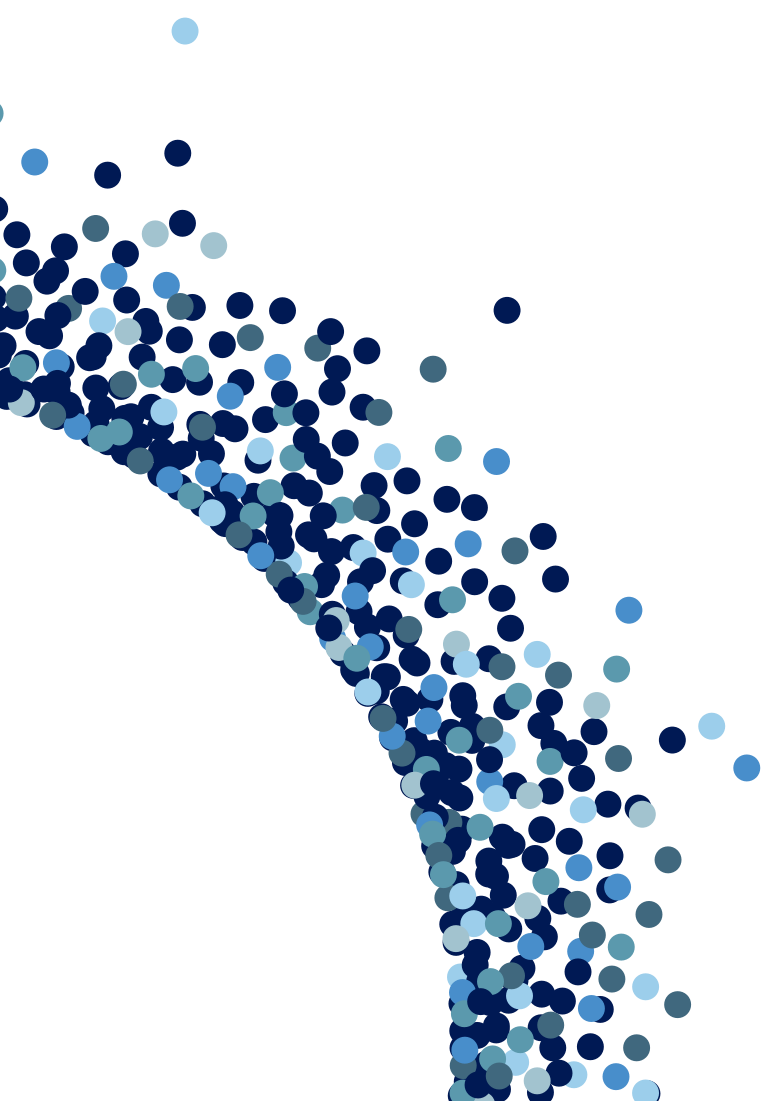




# BRIEFING

## Demographics of Young Migrants in the UK



AUTHOR: YVONNI MARKAKI  
PUBLISHED: 30/11/2015



This briefing provides an overview of young migrants in the UK and their demographic characteristics. The analysis uses data from the Census for England and Wales and the UK Labour Force Survey, and focuses on people born outside the UK who are up to 24 years of age. It is part of a series of briefings the Migration Observatory is producing on migrant youth in the UK.

## Key Points

At the time of the most recent Census in 2011, 594,000 or 8% of non-UK born residents in England and Wales were children (age 0-15), and 897,000 or 12% were young adults (age 16-24). Foreign-born children and young adults were roughly evenly divided across the sexes.

Younger children are less likely to be born abroad than older children and young adults in their early twenties.

About half of recent arrivals to the UK are under the age of 25.

About two fifths of foreign-born children (39%) and one in three young adults (33%) are born in EU countries. The number of young people born in accession countries that joined the EU between 2001 and 2011 has grown faster than the numbers born in other regions.

Non-UK born residents aged 0-15 and 16-24 are less likely than non-UK born adults (25+) to hold a UK passport.

Just over half of foreign-born children had a first language that was not English in 2011, but the majority of those children reported speaking English 'well' or 'very well'.

The geographical distribution of foreign-born children in England and Wales is similar to the distribution of foreign-born adults, although the share of foreign-born residents who are children is lowest in London.

The number of foreign-born children increased in 9 out of 10 local authorities between 2001 and 2011.

## Understanding the evidence

This briefing looks at the characteristics of residents of the UK who are up to 24 years old. The term 'children' is used to refer to people age 0–15 years and the term 'young adults' to those age 16–24 years.

There is no consensus on a single definition of a 'migrant'. Different data sources use a variety of definitions of 'migrant', including (1) country of birth, (2) nationality, (3) passports held, (4) length of stay, (5) reason for migration and (6) being subject to immigration controls. For example, not all foreign-born people are also foreign nationals; some foreign nationals may have lived in the UK for decades while others arrived recently. Not all of the non UK born are subject to immigration control, such as EEA nationals and people born abroad to UK citizen parents.

The analysis in this briefing uses two data sources, the Census for England and Wales for 2001 and 2011, and the UK Labour Force Survey (see evidence gaps and limitations section of the briefing for a more detailed discussion of the challenges associated with these sources).

