population	
Austria	1,439	16%	1,723	19%	8,859
Belgium	1,414	12%	1,968	17%	11,456
Bulgaria	104	1%	172	2%	7,000
Croatia	69	2%	527	13%	4,076
Cyprus	156	18%	186	21%	876
Czechia	557	5%	507	5%	10,650
Denmark	526	9%	708	12%	5,806
Estonia	200	15%	198	15%	1,325
Finland	258	5%	377	7%	5,518
France	4,883	7%	8,355	12%	67,013
Germany	10,089	12%	14,880	18%	83,019
Greece	832	8%	1,307	12%	10,725
Hungary	181	2%	565	6%	9,773
Ireland	612	12%	844	17%	4,904
Italy	5,256	9%	6,298	10%	60,360
Latvia	267	14%	242	13%	1,920
Lithuania	47	2%	138	5%	2,794
Luxembourg	291	47%	291	47%	614
Malta	83	17%	100	20%	494
Netherlands	1,111	6%	2,299	13%	17,282
Poland	290	1%	761	2%	37,973
Portugal	480	5%	959	9%	10,277
Romania	121	1%	612	3%	19,414
Slovakia	76	1%	194	4%	5,450
Slovenia	138	7%	265	13%	2,081
Spain	4,840	10%	6,539	14%	46,937
Sweden	932	9%	1,954	19%	10,230
UK	6,200	9%	9,469	14%	66,647

Link to sources: [migr_pop1ctz](#) and [migr_pop3ctb](#)

Notes: Estimates are as at 1 Jan 2019. Figures for the UK therefore differ slightly from ONS figures which are an average for the whole of 2018.

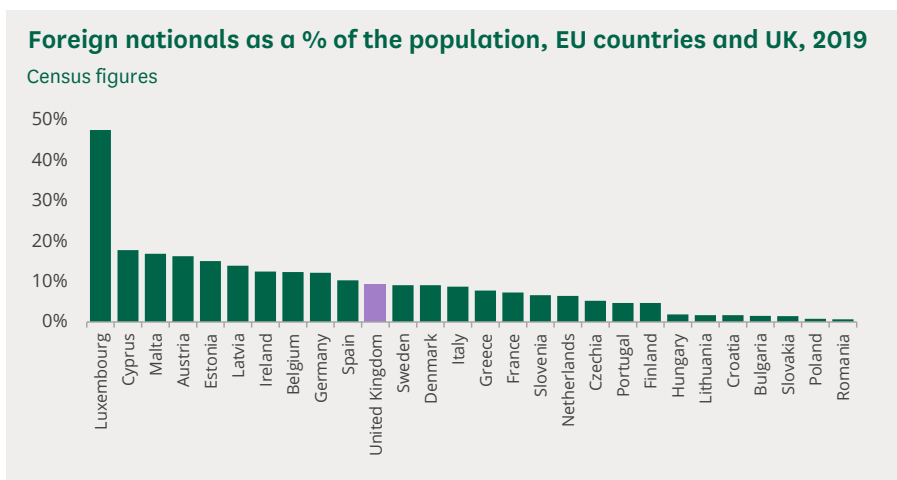
The EU countries with the largest number of foreign national residents in January 2015 were Germany (10.1 million), the UK (6.2 million), Italy (5.3 million), France (4.9 million), and Spain (4.8 million).

²⁷ Note that these are estimates of the size of each country's migrant population on 1 Jan 2019, so the estimates given here for the UK differs slightly from those provided in Section 3.

The countries with the largest number of foreign born residents were Germany (14.9 million), the UK (9.5 million), France (8.4 million), Spain (6.5 million), and Italy (6.3 million).

The countries with the smallest foreign national population were Lithuania (47,000), Croatia (69,000), and Slovakia (76,000); while the countries with the smallest foreign born populations were Malta (100,000), Lithuania (138,000), and Bulgaria (172,000).

