BRIEFING

Migrants in the UK labour market: an overview

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This briefing provides data on migrants' labour market integration and the jobs they do in the UK labour market. It also presents data on migrants' employment and unemployment rates, occupational status, earnings, and contract types.

Key Points

In December 2024, 19% (or 5.75 million) of UK employees were adult migrants.

Men born outside the UK were more likely to be employed than UK-born men, but among women, migrants were less likely to be in employment.

Unemployment rates have been higher among migrants than the UK-born over the past two decades.

In March 2025, 15% of individuals in receipt of a Universal Credit payment were neither UK nor Irish nationals, similar to their share in the wider population.

Non-EU-born migrants who moved to the UK seeking asylum were less likely to be employed than those who moved for employment, family or study reasons.

Migrants are overrepresented in the administrative services, hospitality, and health and care sectors.

Workers born in North America and Oceania were most likely to be in high-skilled occupations, while those born in new EU member states (EU8 and EU2) were the most likely to be in occupations classified as low-skilled.

The annualised median earnings of EU and non-EU employees were slightly higher than UK nationals in December 2024.

Many highly educated migrant workers are overqualified for their jobs.

Foreign-born workers were more likely to work during night shifts and in non-permanent jobs than the UK born.

Understanding the evidence

The two datasets used in this briefing define migrants differently. In statistics calculated using the ONS's Annual Population Survey (APS), migrants are defined as individuals born outside the UK, regardless of whether they have become UK citizens. By contrast, figures from HMRC data on employment counts and employee earnings define migrants as individuals who had a non-UK nationality when they applied for a National Insurance Number. See the Migration Observatory briefing, Who Counts as a Migrant: Definitions and their Consequences, for a further discussion of this terminology.

Both datasets also have strengths and limitations in terms of timeliness, coverage, and level of granularity. Neither provides a complete picture of the labour market and in this briefing we switch between them in order to cover different topics. The rest of this section contains more information on each of the sources.

The Annual Population Survey

The APS is the largest household survey in the UK. It is derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which provides official measures of employment and unemployment, alongside sample boosts sponsored by government agencies. Some people are excluded from the survey, such as residents of communal establishments like hostels, while other groups may be undercounted due to survey non-response.

Face-to-face interviewing for the LFS was suspended in March 2020 due to the pandemic, with respondents instead interviewed by telephone. This change in data collection mode impacted the survey's response rate, and in October 2023, scheduled LFS estimates were suspended due to quality concerns. Face-to-face interviewing was subsequently reintroduced for the first two waves of interviews, leading to improvements in response rates. However, estimates from the LFS and APS still come with a high degree of uncertainty

All of the differences described in the narrative of the briefing are statistically significant – that is, they are likely to exist in the population, rather than being caused by chance. Note, however, that small differences between estimates for different groups may not be statistically significant if they are not described in the narrative of the briefing.

HMRC employee counts and employee earnings

This briefing also uses HMRC statistics that combine Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (RTI) with data from the Migrant Worker Scan (MWS). The former contains information on all payrolled employee jobs that were active in a given month, including the age and sex of the employee, the industry and broad region where the role was located, and the gross earnings the employee received in that month. MWS is a record of people who were non-UK nationals when they were issued a National Insurance Number (NINo). New NINos are issued to all non-UK nationals aged 16 and above who are working, planning to work legally, or claiming benefits in the UK, regardless of the duration of their intended stay in the UK. As a result, we can see the number of employee jobs held by people who were adult EU or non-EU nationals when they arrived in the UK, even if they have since obtained UK nationality.

However, the data do have some important limitations. First, they do not record self-employment or off-payroll employment (i.e., the hidden economy or casual work). This means the figures do not fully reflect labour market patterns, particularly in sectors where self-employment or cash-in-hand work is more common, such as construction. Second, the data refer to employments rather than employees—in other words, if an individual has two jobs, they will be counted in the data twice. Third, non-UK nationals who moved to the UK before the age of 16 are recorded as UK nationals, whereas individuals who arrived as non-UK nationals but subsequently acquired British citizenship will still be recorded as non-UK nationals. For example, somebody who was issued a NINo when they had Indian citizenship would be recorded as an Indian national, even if they later acquired British citizenship. In this briefing, we refer to people who were non-UK citizens when they first registered for a NINo as 'adult migrants'.