The Census is the most complete source of information about the population. It is particularly useful for obtaining information for small geographical areas and demographic groups. The census is based on a count of people and households, with efforts to include everyone, and supplemented by a survey to detect and estimate those who are initially missed. In England and Wales the latest census took place on the 27th of March 2011 and was conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Statistics based on the census refer to usual residents of England and Wales. A usual resident is defined as anyone in the UK on census day who had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for 12 months or more (or were outside the UK but had a permanent UK address and intended to stay outside the UK for less than 12 months). See the Migration Observatory video interview of Peter Stokes, 2011 Census Statistical Design Manager, for further discussion.

Some of the information in this briefing is based on a 5% subsample of the 2011 census micro-data, which enables more detailed analysis of certain variables. It includes over 2 million observations selected especially to be representative of census totals. In this briefing the subsample is only used to show national-level statistics.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is also conducted by the ONS. It is a survey of private households and among many other official statistics, it also provides data on foreign born living in the UK. The LFS is a sample survey and its estimates have margins of error. For several reasons related to the way the information is collected, the LFS undercounts the UK's foreign born population. However, it can be useful as a complement to census data since it allows us to show trends over time and offers more flexibility on the variables that can be analysed. For this briefing LFS data refer to residents of the United Kingdom.

Caution should therefore be taken when comparing the statistics produced using the LFS with the Census figures.

In the text, both Census and LFS data are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

## At the time of the most recent Census in 2011, 8% of foreign-born residents in England and Wales were children (age 0-15), and 12% were young adults (age 16-24)

In 2011, there were 594,000 foreign-born children aged 0-15 years living in England and Wales. A further 897,000 people were foreign born young adults aged 16-24. Of the total foreign-born population in England and Wales, children made up 8%, while young adults made up 12%. In other words, approximately 20% of the foreign born population was younger than 25 years old.

The foreign born made up 5.6% of all children living in England and Wales in 2011 (Table 1). Between 2001 and 2011, the number of 0-15 year olds who were born abroad increased by about 222,000, or just under 60%. This is comparable to the growth of 62% in the total adult (16+) foreign-born population of England and Wales during this period. In other words, the share of migrants who were children remained stable during this period.

**Table 1 - Key Census statistics for residents 0-15 years old, England and Wales**

	2001	2011	Change (%)
Total usual resident population 0-15 years old	10,488,736	10,579,132	0.9%
UK-born resident population 0-15 years old	10,116,134	9,984,717	-1.3%
Non-UK born resident population 0-15 years old	372,602	594,415	59.5%
Non-UK born 0-15 years old as share of the 0-15 years old population	3.6%	5.6%	58.2%
Non-UK born 0-15 years old as share of all non-UK born	8%	7.9%	-1.5%

Source: England and Wales Census 2001 and 2011, ONS. Usual resident population

Among the 16-24 year old residents of England and Wales, about 897,000 or 13.5% were born abroad in 2011 (Table 2).

**Table 2 - Key Census statistics for residents 16-24 years old, England and Wales**

Usual residents of England and Wales 16-24 years old	2011
Total usual resident population 16-24 years old	6,658,636
UK-born resident population 16-24 years old	5,761,917
Non-UK born resident population 16-24 years old	896,719
Non-UK born 16-24 years old as share of the 0-15 years old population	13.47%
Non-UK born 16-24 years old as share of all non-UK born	11.95%

Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS. Usual resident population. breakdowns by country of birth for this age group are not available from the 2001 Census tables.

## Younger children are less likely to be born abroad than older children and young adults in their early twenties

Within the 0-24 year old population of England and Wales, the shares of people who were born abroad increase with age. For example, there were about 103,000 non-UK born children aged 0-4 years, making up just 3% of all children in this age group. Among those of primary school ages (5-10), 232,000 or 6% were born abroad. In

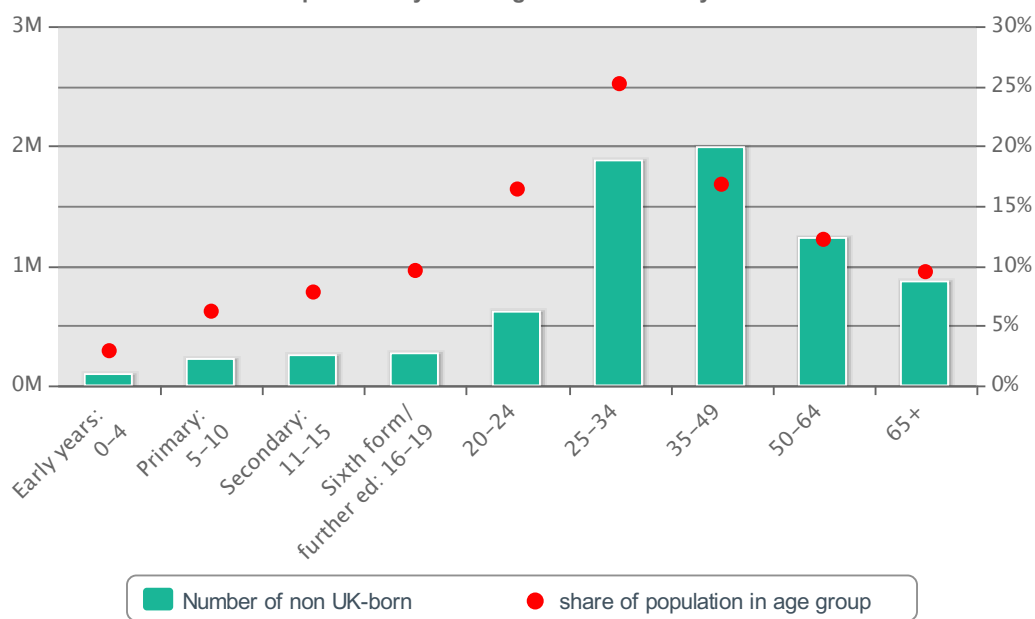
2011, 259,000 or 8% of secondary school age children (11-15) and 16% of 20-24 year olds were non-UK born. Across the population as a whole (all age groups), 13.4% were born abroad.

