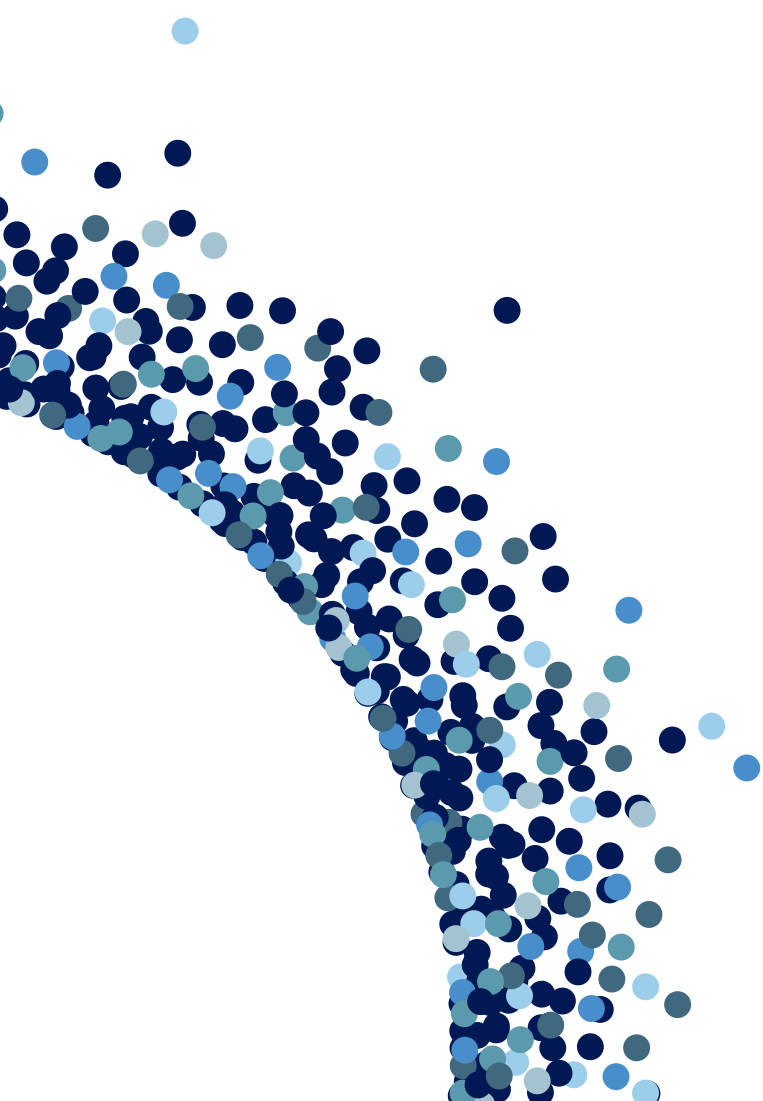




COMMENTARY

The EU shuffle: How does freedom of movement in the EU affect migration to and from the UK?



PUBLISHED: 29/06/2012



www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

In recent weeks EU migration to the UK has become – once again – a political hot potato. Home Secretary Theresa May suggested that the UK was considering “contingency plans” to deal with increased immigration from the European Union in the event of significant problems in the Eurozone and Labour leader Ed Miliband focused on the EU in a speech last week on immigration.

Concerns in Britain about European immigration are not new. As a member of the EU, Britain has signed-up to the freedom of movement directive, which allows citizens of the UK to live and work in other EU countries and citizens of most other EU countries to live and work in the UK without any restrictions. The accession of several eastern European states to the EU in 2004 resulted in a substantial increase in European immigration to the UK and many negative headlines.

But how exactly does EU citizens’ right to freedom of movement affect migration to and from the UK? How does the number of British citizens moving to other EU countries compare to the number of other EU citizens moving to the UK? And what contribution does net-migration of EU citizens between Britain and other EU countries make to overall net-migration in the UK?

The answers to these questions are more complex than commonly suggested in public debates. For example, in April 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron highlighted provisional data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showing that in 2010 “net migration to our country from EU nationals was just 27,000” – which Mr Cameron defined as “a small proportion of overall net migration.” While this was technically correct, the data can be read in different ways, which can lead to different understandings of how freedom of movement around the EU affects overall UK net migration.