Understanding the policy

The people this briefing examines will have migrated to the UK over the course of several decades under a number of different policy regimes; for the majority, work will not have been the main reason for migration (see the Migration Observatory briefing Where do migrants live in the UK for information on the main reason for migration of the foreign-born population). For more information on work visas and people who move specifically for work, see the Migration Observatory briefing Work visas and migrant workers in the UK.

Across Europe, labour market integration policies tend to focus on recently arrived migrants and could include job search assistance, recognition of foreign qualifications or provision of specific skills, such as language courses or vocational and non-vocational training. For an overview of labour market integration policies in Europe, see the MIPEX report Evaluating Impact: Lessons Learned from Robust Evaluations of Labour Market Integration Policies.

The UK does not have an overarching policy on migrants' labour market integration, although the 2019 Home Office Integration framework – published when the Conservative Party was in office – emphasised that positive labour market outcomes were key for migrants' wider integration. For more information about policies on integration, see the Migration Observatory policy primer, Integration.

In December 2024, 19% of employees were non-UK nationals at the time they registered for a national insurance number

The share of employee jobs held by people who were non-UK citizens when they first registered for a national insurance number ('adult migrants') has steadily increased over the past decade, rising from 12% in July 2014 (3.5 million) to 20% in December 2024 (6.3 million) (Figure 1). This is higher than the share of *employees* who were adult non-UK citizens in December 2024 – 19%, or 5.75 million – because migrants were more likely to hold multiple jobs. Neither of these measures includes the self-employed population or those working in cash-in-hand jobs, however.

London had the highest proportion of employee jobs held by non-UK employees (42%), while Wales had the lowest (10%).

In the years before Brexit, there were more employee jobs held by EU than non-EU adult migrants. This was a period when EU net migration to the UK was high, as EU citizens faced relatively few restrictions under free movement rules. Since the introduction of the post-Brexit immigration system in January 2021, however, non-EU citizens have been the major source of growth in the migrant workforce. This growth was driven primarily by high levels of recruitment into health and care roles, particularly care work. For more information about net migration from EU and non-EU countries, see the Migration Observatory Briefing, Net Migration to the UK.

Figure 1

Employee jobs held, by original nationality and UK region
July 2014 to December 2024
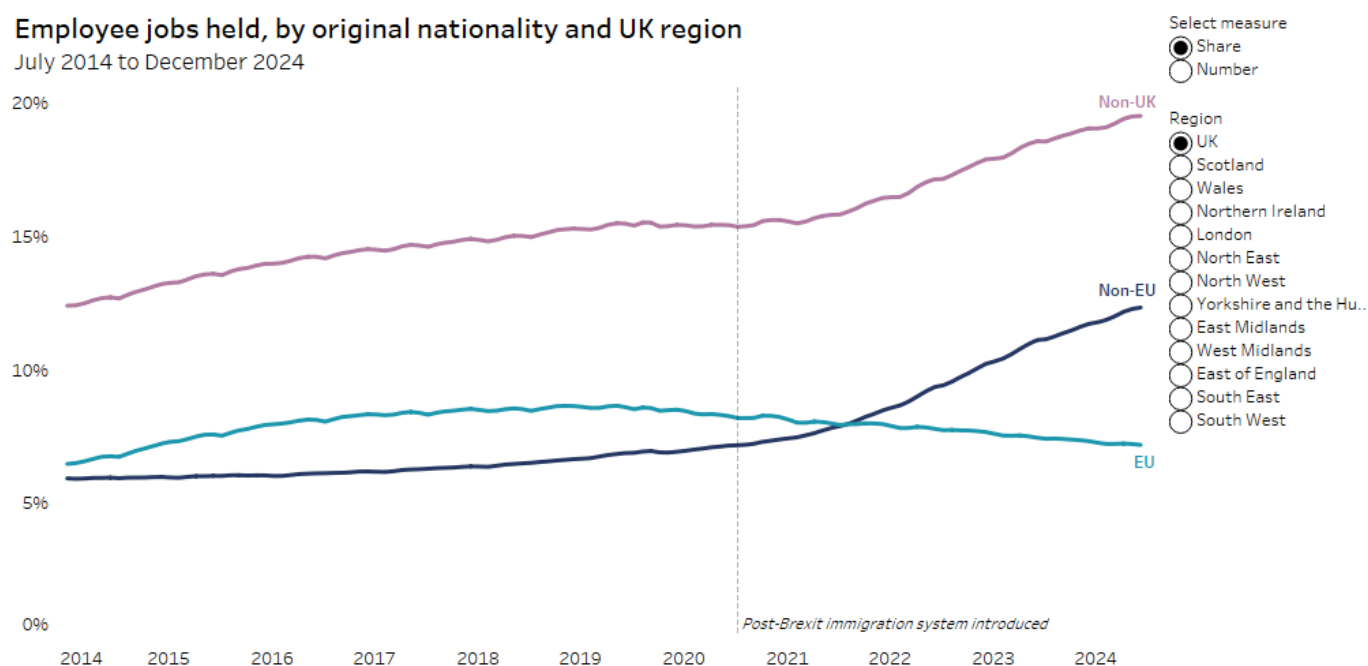
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC payrolled employments in the UK by nationality, region and industrial sector, from July 2014 to December 2024.