When measured as a proportion of the total population, foreign nationals were 9.3% of the UK population, which places the UK 11th among the 28 EU countries on this measure. Foreign born people were 14.2% of the UK population, which places the UK 10th among EU countries on this measure.



Source: Eurostat, [Population by sex, age group and country of birth](#) [migr_pop3ctb] and [Population by sex, age group and citizenship](#) [migr_pop1ctz]

Notes: Figure for the UK differs slightly from ONS figures which are an average for the whole of 2018.

The countries with the largest number of foreign nationals as a proportion of the population were Luxembourg (47%), Cyprus (18%), Malta (17%), and Austria (16%). Those with the smallest proportion of foreign nationals were Romania (0.6%), Poland (0.8%), Bulgaria (1.4%), and Slovakia (1.4%).

The countries with the largest number of foreign-born residents as a proportion of the population were Luxembourg (47%), Cyprus (21%), Malta (20%), and Austria (19%). Those with the smallest proportion were Poland (2%), Bulgaria (2.5%), Romania (3%), and Slovakia (4%).

6. Migration between the UK and EU countries

How many EU migrants are living in the UK, and how does this compare with the number of British migrants living in EU countries? The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 but most of the figures in this report are from the time when it was still a Member State.

The available data suggests that in **2017** there were around **785,000** British nationals living in other EU countries excluding Ireland, while in 2019 there were around **3.7 million** EU nationals living in the UK.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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

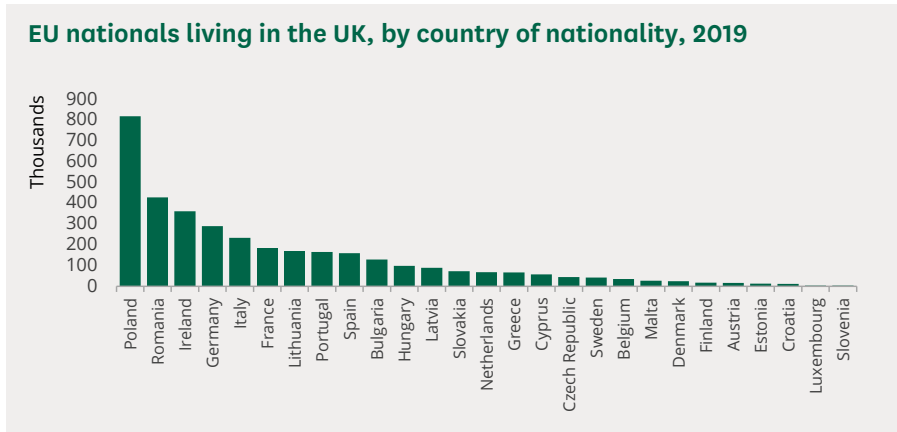
The most recent estimates of the EU migrant population of the UK are available from the Labour Force Survey and are published in an ONS annual statistical release on ‘Population by Country of Birth and Nationality’. According to these figures, in 2019 there were around **3.62 million** people born in other EU countries living in the UK, and around **3.72 million** people who were nationals of other EU countries living in the UK.³⁰

²⁸ The ONS has a different method of estimating the British population in Ireland, since migration between the two countries is complex, and the latest estimate is given in section 6.2.

²⁹ ONS, [2011 Census. Key Statistics and Quick Statistics for local authorities in the United Kingdom - Part 1](#), Table QS203UK

³⁰ ONS, [Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, December 2019](#), Tables 1.1 and 2.1

The chart shows the estimated number of EU nationals living in the UK in 2019 broken down by nationality. The EU countries with the largest number of nationals living in the UK were Poland (818,000), Romania (427,000), Ireland (360,000), Germany (289,000), and Italy (233,000).



Source: ONS, [Population by country of birth and nationality](#), December 2019: 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, such as hostels and institutions.