To understand these issues properly we need to look both at flows of British and other EU migrants to and from the UK, and at the stocks of EU migrants in Britain and of UK citizens in other EU member states.

Migration of UK citizens to other EU member states, and of other EU citizens (excl. British) to the UK

Dealing first with flows, Figure 1 shows the migration flows of EU citizens (excluding British citizens) to the UK, and of UK citizens from Britain to other EU countries. In the absence of the right to free movement, these migration flows would be restricted by immigration controls in the UK and other EU countries.

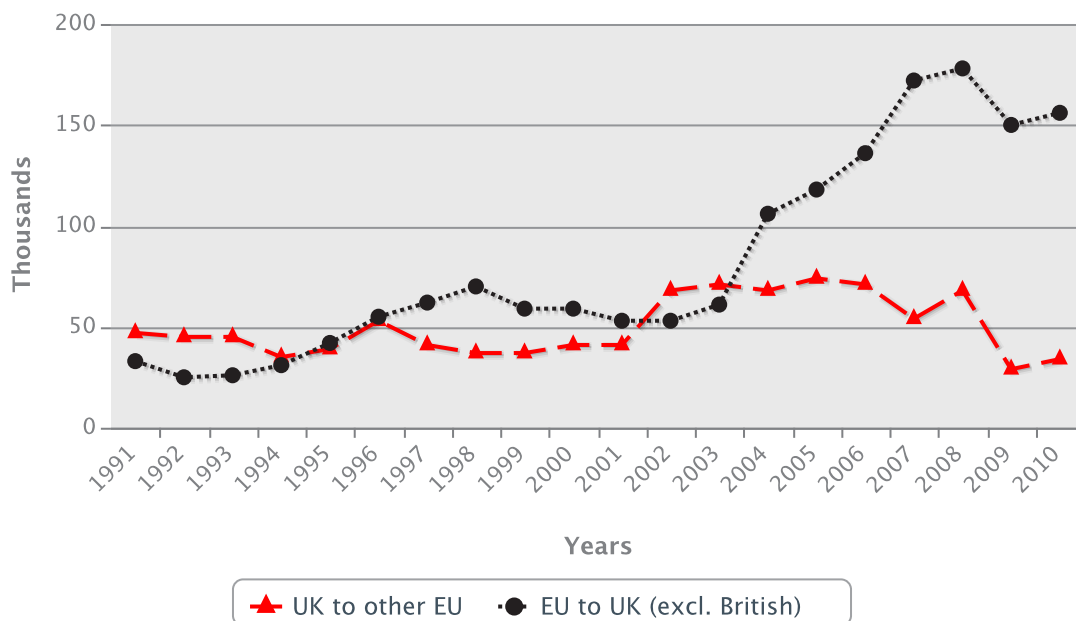
Figure 1 illustrates that during the 1990s and early 2000s the number of EU citizens – excluding British – coming to the UK was broadly similar to the number of UK citizens moving to other EU countries. However, this changed in 2004 when eight East European countries – the so-called A8 countries – joined the EU.

Since 2004 considerably more EU migrants have arrived in Britain annually than British citizens have moved from Britain to the (enlarged) EU. In 2010, 156,000 EU migrants came to the UK, while 34,000 UK citizens emigrated to other countries in the EU – indicating that a balance of 122,000 more EU migrants came to the UK than UK citizens emigrated to take up residence elsewhere in the EU.

Figure 1

Migration of UK citizens to EU countries & EU citizens to the UK

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Office for National Statistics, IPS estimates

While Figure 1 provides an interesting insight, it shows only part of the migration picture as it does not deal with EU citizens leaving the UK to return to their home countries or other EU states, or the return of UK citizens from other EU countries to the UK. So Figure 1 does not tell us about net-migration of EU citizens between the UK and other EU countries.

