BRIEFING
Where do migrants live in the UK?

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BRIEFING: Where do migrants live in the UK?

This briefing looks at the distribution of migrants across regions and local authorities within the UK, providing data by country of birth and reason for migration (i.e. work, study, family and asylum).

**Key Points**

London is the most popular destination in the UK, particularly for non-EU migrants

Non-EU migrants outnumber EU migrants in most regions

Non-EU migrants are more likely than EU migrants to live in London, EU migrants are more likely than non-EU migrants to live in the East, East Midlands, South West and Scotland

Migrants in London are less likely to have come for family and more likely to have come for work or asylum than migrants in other regions of Great Britain

People who came to the UK for asylum purposes appear to become more concentrated in London as time passes since they arrived

**Understanding the evidence**

Most of the analysis in this briefing uses data from the UK’s Labour Force Survey (LFS) and related Annual Population Survey (APS). The LFS, which is conducted by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), is the largest household survey in the UK and is designed to be representative of the population. The LFS has some limitations. The survey does not capture those who do not live in private households, such as in hotels, caravan parks and other communal establishments. Its response rate has declined over time, and is now below 50% (ONS, 2016); this means that people who are more likely not to respond to the survey may be under-counted, and ONS analysis based on the Census suggests that non-response is a greater problem among people born outside of the UK (Weeks et al, n.d.).

For this briefing, migrants are defined as people born outside the UK. This definition may differ from those used in other studies (See Migration Observatory briefing, Who Counts as a Migrant). From 2010, the LFS now asks foreign-born respondents about the reason why they came to the UK. Respondents may choose from one of: employment, family reunification, study, asylum and other. These are self-reported and may not be the same as the visa type under which the individual entered the country or their current visa status. The analysis on reason for migration focuses on Great Britain due to small sample size in Northern Ireland.

The analysis also uses data from the ONS’ Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) Estimates. These estimates are primarily derived from the International Passenger Survey (IPS), but also incorporate information from other sources. The ONS uses the UN standard definition of a long-term international migrant – a person moving to another country for at least one year – to produce LITM estimates.
London is the most popular destination in the UK, particularly for non-EU migrants

Figure 1 presents the destination of long-term migrants who entered the UK between the years 1991 and 2016. London receives about a third of all migrants coming to the UK. The share of those who report the capital as their region of destination peaked at 45% in 1998 and has steadily declined since then to just less than 30% in recent years.

This pattern is also reflected in the distribution of the foreign-born population across the country’s regions. Table 1 shows that 3.4 million of London’s population were born outside the UK in 2017, which is 36% of the overall UK’s foreign-born population. This is more than twice as many foreign-born people as in the South East, the region with the second greatest number of foreign-born residents. Northern Ireland has the lowest foreign-born population of all UK regions.
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Table 1: Population by region and place of birth, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>UK born</th>
<th>Foreign born</th>
<th>EU born</th>
<th>Non-EU born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>United Kingdom</strong></td>
<td>65,176,000</td>
<td>55,777,000</td>
<td>9,382,000</td>
<td>3,705,000</td>
<td>5,677,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>54,932,000</td>
<td>48,342,000</td>
<td>6,570,000</td>
<td>3,286,000</td>
<td>5,289,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wales</strong></td>
<td>3,081,000</td>
<td>2,887,000</td>
<td>193,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>103,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ireland</strong></td>
<td>1,852,000</td>
<td>1,714,000</td>
<td>138,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>London</strong></td>
<td>8,888,000</td>
<td>5,529,000</td>
<td>3,354,000</td>
<td>1,066,000</td>
<td>2,288,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South West</strong></td>
<td>5,448,000</td>
<td>4,934,000</td>
<td>513,000</td>
<td>243,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South East</strong></td>
<td>8,951,000</td>
<td>7,736,000</td>
<td>1,211,000</td>
<td>509,000</td>
<td>702,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East</strong></td>
<td>6,102,000</td>
<td>5,361,000</td>
<td>741,000</td>
<td>331,000</td>
<td>410,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Midlands</strong></td>
<td>5,751,000</td>
<td>4,965,000</td>
<td>784,000</td>
<td>292,000</td>
<td>492,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Midlands</strong></td>
<td>4,673,000</td>
<td>4,072,000</td>
<td>599,000</td>
<td>273,000</td>
<td>326,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yorkshire and The Humber</strong></td>
<td>5,375,000</td>
<td>4,839,000</td>
<td>535,000</td>
<td>236,000</td>
<td>299,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North West</strong></td>
<td>7,134,000</td>
<td>6,466,000</td>
<td>677,000</td>
<td>278,000</td>
<td>401,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North East</strong></td>
<td>2,811,000</td>
<td>2,450,000</td>
<td>161,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>101,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Population Survey, 2017

Non-EU migrants outnumber EU migrants in most UK regions

Migrants born in non-EU countries outnumbered EU migrants across all regions in 2017, with the exception of Northern Ireland. In London for example, non-EU migrants made up 26% of the population and EU migrants just over 12% (Figure 2). In contrast, in Scotland, Wales and regions such as the South West, the EU and non-EU born populations were of a similar size.