Figure 2 shows the non-UK born population by sex across individual ages. The numbers and shares of foreign-born children start small and gradually increase as ages increase. Foreign-born children were roughly evenly divided across the sexes: 49% of foreign-born children were female in 2011.

Figure 1

**Key Census statistics by age cohort, England and Wales, 2011**

Chart provided by [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

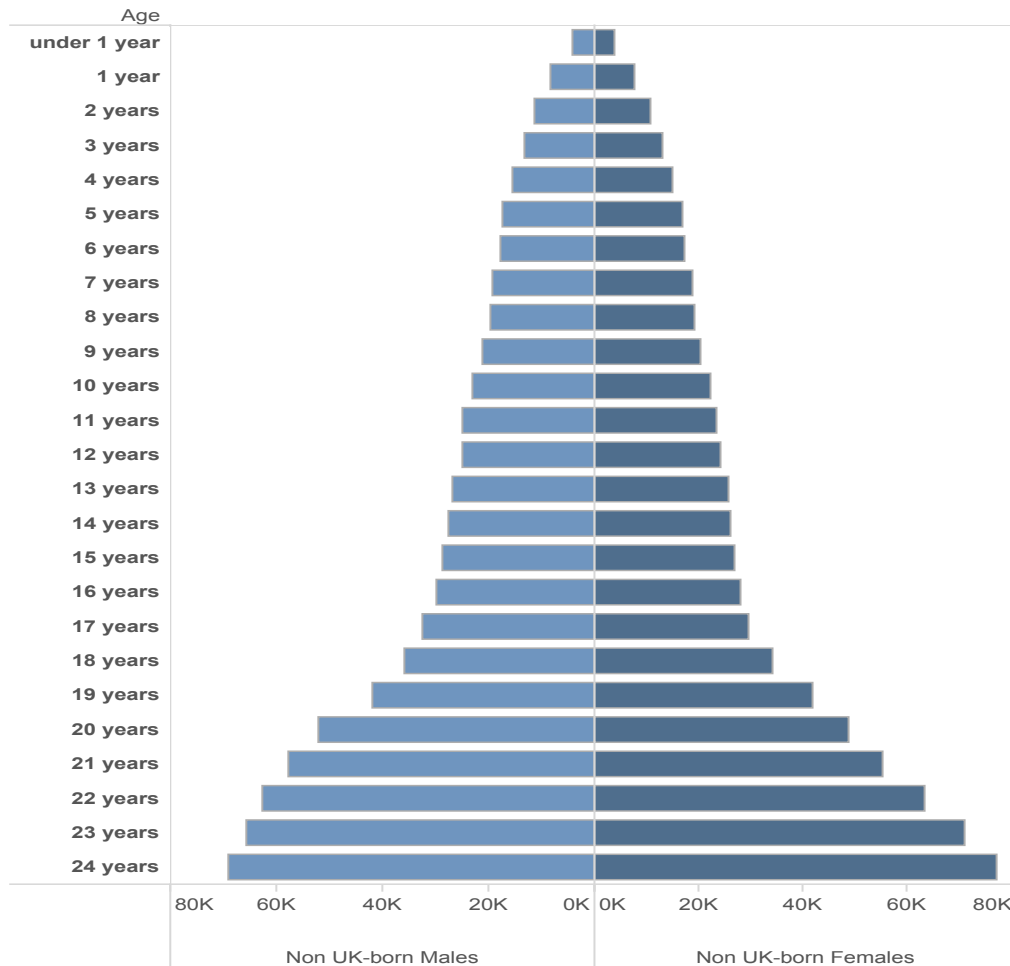


Source : England and Wales Census 2011, ONS. Usual resident population.

Figure 2

**Non-UK born by age (0-24) and sex, England and Wales**

Chart provided by [migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)



Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS. Usual resident population.