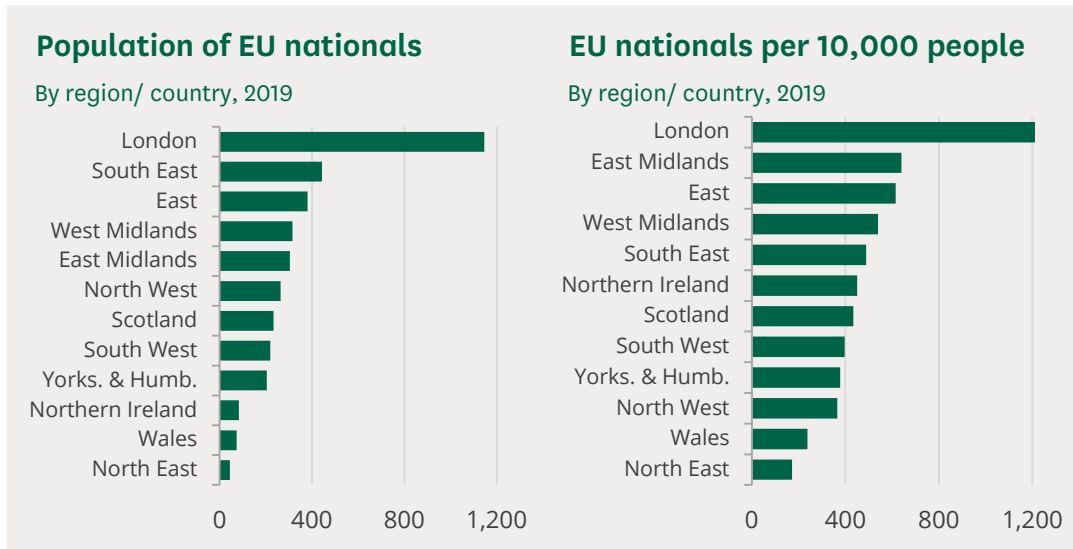
One feature of the LFS is that respondents do not need to be usually resident at the time they complete the survey. However, the sample is weighted to represent just the usually resident population. In that sense LFS estimates do not reflect short-term migration.

6.2 Where do EU nationals live in the UK?

The chart shows the estimated number of EU nationals living in each country and region of the UK in 2019. Around a third (31%) of EU nationals living in the UK were living in London, which was around 1.1 million people.

Outside London, the three regions with the largest EU national populations were the South East (443,000), the East of England (381,000), and the West Midlands (315,000).

A different picture emerges when taking into account the different population sizes of the UK's regions. London still had the largest number of EU nationals per 10,000 inhabitants (1,275) but it was followed by the East Midlands (640 per 10,000), the East of England (615 per 10,000), and the West Midlands (539 per 10,000).



Source: [ONS, Population by Country of Birth and Nationality, 2019, Table 2.1](#)

6.3 What do EU migrants do for a living?

Data from the LFS can be used to generate a picture of the economic activity of EU migrants in the UK. In the third quarter of 2020, the LFS data indicates that 52% of EU nationals in the UK were employees, which is higher than the figure for British nationals in the UK (42%). EU migrants were also more likely to be self-employed (8%) than British nationals (7%).

The table shows the full breakdown for the population, as estimated using the LFS. Note that the estimated population size is different to that estimated in the ONS’s ‘Population by Country of Birth and Nationality’ because it covers a different time period. Please also note that these figures, from Q3 2020, represent the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Basic economic activity of EU nationals in the UK				
Thousands, Q3 2020				
Basic economic activity	EU citizens in the UK		UK population	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Employee	1,829	52%	27,915	42%
Self-employed	291	8%	4,539	7%
Government employment & training	5	0%	36	0%
Unpaid family worker	6	0%	97	0%
ILO unemployed ^(b)	106	3%	1,588	2%
Inactive, seeking work	18	0%	240	0%
Inactive, not seeking, would like work	114	3%	1,891	3%
Inactive, not seeking, would not like work ^(c)	512	14%	17,298	26%
Under 16	669	19%	12,809	19%
Total	3,550	100%	66,412	100%