Note: Data do not include self-employed jobs, and a person can hold multiple employee jobs at one time. 'Original nationality' refers to an individual's nationality when they registered for a national insurance number; therefore, people who moved to the UK and became UK citizens before applying for a NINo are recorded as UK-origin employees. Data are not seasonally adjusted; comparisons across years should be made using the same month.

Between January 2021 and December 2024, the sharpest increases in the number of jobs held (in absolute terms) were among Indian and Nigerian adult employees (Figure 2). Over the same period, the number of employee jobs held by adult nationals of EU8 countries declined, while EU2 employees remained stable.

Figure 2

Employee jobs held, by original nationality
July 2014 to December 2024
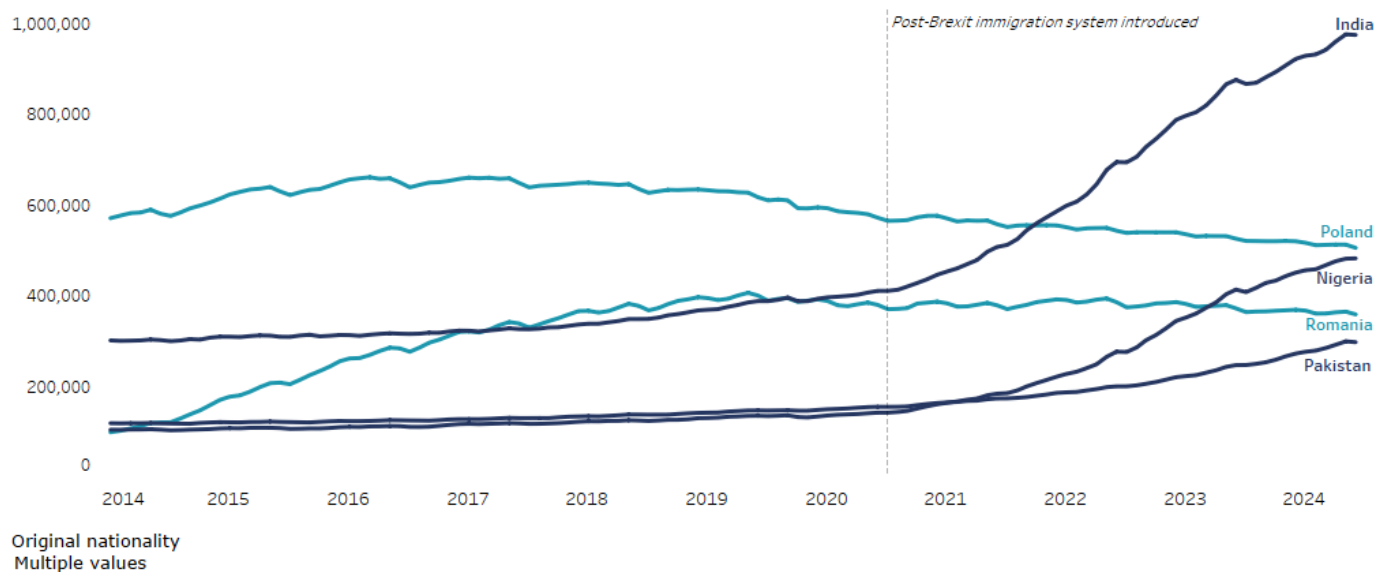
Source: HMRC payrolled employments in the UK by nationality, region and industrial sector, from July 2014 to December 2024.

Note: Data do not include self-employed jobs, and a person can hold multiple employee jobs at one time. 'Original nationality' refers to an individual's nationality when they registered for a national insurance number; therefore, people who moved to the UK and became UK citizens before applying for a NINo are recorded as UK-origin employees. Data are not seasonally adjusted; comparisons across years should be made using the same month.