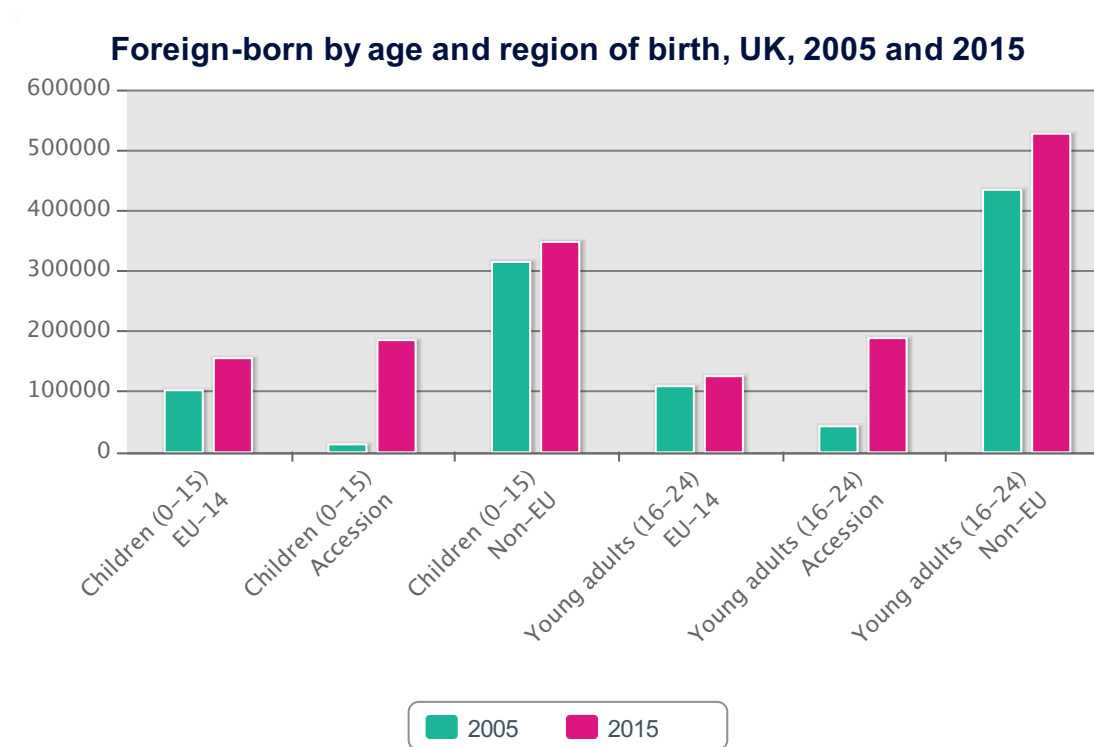
## About half of recent arrivals in the UK are under age 25

Looking only at the size of the young migrant population at a given point in time understates the importance of the migration of young people, because many of the people who arrived years or decades ago as children or young adults are now older.

Looking at people who arrived very recently gives a better picture of the 'flow' of young people to the UK. Among foreign-born who arrived in the UK in the year preceding the 2011 Census, half were under the age of 25. Data from the Labour force Survey suggest this trend has been consistent over time: between 2004 and 2015, the share of people who arrived within the past year who are under 25 years old has fluctuated between 45% and 54%. The number of young people born in accession countries has grown faster than the number born in other regions

The number of children and young adults born in each of the three main areas of origin (EU-14, accession countries joining the EU between 2001 and 2011, and non-EU) has grown over the past decade. The fastest growth was seen among people from countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later, such as Poland (Figure 3). This mirrors overall migration trends in the UK.

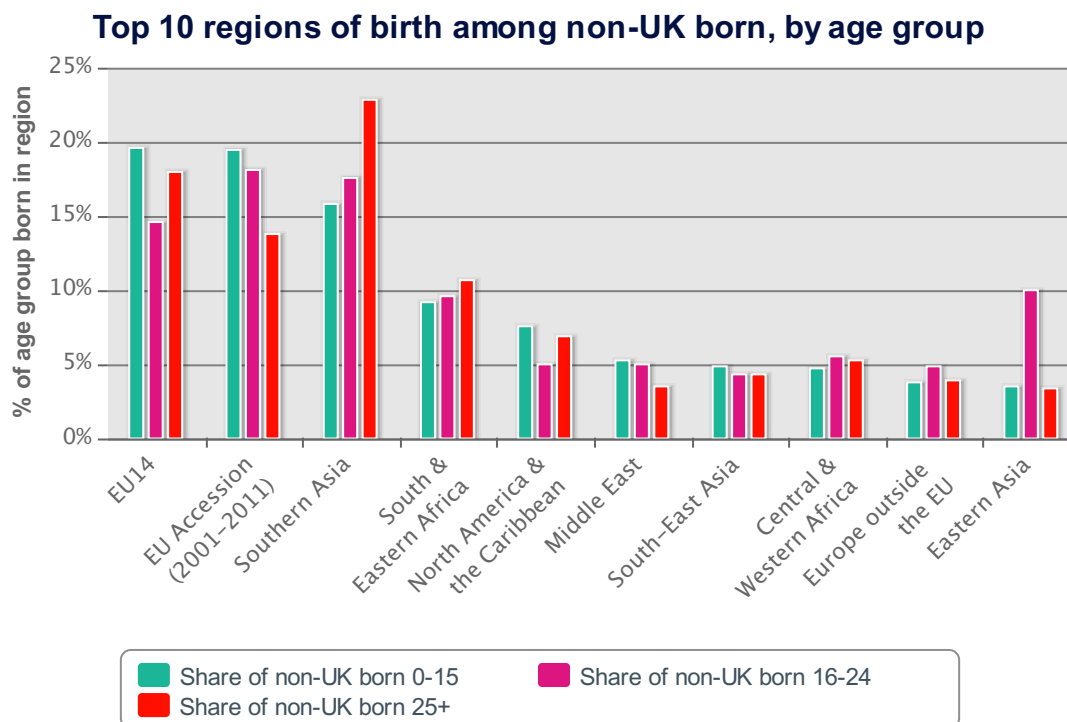
Figure 3



Source: Labour Force Survey, Q1 2005 and Q1 2015

Foreign-born children are more likely to come from EU countries than people aged 25 and older. In 2011, 39% of England and Wales' foreign-born children were from EU countries, compared to 33% of young adults and 32% of those aged 25 and above. The younger age profile of EU citizens in part reflects the fact that people born in EU accession countries are more likely to have arrived in the UK recently. By contrast, people from other regions such as South Asia, were less likely to be under the age of 25 (Figure 4). The comparatively large share of those aged 16-24 born in Eastern Asia is likely associated with students from China. Up to 89% of people 16-24 years old from Eastern Asia were full-time students in 2011.