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey, Q3 2020: variable INECAC05























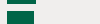

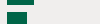

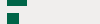

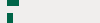

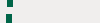

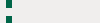

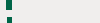

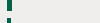

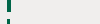

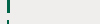

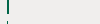

Notes: a) EU citizens does not include UK citizens.

b) An individual is classified as 'ILO unemployed' if they are aged 16 or over and they haven't met the criteria for Employee, Self-employed, Government Employment & training scheme or unpaid family worker categories AND they can start work within the next two weeks AND any of the following is true: i) they were looking for paid work in last four weeks, ii) they were looking for a place on a Government scheme in the last four weeks, iii) they are temporary away from paid work as they are waiting to take up new job/business already obtained iv) they are waiting to take up job. (LFS User Guide Volume 4)

c) The majority in this category are looking after a family/ home or retired.

In which industries do EU nationals work?

The table below shows estimates of the number of EU migrants employed in the UK by the industry sector of their main job. These estimates are taken from the quarterly Labour Force Survey for Q3 2020.

Sector of employment, EU nationals in the UK				
Thousands, Q3 2020				
Sector	EU citizens in the UK		UK population	
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	256		3,993	
Health and social work	239		4,448	
Manufacturing	225		2,783	
Accommodation and food services	206		1,565	
Education	195		3,489	
Construction	154		2,190	
Transport and storage	152		1,547	
Prof, scientific, technical activ.	143		2,631	
Admin and support services	123		1,460	
Information and communication	117		1,550	
Financial and insurance activities	78		1,360	
Public admin and defence	71		2,317	
Other service activities	52		889	
Arts, entertainment and recreation	33		856	
Water supply, sewerage, waste	15		230	
Extraterritorial organisations	14		64	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	13		287	
Electricity, gas, air cond supply	12		187	
Real estate activities	11		401	
Mining and quarrying	6		119	
Households as employers	5		38	
No answer	3		49	
Total	2,120	100%	32,454	100%

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey, Q3 2020: variable INDS07M

Note: EU citizens does not include UK citizens. Main sector is shown, although individuals may work in multiple sectors. Employed and self-employed only are shown.

In this quarter there were an estimated 2.1 million EU nationals working in the UK. Of these, around 256,000 were working in wholesale, retail, or repair of vehicles, 239,000 were working in health and social work, 225,000 were working in manufacturing, 206,000 were working in accommodation and food services, and 195,000 were working in education.

6.4 How many British migrants live in other EU countries?

Office for National Statistics estimates

In response to rising interest in migration between the UK and the EU, the ONS in 2017 began to publish newly compiled estimates of the number of British nationals living in other EU countries.

It estimated that **in 2011**, 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 2011.³¹

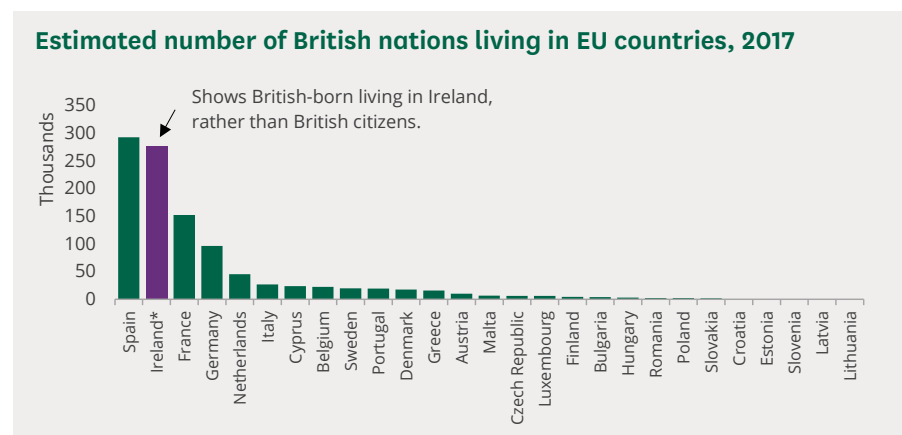
These figures are based on the 2010 to 2011 round of censuses in Europe and other data from European statistical offices.