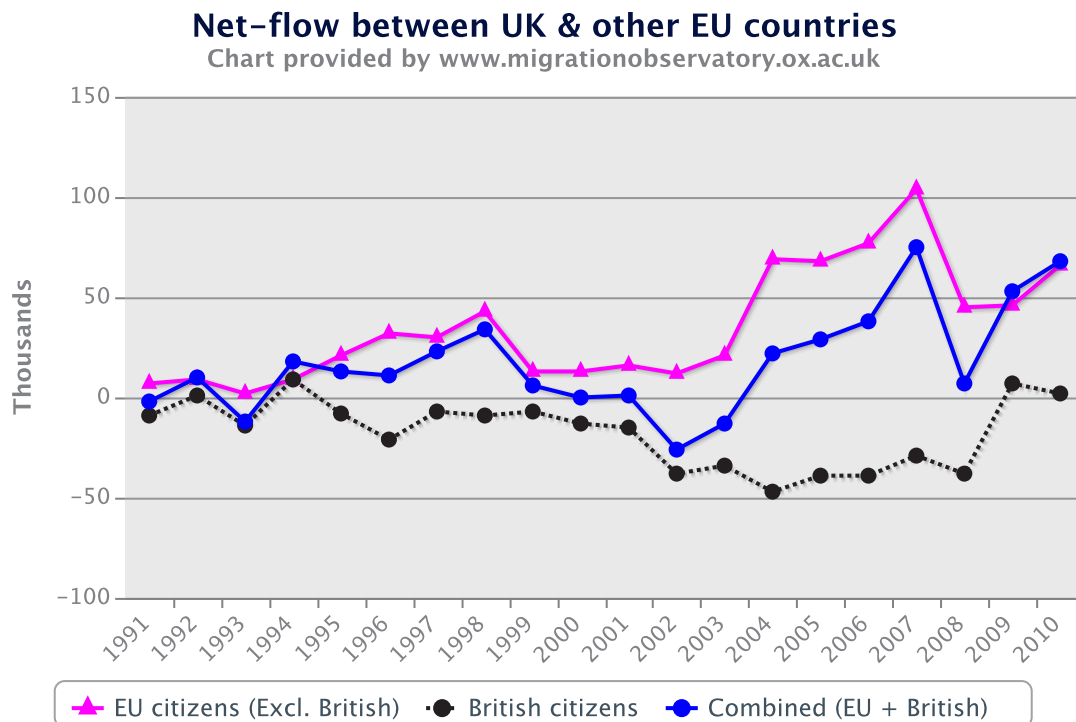
Net-migration of EU citizens: the 'Strictly EU' approach

Figure 2 gives a clearer picture of the impact of EU freedom of movement on overall net migration in the UK. It looks at the net-flows of British and other EU citizens between Britain and other EU countries. This means that it measures three things:

1. The balance between the number of British citizens who leave the UK to take up residence in another EU country, and the number who return to the UK after having been resident in another EU country (the black line)
2. The balance between the number of (non-British) EU citizens who arrive in the UK to take up residence and the number who leave the UK for another EU country, after having been resident here (the purple line)
3. The balance between these two numbers (the blue line).

What the data shown in Figure 2 do NOT include is British or other EU citizens moving to, or arriving from, non-EU countries. We call this the 'Strictly EU' method.

Figure 2



Three particularly striking points from this graph are, firstly, that between 2002-2007 the combined net migration of British and EU citizens to the UK increased by more than 100,000, from -26,000 to +75,000; secondly, that between 2007-2008 net EU migration to the UK dropped dramatically (widely attributed to the financial crisis); and thirdly, that in 2009 and 2010 – for the first time since 1994 – more British citizens returned to the UK from other EU countries than left to move to other EU states.

In 2010, net-migration of EU citizens between the UK and other EU countries (around 68,000, based on the ‘combined’ line in Figure 2) accounted for a little over a quarter of overall net migration to the UK.

During the period 2004-2010, total net-migration of EU citizens between the UK and other EU countries was about +298,000 (again equivalent to about a quarter of total net-migration in the UK over this period).