Figure 4



Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS. Usual resident population

Note: country breakdown of regions is available at [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/country-breakdown-regions-figure-4](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/country-breakdown-regions-figure-4)

## Just over half of foreign-born children had a first language that was not English in 2011, but the majority of those children reported speaking English well or very well

In 2011, 54% of foreign-born children aged 3-15 years old did not have English as their first language, according to Census microdata. The fact that these foreign born groups report having another language as their main language does not mean that they do not speak English, however. A majority (78%) of 3-15 year olds with another first language were reported as speaking English well or very well, by the household member filling in the Census form.

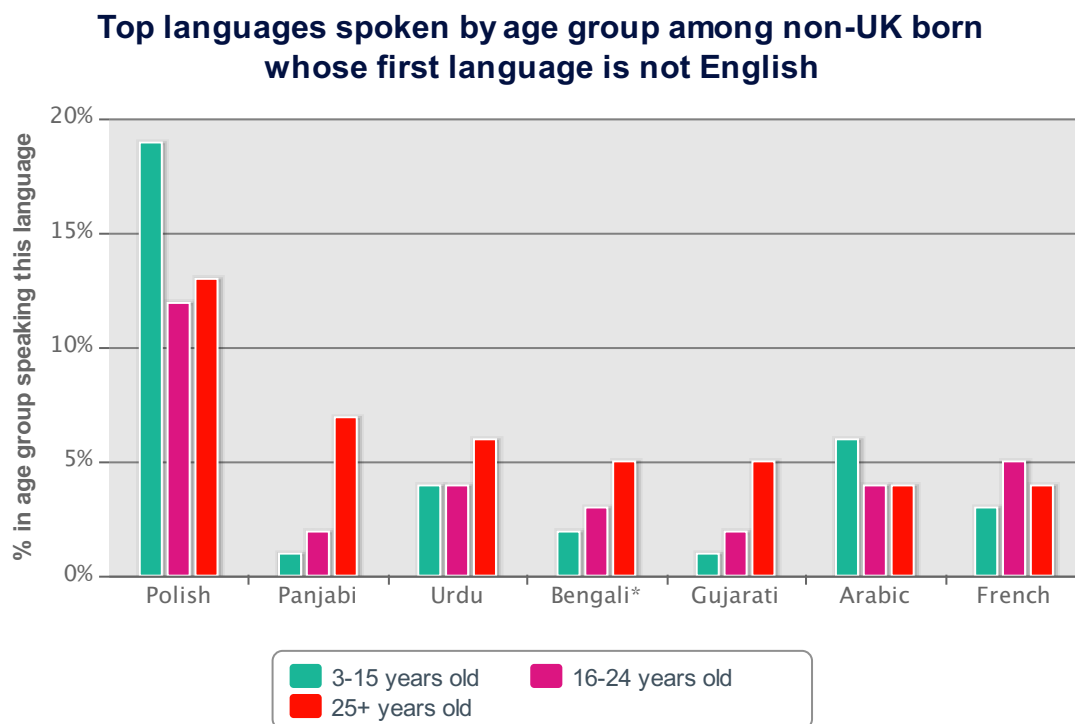
In total, 88% of 3-15 year old foreign-born children spoke English well, very well, or as a native speaker, and 12% did not. Many of those who did not speak English well or very well would be very young children who have not yet been exposed to UK schooling. Among all children (both UK and non-UK born) who did not speak English well or very well in 2011, the majority (55%) were 3 to 4 years old.

Among non-UK born children 3-15 years old whose first language was not English, the three most commonly spoken languages were Polish (19%), Arabic (6%) and Urdu (4%) (Figure 5).

Among young adults aged 16-24, 60% reported having a different first language, of whom 87% spoke English well or very well. Among non-UK born youth 16-24 years old, the most commonly spoken languages were Polish (12%), French (5%), and Urdu (4%).

Gujarati, Bengali, and Panjabi languages were more likely to be spoken among older adult migrants than other age groups of foreign speaking non-UK born residents. Polish and French were the only two languages associated with European countries in the top 7. Speaking French does not necessarily imply France as country of birth since French is spoken in many other areas of the world.

Figure 5



Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS.

Notes: Usual resident population; based on the micro-data subsample. \*Bengali includes Sylheti and Chatgaya.