In April 2018, the ONS produced updated estimates using Eurostat's European Labour Force Survey (ELFS).

These estimates do not include Ireland, which was excluded because

"...citizenship is not a suitable definition and so the data would not be comparable. Irish and British citizenships are complex. There are many dual nationals and there are further, unknown, numbers of those who have rights to citizenship in both countries but have not yet exercised one of them. There have also been increases in applications for Irish citizenship of which it is not yet possible to take account in the available data."³²

These figures show that **in 2017, 785,000 British nationals were living in other EU countries excluding Ireland**.³³ In a separate publication, the ONS estimated that there were 277,200 people born in the UK and resident in Ireland in 2016.³⁴ These data are presented on the chart below.



Source: ONS [Number of British citizens resident in EU countries 2017](#); ONS [Living abroad: dynamics of migration between the UK and Ireland](#).

Notes: For Greece there are no 2017 ELFS data, so 2016 ELFS data have been used. For Malta and Cyprus, census data from 2011 have been used.

Spain had the highest number of British nationals (293,500), followed by France (152,900), Germany (96,500), and the Netherlands (45,300). The ONS has not yet estimated the number of British nationals in Ireland although the number of British-born people living in Ireland (277,200) position it in second place among EU countries.

United Nations estimates for 2019

An alternative source of estimates for the number of British migrants living in other EU countries is the United Nations Global Migration

³¹ ONS, [What information is there on British migrants living in Europe?: Jan 2017](#)

³² ONS, [Living abroad: dynamics of migration between the UK and Ireland](#)

³³ ONS, [Living abroad: British residents living in the EU: April 2018](#)

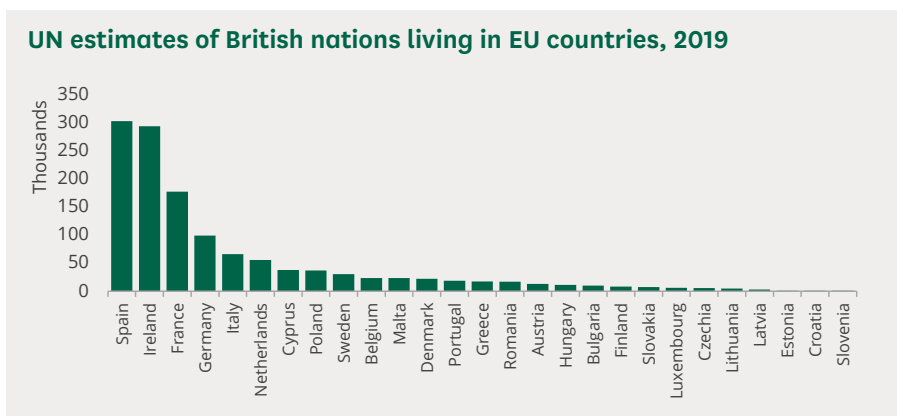
³⁴ ONS, [Living abroad: dynamics of migration between the UK and Ireland](#)

Database. According to this data, there were an estimated **1.29 million British migrants** living in EU countries, or 994,000 excluding Ireland, in 2019.³⁵

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. This is supplemented with information from population registers and nationally representative surveys.

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 EU countries.



Source: United Nations Global Migration Database, [Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin, 2019](#)

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

The chart shows United Nations estimates of the number of British migrants living in other EU28 countries in 2019. The EU countries with the largest British migrant populations were Spain (302,000), Ireland (293,000), France (177,000), Germany (99,000), and Italy (66,000). Almost three quarters (72%) of British migrants living in other EU countries were living in these top five countries.