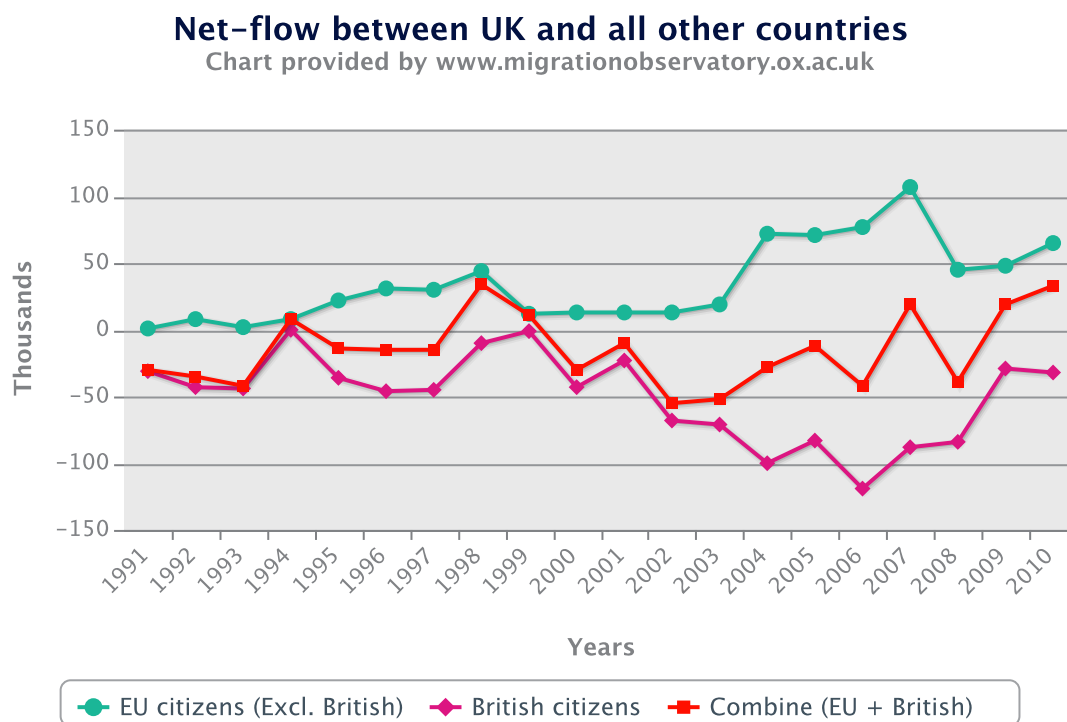
Net-migration of EU citizens: the ‘global’ approach

Importantly, the ‘strictly EU’ evaluation of the share of intra-EU migration in total net-migration in the UK differs significantly from the ‘global’ approach used by Mr Cameron in April 2011. The ‘global’ approach discusses the effects of EU net-migration by focusing on citizenship of the migrants only, without taking their destination or where they are moving from into account. In other words, this method analyses the migration flows of EU citizens to and from the UK regardless of whether their origin or destination is inside or outside the EU.

Using this ‘global’ method, Figure 3 shows the migration flows of British and other EU citizens to and from the UK. While EU migration remains almost identical to the levels shown in Figure 2, British emigration appears much larger. This is because many British citizens emigrate to non-EU countries, and these movements are included in Figure 3 but not in Figure 2.

Using this 'global' method, one can argue that total-net migration of EU (incl. British) citizens was +33,000 in 2010 (see the combined red line in Figure 3 below). This is less than half of the net figure from the 'strictly EU' approach for that year. During the period 2004–2010, total net-migration of EU (incl. British) citizens between the UK and the rest of the world was -50,000 (i.e. slightly more EU citizens left than arrived in the UK during that period).

Figure 3



Source: Office for National Statistics, IPS estimates

Both approaches can be valid but they give us different information. The 'global' approach essentially tells us about the net-migration of people whose international movement Britain cannot control (British and other EU citizens).

If, however, we want to discuss the effects of the right to free movement within the EU on total net-migration in the UK, the 'strictly EU' approach (which concludes that free movement accounts for over a quarter of total net-migration to the UK) is clearly more appropriate than the 'global' approach (which suggests that the migration of EU citizens accounts for a much smaller share of net-migration in the UK).