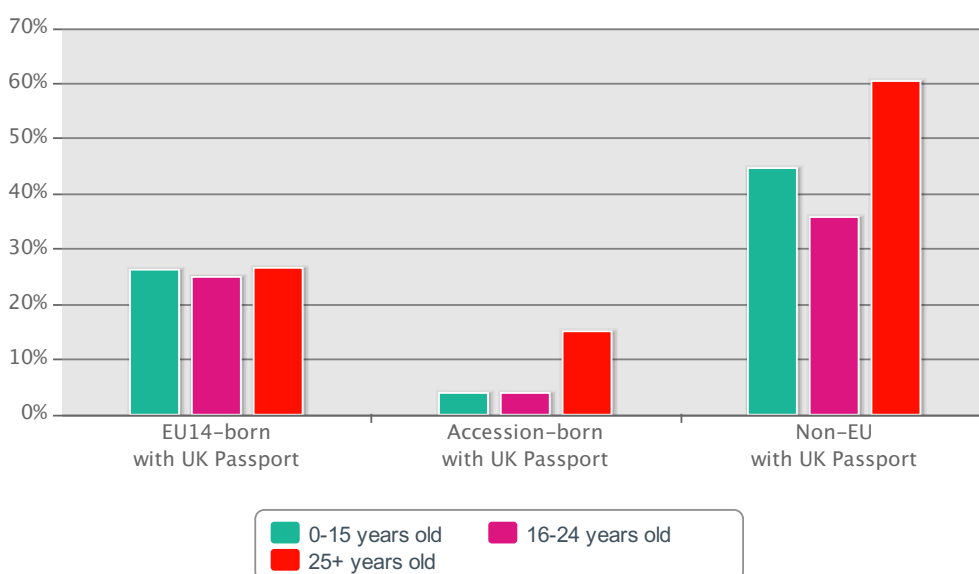
## Non-UK born residents aged 0-15 and 16-24 are less likely than non-UK born adults (25+) to hold a UK passport

In 2011, 33% of non-UK born children aged 0-15 and 29% of young adults aged 16-24 held a UK passport. This is significantly lower than the 48% of non-UK born over 25 years old who held a UK passport. One reason for this is that foreign-born youth are more likely to have arrived in the UK recently.

There is some variation by country of birth (Figure 6). Children and young adults born outside the EU were more likely than EU-born residents to hold a UK passport. Among those born outside the EU, 60% of adults aged 25 and older held a UK passport, followed by 45% of children, and 36% of young adults.

Accession-born residents had the lowest percentage of UK passport holders at 4% for those up to 24 years old and 15% among those above 25. Passport holders who were born in EU14 countries were

**Figure 6**  
**Percentage of foreign-born who hold a UK passport by country of birth and age group, 2011**



Source: England and Wales Census 2011, ONS.