³⁵ United Nations Global Migration Database, [International migrant stock by destination and origin](#)

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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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

³⁶ Home Office, [Short-term study visas](#)

³⁷ 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?

In November 2010, then Home Secretary, Theresa May made an explicit commitment to “reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands”.³⁸ Since then there has been a debate about whether students should be included within that target.

The chart in Section 2.6 shows estimates of immigration to the UK by main reason for migration from 1991 to 2019. 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.

In 2019, around 681,000 people migrated into the UK. Of these, around 238,000 (36%) migrated mainly for formal study. Since 2018, formal study has again been the most common reason for people to migrate to the UK.

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.³⁹

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.

³⁸ Home Secretary, HC Deb, 23 November 2010, col 169

³⁹ 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.

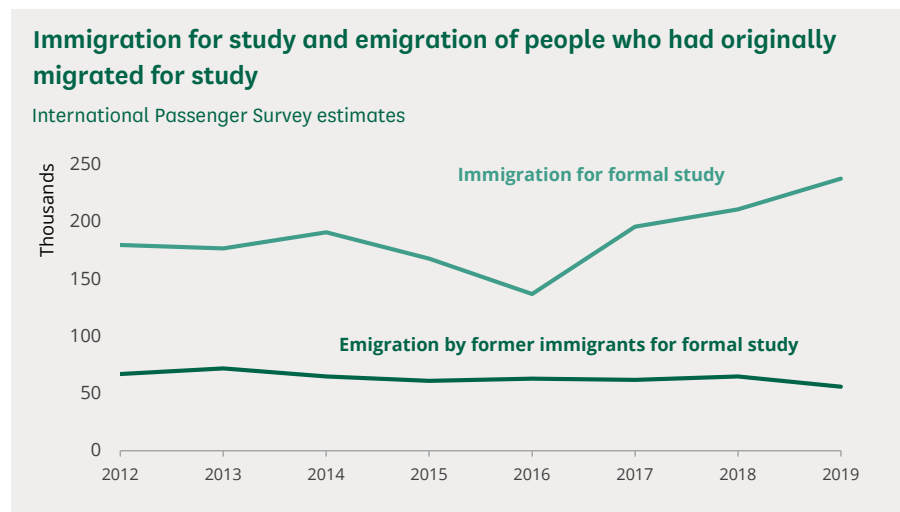
However, as a person who migrates to the UK in order to study may leave in order to work, or to join their family, it is not possible to estimate net migration of students using just this data.

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.**⁴⁰

The chart below shows 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 Section 2.6 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.



Source: ONS, [International Passenger Survey 3.21, previous main reason for immigration by main reason for emigration, UK](#); Provisional LTIM August 2020.

Note: these are designated as experimental statistics.

But comparing the inflows and outflows of people migrating to the UK to study during the period for which data are available suggests that the number of emigrants who originally migrated to the UK in order to

⁴⁰ ONS, [What's happening with international student migration?](#), 24 August 2017

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.⁴¹

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 95% of the international students who immigrated on a long-term visa (12 months or more) either left before the expiry of their visa (69% of the total) or extended their visa to remain in the UK for further study or work (26% of the total). 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.⁴²

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.⁴³

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

⁴¹ Home Office, [Second report on statistics being collected under the exit checks programme](#), 24 August 2017

⁴² ONS, [What's happening with international student migration?](#), 24 August 2017

⁴³ *Ibid.*

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.⁴⁴

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.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

8. Appendix

8.1 Background to tables in Section 2.5 and Section 3

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 EU27 consists of the EU minus the UK.

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.⁴⁵

8.2 Background to tables in Section 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.

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

⁴⁵ ONS, [International Passenger Survey 3.25, country of birth - current and old country groupings, UK](#)

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 EU8.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ For a full explanation of these geographies, see Background to tables in Section 2.5 above.

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