Stocks

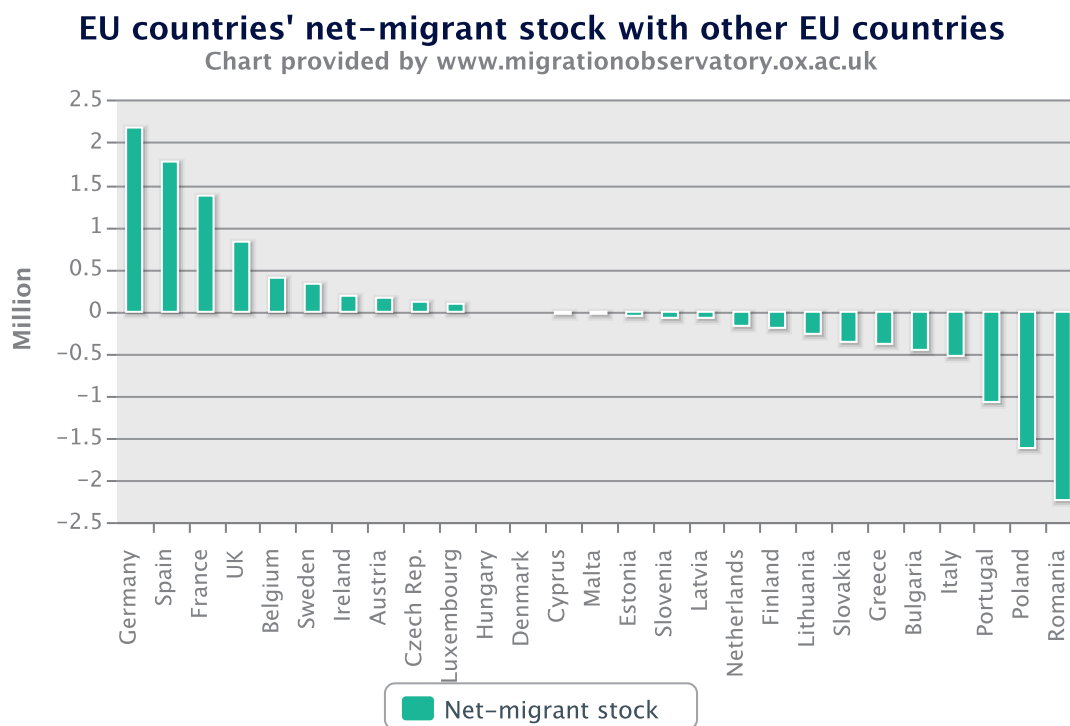
Another way to evaluate the impact of EU migration on the British population is by examining the (limited) available data on the stock of EU migrants in the UK and of UK migrants in other EU countries. More details of these data are discussed in the Migration Observatory's briefing on EU Migrants in other EU Countries: An Analysis of Bilateral Migrant Stocks.

In 2010, of all EU countries, the UK was hosting the fourth largest number of EU migrants (about 2.2 million). The EU members with a bigger stock of EU migrants are Germany (3.76m), Spain (2.6m) and France (2.47m).

On the other hand, the UK is also the fifth biggest sender of migrants to other EU countries, with about 1.4 million British people living in other EU countries in 2010. The four biggest senders of migrants to other EU countries are Romania (2.2m), Italy (2m), Poland (1.9m) and Germany (1.7m).

Combining figures on ‘hosting’ and ‘sending’ shows that the UK has the fourth-highest ‘net stock’ of EU migrants, as shown in Figure 4. This ‘net figure’ shows how many more (or fewer) migrants from the EU are living in a country than there are nationals of that country living elsewhere in the EU.