Non-UK-born men were more likely to be employed than UK-born men in 2024, but migrant women were less likely to be in employment

There are many factors that shape migrants' employment rates in the UK, ranging from their level of education and skills, how well they speak English, family and caring responsibilities, social networks, the extent to which UK employers recognise their foreign qualifications, and discrimination. More information about English language use among migrants is available in the Migration Observatory briefing, Language Use and Proficiency of Adult Migrants in the UK.

Migrants' employment rates will also differ depending on the measure used. The figures below define a migrant as a person born outside the UK, and they include self-employed individuals. This differs, therefore, from the previous section, which defined migrants as those who were non-UK citizens when they registered for a national insurance number and only included employees on payrolls.

In 2024, the employment rate of working-age migrant men was higher than that of UK-born men (83% and 78%, respectively) (Figure 3). Most region-of-birth groups had higher employment rates than UK-born men. Among women, the employment rate for working-age migrants was 71%, slightly lower than for the UK-born (73%). However, EU-born women had unusually high employment rates (80%).

Women from Middle Eastern, North African, Central Asian and South Asian countries, excluding India, were far less likely to be employed, with looking after the family home the primary reason: among women from these regions who were not in employment in 2024, 38% of those born in MENA and Central Asia cited this as the reason they were not employed, as did 49% of women who were born South Asian countries excluding India.

Figure 3

Working-age labour market activity by country of birth, 2024
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

EU8	85%
EU2	82%
India	82%
EU	82%
North America & Oceania	80%
EU14	80%
Sub-Saharan Africa	79%
All foreign-born	77%
Central & South America	76%
UK	75%
Non-EU	74%
Other countries	72%
East & Southeast Asia	69%
South Asia (excl. India)	65%
MENA & Central Asia	60%

Select view
○ All
○ By gender

Measure
○ Employment rate
○ Unemployment rate

Region
○ UK
○ London
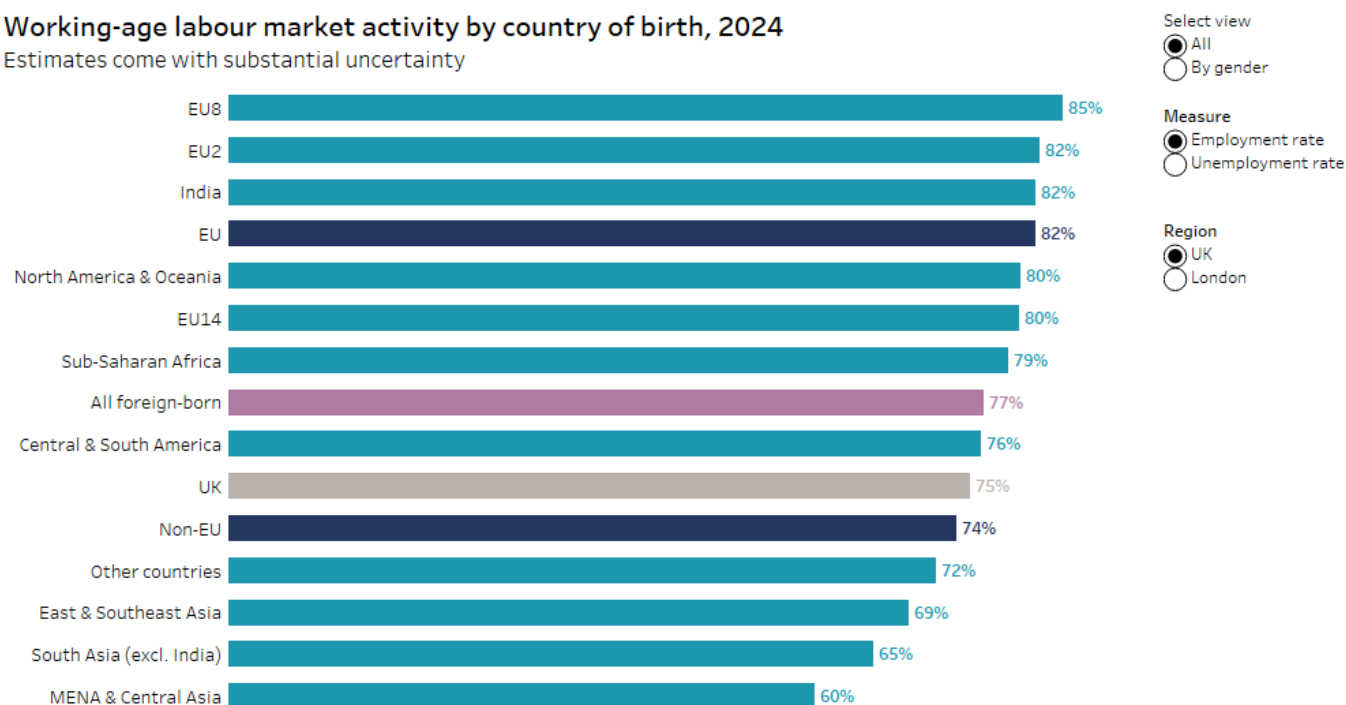
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2024.