Notes: Usual resident population; based on the micro-data subsample

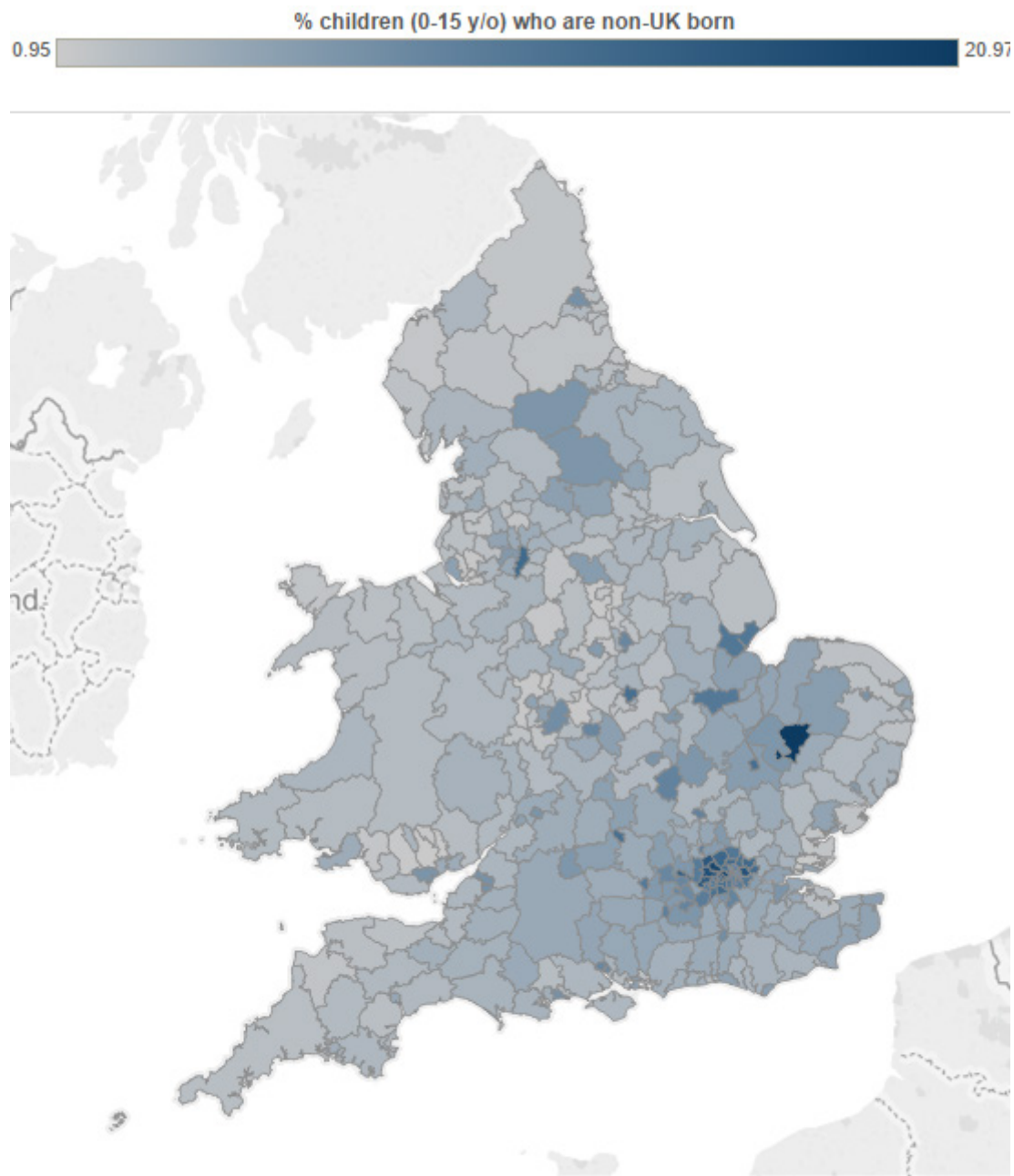


evenly split among the age groups; 26% of children, 25% of those aged 16-24, and 27% of those aged above 25, held a UK passport.

**The geographic distribution of foreign-born children in England and Wales is similar to the distribution of foreign-born adults, although the share of foreign-born residents who are children is lowest in London**

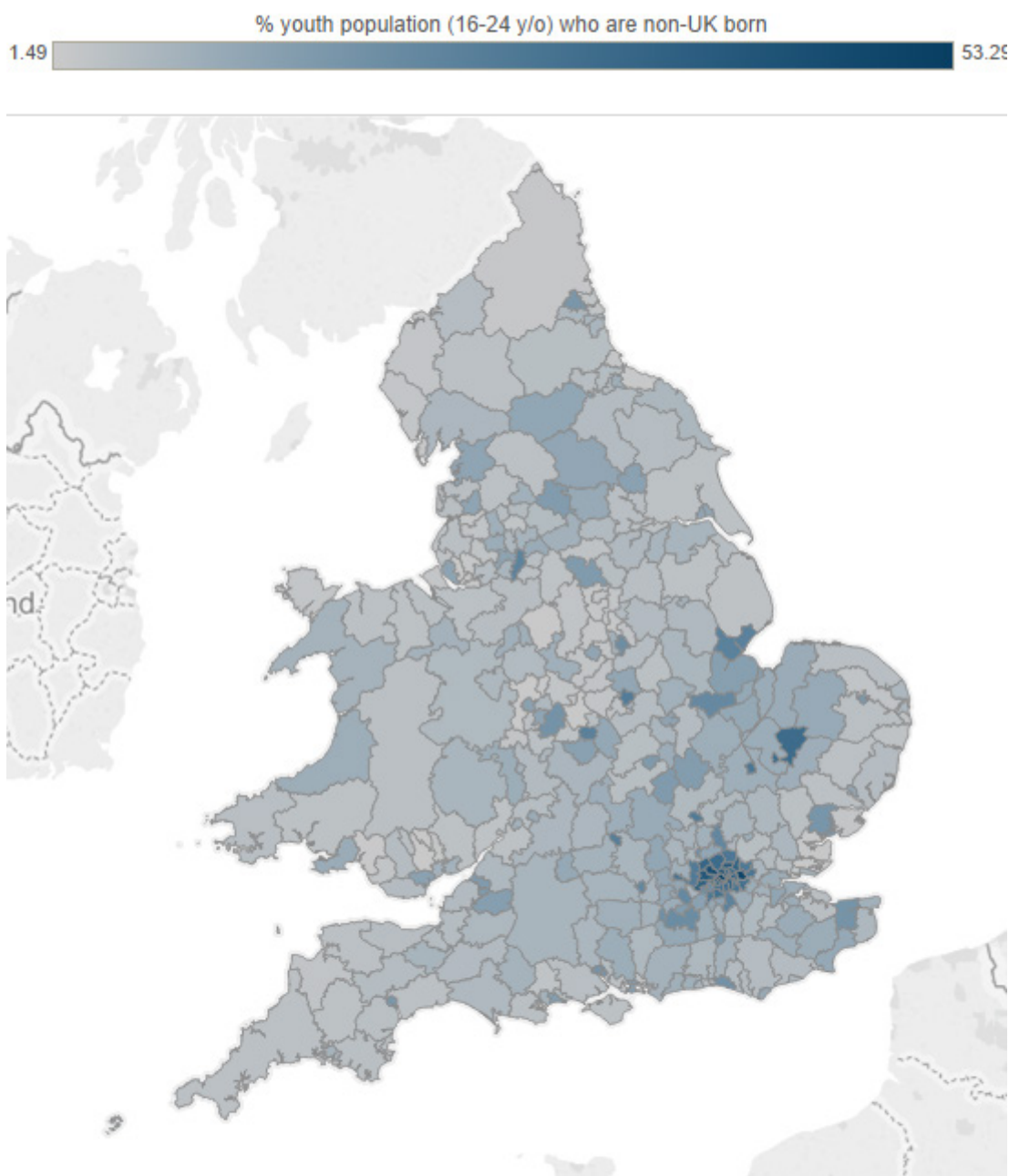
In most regions, the share of children in the total foreign-born population was between 8% and 10% in 2011, suggesting that the geographical distribution of children and adults is similar. The exception was London, where children made up a smaller share of the foreign-born population at 6.5%. The share of the foreign-born who were children changed little between the two censuses with the exception of the West Midlands where it increased from 6.2% in 2001 to 8% in 2011.