Figure 4

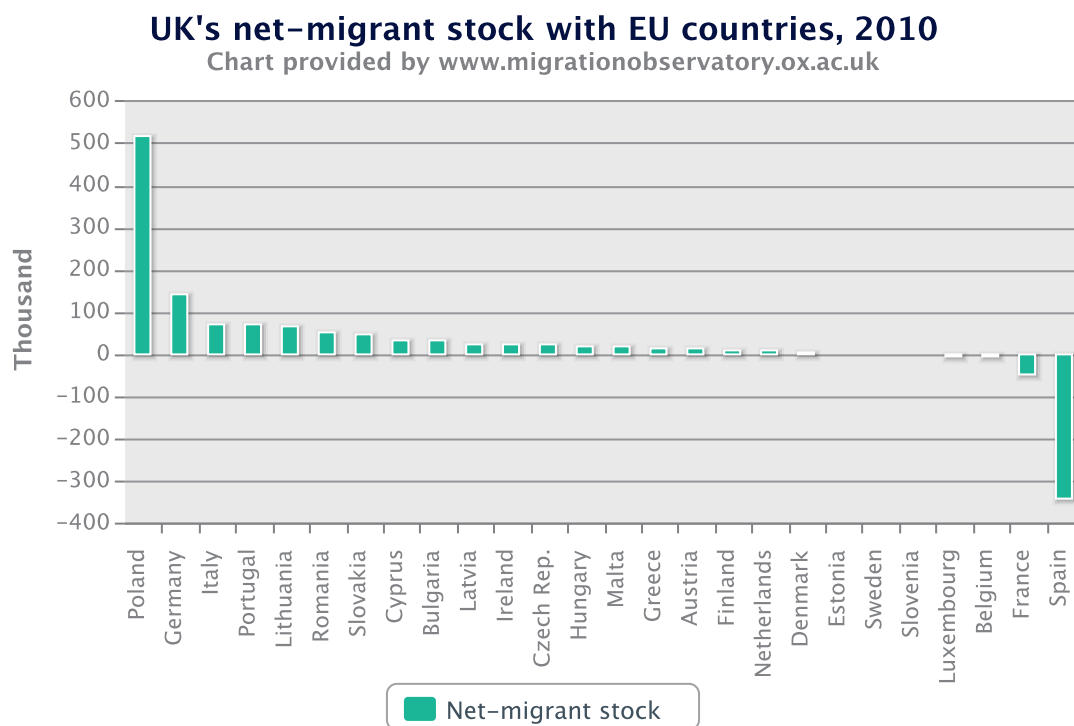


Source: World Bank, 2010. Values for some countries are too small to be visible in the figure.

The UK has a high net stock of EU migrants (around 800,000) but trails Germany (which has 2 million), Spain (1.8m) and France (1.3m).

Figure 5 then looks in more detail at the UK’s net migration stock with other specific EU member states. It shows that the biggest net sender of migrants to the UK is Poland, with whom the UK has a net stock of +518,497 (indicating that that many more Polish people live in the UK than British people live in Poland). The biggest net receiver of UK migrants is Spain, with whom the UK has a net stock of -340,299, illustrating that many more British people live in Spain than Spanish people live in the UK.

Figure 5



Source: World Bank, 2010. Values for some countries are too small to be visible in the figure.

Conclusion

So what does all of this tell us about the effect of EU citizens' right to free movement within the EU on migration to and from the UK?

Essentially, freedom of movement cuts both ways for the UK, though on balance Britain receives more than it sends. Other EU countries (as a whole) have in recent years sent more than four times as many people to the UK than the UK has sent to the rest of the EU. The impact of EU freedom of movement on overall net migration in the UK is about a quarter of the total – more significant than is sometimes suggested. But in specific cases – notably Spain – the UK has been a major net sending country.

Related material

- Telegraph interview with Teresa May - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9291483/Theresa-May-interview-Were-going-to-give-illegal-migrants-a-really-hostile-reception.html>
- Politics.co.uk transcript of Ed Milliband's June immigration speech - <http://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2012/06/22/ed-miliband-s-immigration-speech-in-full>
- BBC transcript of David Cameron's April immigration speech - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13083781>
- Migration Observatory briefing: EU Migrants in other EU Countries: An Analysis of Bilateral Migrant Stocks <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/eu-migrants-other-eu-countries-analysis-bilateral-migrant-stocks>



The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk

Press contact

Rob McNeil

Senior Media Analyst

robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk

+ 44 (0)1865 274568

+ 44 (0)7500 970081