Note: APS estimates are highly uncertain due to low response rates. The employment rate is the share of working-age population (age 16 to 64) who are in employment (i.e., employees, self-employed, workers in government training programmes and unpaid family workers).

The gender employment gap—the difference between the employment rates of men and women—is smallest among the working-age population born in EU8 and EU14 countries, as well as East and Southeast Asia, but largest among migrants born in South Asian countries, excluding India, for which women's employment rate was 36 percentage points lower than that of men.

As with employment, unemployment rates vary widely by country of birth and gender (Figure 3). They have generally followed similar trends for both migrants and the UK-born over the past two decades. After sharp increases in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the unemployment rate steadily declined from 2012 to 2019 before the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to another steep rise (Figure 4).

The unemployment rate rose for UK- and foreign-born residents between 2023 and 2024. While this increase may have owed to lower employer demand for workers, methodological issues with data collection mean these figures are highly uncertain (see Understanding the Evidence, above, for more information).

Figure 4

Unemployment rate by country of birth, 2004-2024
Age 16+
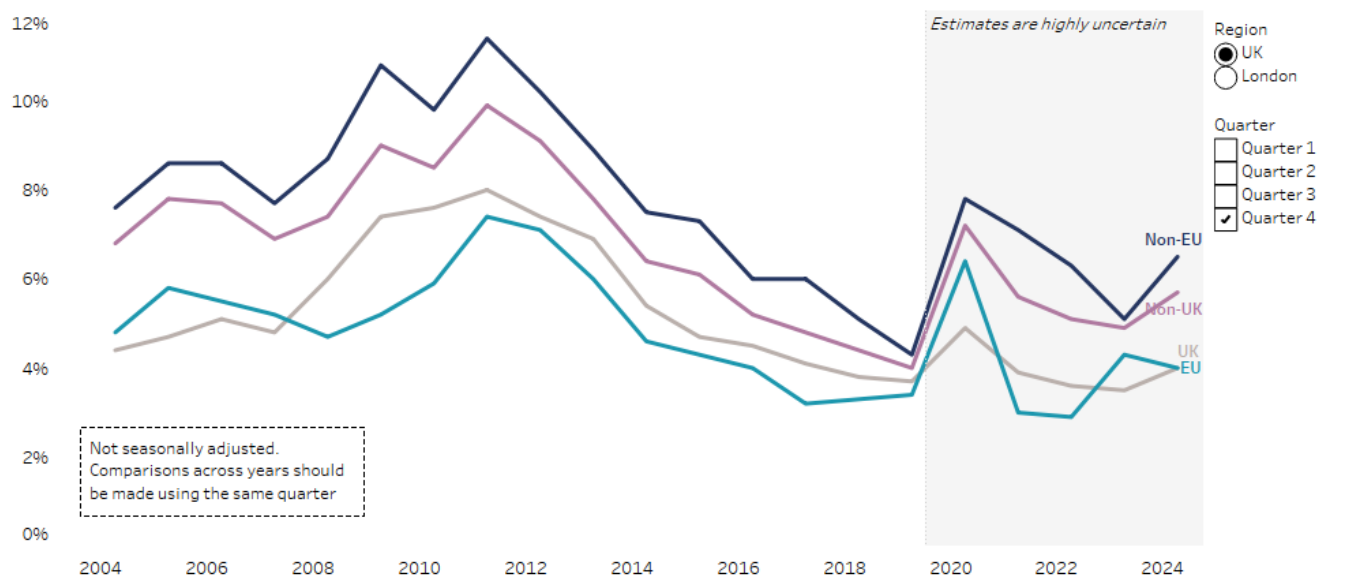
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS Table A12 *Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity by nationality and country of birth*, and of quarterly Labour Force Survey data from Q1 2007 to Q4 2024.