**Map 1 - Percentage of non-UK born children (0-15 y/o), 2011 Census England & Wales - LA Districts**



Source: England & Wales Census 2011, ON  
 Note: EU14 refers to member countries of the EU in 2001  
 Accession member countries refer to countries that joined the EU between 2001 and 2011: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus (EU part), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia

Map 2 - Percentage of non-UK born youth (16-24 y/o), 2011 Census England & Wales - LA Districts



Source: England & Wales Census 2011, ON

Note: EU14 refers to member countries of the EU in 2001

Accession member countries refer to countries that joined the EU between 2001 and 2011: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus (EU part), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia

### The number of foreign-born children increased in 9 out of 10 local authorities in England and Wales between 2001 and 2011

The number of foreign-born 0-15 years old residents increased between the two censuses in 2001 and 2011 across most local authorities and districts in England and Wales. Out of 348 local authorities included in the 2001 and 2011 Censuses for England and Wales, 313 saw an increase the number of foreign-born children during the 10-year period and 34 saw a decrease.

The change in the size of the 0-15 migrant population varied by local authority. Birmingham was the local authority with the largest number of foreign-born children in 2011, and its foreign-born 0-15 population roughly doubled between the two censuses. There were also substantial increases in Manchester, Leicester, and many London boroughs.

The number of children who were born abroad decreased in about one in ten local authorities. Many of these were small, rural areas where the total foreign-born population is relatively small. However, 8 of the local authorities with a decrease between the two censuses were in London: Hackney, Islington, Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Haringey, and Hammersmith and Fulham. These decreases took place despite overall increases in the size of the total foreign-born population in all London boroughs between censuses (see the Migration Observatory's London Census Profile).

The main countries of birth also vary by local authority. In just under half of local authorities the largest share of foreign-born children were born in Asia and the Middle East (Table 4). In 96 out of 348 local authorities (28%) the largest group of foreign-born children were born in EU Accession countries. EU14 born children represented the largest origin group in 66 or 19% of local authorities.

**Table 3 - Top region of origin among non-UK born 0-15 years old across local authorities in England and Wales**

Top region of origin among non-UK born children in LA	Number of local authorities	Percentage of local authorities
Middle East and Asia	162	47%
EU Accession (2001-2011)	96	28%
EU14	66	19%
Africa	13	4%
The Americas and the Caribbean	10	3%
Antarctica, Oceania (including Australasia)	1	0%
<b>All local authorities in England and Wales</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: England and Wales Census 2001 and 2011, ONS. Usual resident population. Countries of the Middle East include: Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Yemen

### Evidence gaps and limitations

The Census has two main limitations. Firstly, it is only conducted every 10 years. Secondly, it includes a limited number of questions, limiting the breadth of information available. While the census aims to include the entire population, it does have a certain margin of error. For England and Wales as a whole, the relative confidence interval at the 95% confidence level published by the ONS was 0.15% (83,000 more or less people than the estimate). To give an example at a more local level, for London's usually resident population, the relative confidence interval at the 95% level was 0.41%, suggesting a 95% probability that the true value of the London population lies somewhere between 8,207,000 and 8,274,000 persons (ONS, 2012). Specific confidence intervals are not currently available for census data relating to country of birth.

The LFS is a survey and while it provides data on migrants in the UK, certain groups are excluded. The LFS does not contain information on short-term migrants because the survey excludes individuals who have been resident in their households for less than 6 months (Dustmann et al. 2010). Also, the LFS excludes those who do not live in households, such as those in hotels, caravan parks, and other communal establishments; it also excludes halls of residence, thus missing many overseas students. Finally, the LFS may not capture migrants without the legal right to live and/or work in the UK. For further discussion see the data sources and limitations section of the Migration Observatory website.

In spite of their limitations, the Census and the LFS are among the most reliable data sources for demographics of the UK population. However, these data sources are unable to provide information related to young migrants' visa categories or legal status, foreign born who arrive as unaccompanied minors, students in higher education, or grades in compulsory education.

Thanks to Angus Holford, Tina Rampino and Martin Ruhs for comments on an earlier version of this briefing.

### References

- Dustmann, C., T. Frattini, and C. Halls. "Assessing the Fiscal Costs and Benefits of A8 Migration to the UK." *Fiscal Studies*, 31 (2010): 1-41.
- Office for National Statistics. "Confidence Intervals for the 2011 Census." London, December 2012.

### Related material

- Migration Observatory briefing – Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences – [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/who-counts-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/who-counts-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences)
- Migration Observatory briefing – Geographical Distribution and Characteristics of Long-Term International Flows to the UK – [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/geographical-distribution-and-characteristics-long-term-international-migration-flows-uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/geographical-distribution-and-characteristics-long-term-international-migration-flows-uk)
- Migration Observatory briefing – Migrants in the UK: An Overview – [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview)
- Migration Observatory project – Migration in the Census – [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/projects/census](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/projects/census)



### 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](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)

### About the author

Dr Yvonne Markaki  
Research Officer  
[yvonne.markaki@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:yvonne.markaki@compas.ox.ac.uk)

### Press contact

Rob McNeil  
Head of Media and Communications  
[robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk)  
+ 44 (0)1865 274568  
+ 44 (0)7500 970081

### Recommended citation

Markaki, Yvonne. "Demographics of Young Migrants in the UK." Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford, UK, November 2015.