Figure 2: EU born and non-EU born migrants as a share of the region’s total population, 2017

Source: Annual Population Survey, 2017
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Table 2 shows data at the local authority (LA) level for England and Wales in 2017. In most LAs for which data were available, the EU born population accounted between 25% and 50% of the foreign-born population. The EU born made up less than a quarter of all foreign born in 11 LAs. They made up more than 50% of the foreign born in 32 LAs, all of which were outside London.

Table 2: Share of foreign-born born in EU countries, for local authorities in England and Wales, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 25%</th>
<th>Between 25% and 50%</th>
<th>More than 50%</th>
<th>Insufficient data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham 268,000</td>
<td>Hourglass 138,000</td>
<td>Newham 197,000</td>
<td>Northamptonshire 115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon 135,000</td>
<td>Cambridgeshire 90,000</td>
<td>Surrey 188,000</td>
<td>Lancashire 83,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Population Survey

Note: Excludes Isle of Scilly and the City of London

Non-EU migrants are more likely than EU migrants to live in London, while EU migrants are more likely than non-EU migrants to live in East, East Midlands, South West and Scotland

Figure 3 shows how EU and non-EU migrants are distributed across the country. Whereas 40% of non-EU migrants reside in London, only 29% of EU migrants do. In comparison, the EU born have higher concentrations in the East of England, the East Midlands, the South West and Scotland. Differences in the concentrations of the two groups in other parts of the country are relatively small.

Figure 3: Share of EU-born and non-EU born migrants who were residing in different UK regions, 2017

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey
The reasons for which migrants came to the UK are similar across regions, but migrants in London are less likely to have come for family and more likely to have come for work or asylum than in other regions.

Table 3 shows the reason that migrants report for having come to the UK (family, work, study and asylum) in 2017. The reasons for which migrants came to the UK were similar across regions. The main exception is that those who report having come to the UK to seek asylum were more likely to reside in London (53%) and EU migrants who report having come to UK for family reasons were less likely to reside in London (22%), relative to the overall migrant population.

Overall, family migrants account for half of the population of non-EU born migrants, although the share is higher (60%) in Yorkshire & Humber and lower (43%) in London (see Figure 4). The concentrations of non-EU migrants who entered the country for employment reasons are greatest in London, the South East and the East: employment migrants represent about 20% of non-EU migrants in these regions.
Only 6% of non-EU migrants came to the UK to seek asylum. However, there is large variation across regions, ranging from 2% in the South East to 10% in the North.

Among EU migrants, the concentrations of employment migrants in 2017 were greatest in London and the East: they represented about half of EU born migrants in these regions. While only 26% of EU born migrants residing in London said they came to the UK for family reasons, the corresponding share was between 30% and 45% in most other regions.

Figure 4: Share of migrants who came for family, employment, study, asylum or other reasons, by reason for migration and UK region, 2017

People arriving for asylum purposes appear to become more concentrated in London as time passes since they arrived

The regional distribution of asylum seekers is not the same as the distribution the population of people in the UK who arrived for asylum reasons (Figure 4). In 2017, only 12% of asylum seekers in receipt of Section 95 support (which is provided to destitute asylum seekers while their claim is ongoing) were living in London, in large part due to the ‘dispersal’ policy which houses them outside of London while claims are pending. However, 35% of people living in the UK who reported having arrived for asylum purposes in the last 5 years lived in London based on LFS figures for the same period. This is consistent with the possibility that people move to London after their asylum claims have been adjudicated. (Note however, that asylum seekers who are not receiving Section 95 support are not included in the Home Office data and it is possible that this group is more likely to live in London.)
Figure 5: Percent living in London: asylum seekers in receipt of Section 95 support vs. non-EU born who arrived for asylum reasons within past 5 years, 2015-2017

Figure 5 shows LFS estimates that suggest that in 2012, 36% of non-EU migrants who had been in the UK for 0-2 years resided in London. If we look at the same cohort of 2010-2012 arrivals three years later, i.e. in 2015, the share of those living in London only marginally increased, to 40%. However, the share of asylum migrants who were living in London increased more. These patterns re-emerge when we look at the cohort of 2011-2013 arrivals in 2013 and in 2016, or the cohort of 2012-2014 arrivals in 2014 and in 2017. This is also consistent with the possibility that asylum migrants born outside the EU move to London over time, and/or that those who live outside of London are more likely to emigrate from the country.

Figure 6: Share of non-EU migrants who live in London (in %), by year of arrival and duration of residence

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of LFS and Home office (Table as_16q)
Evidence gaps and limitations

The analysis in this briefing has a number of limitations. Chief amongst them is the fact that the main variable used for the information on reasons for migration is self-reported. The alternative responses to choose from are not mutually exclusive as people's decisions to migrate are multifaceted. While someone might cite family as their main reason for migration, their reason for migrating may also be driven by the available opportunities to study or work.

Second, the data do not show whether the migrant has always lived in their current region of residence since arrival. Therefore, one cannot tell whether the current region of residence of a migrant is the same as their region of destination or how long they lived in a region before moving to another one. This makes it difficult to construct a full picture of the dynamics of migrants' internal migration within the UK.

References


Related materials

- Migration Observatory briefing: Non-EU Family Migration to the UK – https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/non-eu-family-migration-to-the-uk
- Migration Observatory briefing: Migration to the UK: Asylum – http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum

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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**
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