Note: As a result of the pandemic, the ONS changed the way it contacts people to participate in the LFS in March 2020, which increased survey non-response, especially among migrants. The unemployment rate is the share of unemployed workers among the active population, which includes both employed and unemployed workers. The economically inactive population (e.g. full-time students, retirees or people staying at home to care for family members) is excluded from the calculation of the unemployment rate.

In March 2025, 15% of individuals in receipt of a Universal Credit payment were neither UK or Irish nationals

In March 2025, 15% (around 1 million) of individuals in receipt of a Universal Credit (UC) payment were non-UK (and non-Irish) nationals aged 16 or over at the time they registered for a National Insurance Number (Figure 5). This is broadly in line with their share in the wider population—according to the 2024 Annual Population Survey, 16% of the working-age population was born outside of the UK/Ireland and moved to the UK after the age of 16. Note, however, that neither the British nor migrant figures include 'legacy' benefits that UC replaced.

In general, migrants living in the UK with temporary immigration statuses – such as a work, study or family visa – are not eligible for benefits because they are subject to the "No Recourse to Public Funds" (NRPF) condition, which prevents access to state-funded welfare. By contrast, people who came to the UK after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as those with refugee status or settlement, can claim UC. These groups may have driven the increase in the share of payments to individuals with a non-EEA nationality. Among EEA nationals, the increase likely owes to people who arrived in the UK before the end of free movement and hold status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

The share of migrants subject to NRPF will likely fall in the second half of the decade, as people who came to the UK in the early 2020s – when net migration was unusually high – become eligible to acquire settlement. This may lead to an increase in the share of non-UK nationals claiming Universal Credit.

Figure 5

Individuals in receipt of a Universal Credit payment, by nationality
March 2022 to March 2025
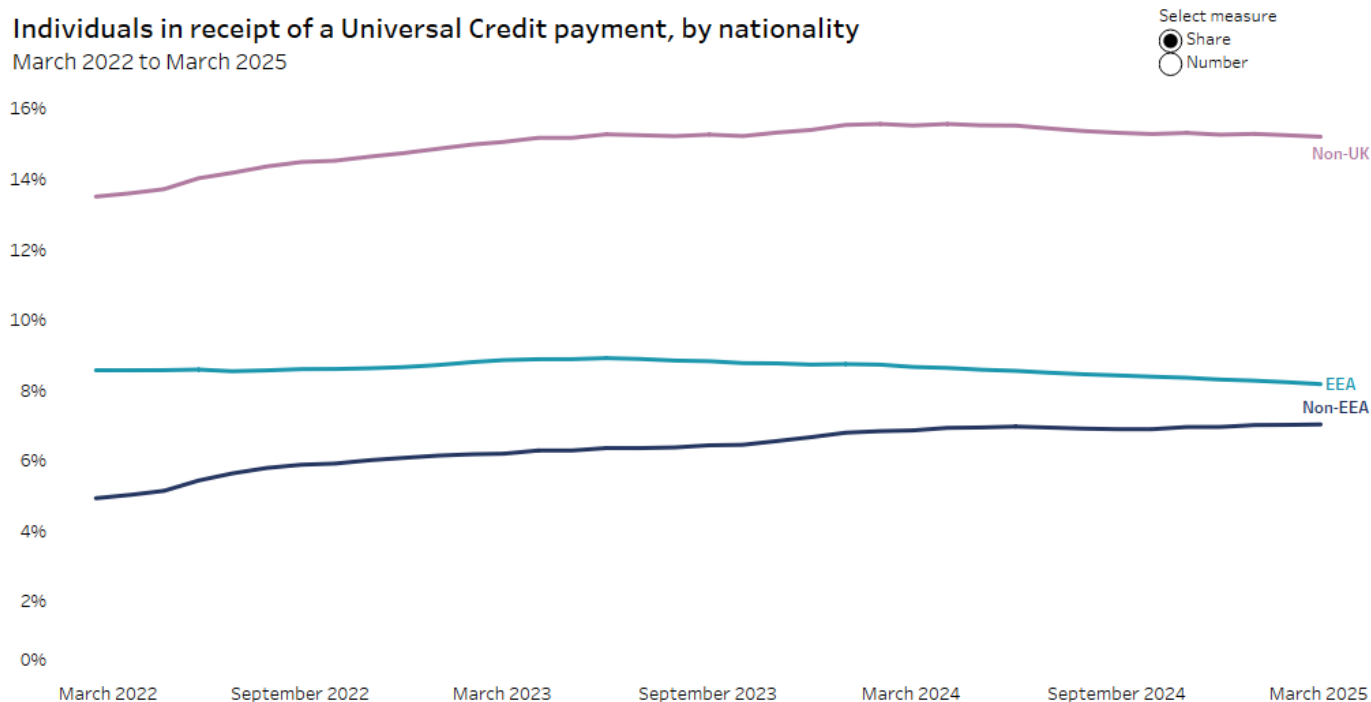
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Department for Work and Pensions data, freedom of information request FOI2025/38616.

Notes: Nationality data, which comes from Habitual Residence Test responses, excludes Irish nationals. Figures include both direct and indirect Universal Credit payments, including those made on behalf of claimants to landlords, repayments for UC advance payments, third-party debtors or fraud penalties.

In the year ending March 2025, the Department for Work and Pensions made £65.4 billion in Universal Credit payments, of which 10% (or £6.25bn) was paid to households with at least one EEA-national claimant and 8% (or £5.31bn) to households with at least one non-EEA-national claimant. These figures cannot be combined, as some households comprise both EEA and non-EEA claimants. They also include payments to UK and Irish claimants living in the same household as an EEA or non-EEA claimant.

Non-EU-born migrants who moved to the UK seeking asylum were less likely to be employed than those who moved for work, study or family reasons

Migrants who came to the UK for work were the most likely to be employed – and the least likely to be unemployed – in 2023. Among non-EU migrants, those who initially came to the UK seeking asylum had both a lower employment rate and a higher unemployment rate than other non-EU migrants (Figure 6). Several factors may have contributed to this, including that refugees tend to have smaller social networks to support the process of finding a job, and often have a lower health status, particularly in terms of mental health. There is also some evidence that restrictions on asylum seekers working while their applications are being processed can lead to worse long-term labour market outcomes.

Figure 6

Employment and unemployment rates by reason for migration, 2023
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

Men and women

		Employment rate
EU	All reasons	83%
	Work	90%
	Study	87%
	Family	71%
Non-EU	All reasons	72%
	Work	90%
	Study	73%
	Family	64%
	Asylum	57%
	Other	70%

● All
○ By gender

● Employment rate
○ Unemployment rate
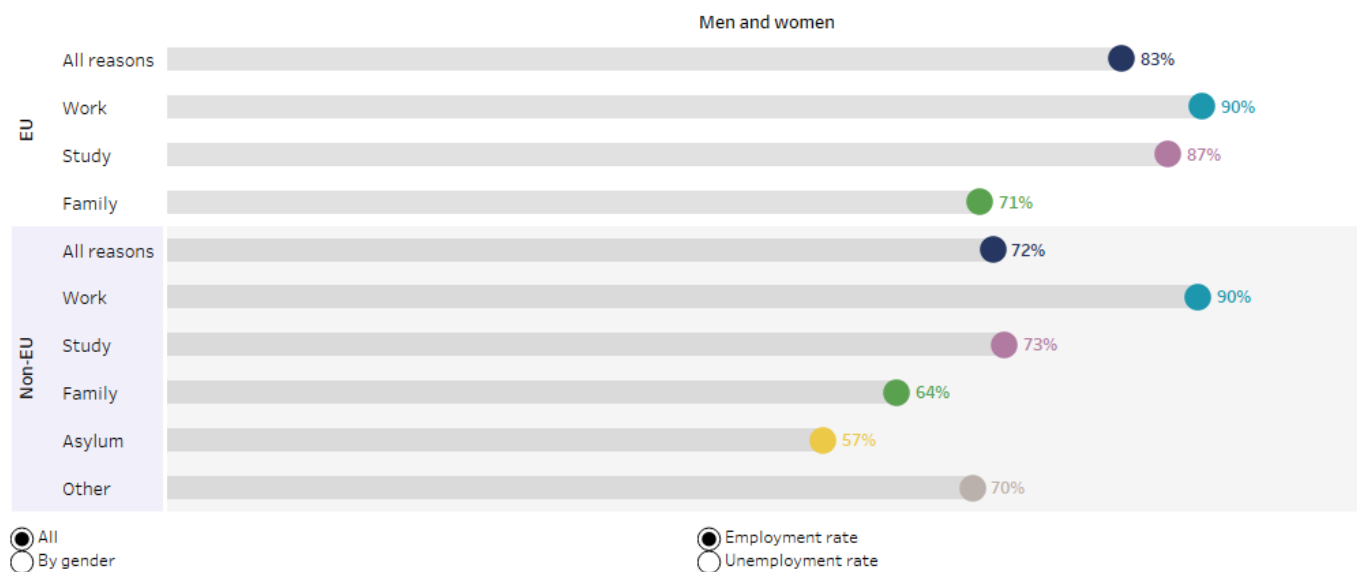
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey [Secure Access] 2023.

Note: The employment rate is the share of working-age population (age 16 to 64) who are in employment (employees, self-employed, workers in government training programmes and unpaid family workers). The unemployment rate is the share of unemployed workers among the active population (employed and unemployed). The economically inactive population (e.g. full-time students, retirees or people staying at home to care for family members) is excluded from the calculation of the unemployment rate.

Migrant employees are overrepresented in the admin services, hospitality, and health and care sectors

In December 2024, a quarter of the jobs held by employees with non-EU nationalities when they registered for a national insurance number ('adult migrants') were in the health and care sector (Figure 7). This share stood at 12% in February 2022 but rose sharply after care workers were made eligible for Skilled Worker visas—111,500 Skilled Worker visas had been granted to care workers by the end of 2024. In Wales, Northern Ireland, and the South West, adult non-EU nationals were even more likely to work in health and care in December 2024, with around a third of employee jobs in the sector.

By contrast, EU employees were more evenly distributed across the labour market, with administrative services, retail, and manufacturing the most common sectors. Just over a third of jobs held by adult EU8 nationals in December 2024 were in either the retail or manufacturing sectors, while adult nationals of EU14 and EU2 countries were most likely to work in administrative services.

Note, however, that because these figures only include employees, they do not fully capture working patterns in sectors with higher levels of self-employment or cash-in-hand work, such as construction. In addition, it is more common for people to work multiple jobs in certain industries, which may lead to some proportions being overstated.

Figure 7a

Jobs held by migrant employees across economic sectors, as at December 2024
By original nationality

Select view
● Sector, by nationality
○ Non-UK share, by sector

	UK	Non-UK	Non-EU	EU	EU14	EU8	EU2
Health & care	14%	19%	25%	10%	12%	9%	8%
Admin & support services	7%	15%	15%	14%	14%	13%	19%
Retail	15%	12%	11%	13%	10%	16%	13%
Hospitality	6%	11%	11%	11%	12%	9%	11%
Professional & technical	8%	7%	7%	8%	11%	6%	5%
Manufacturing	7%	7%	4%	11%	6%	18%	11%
Education	12%	6%	6%	7%	10%	5%	3%
Transport & storage	4%	5%	4%	7%	4%	9%	11%
IT & communication	4%	4%	5%	4%	6%	3%	3%
Finance & insurance	4%	3%	3%	3%	5%	2%	1%
Other services	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%
Construction	5%	3%	2%	4%	2%	4%	8%
Public admin	6%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Arts & recreation	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Real estate	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Energy, water, mining	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Agriculture	1%	0%	0%	1%	N/A	1%	2%

Region
● UK
○ Scotland
○ Wales
○ Northern Ireland
○ London
○ North East
○ North West
○ Yorkshire & the Humber
○ East Midlands
○ West Midlands
○ East of England
○ South East
○ South West

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC payrolled employments in the UK by nationality, region and industrial sector, from July 2014 to December 2024.

Note: Data do not include self-employed jobs, and a person can hold multiple employee jobs at one time. 'Original nationality' refers to an individual's nationality when they registered for a national insurance number; therefore, people who moved to the UK and became UK citizens before applying for a NINo a..

Figure 7b

Jobs held by migrant employees across economic sectors, as at December 2024
By original nationality

Select view
○ Sector, by nationality
● Non-UK share, by sector

	Non-UK	Non-EU	EU	EU14	EU8	EU2
Admin & support services	33%	21%	12%	5%	4%	3%
Hospitality	30%	19%	11%	5%	3%	2%
Health & care	25%	20%	5%	2%	1%	1%
Transport & storage	23%	11%	12%	3%	5%	4%
IT & communication	22%	14%	7%	5%	2%	1%
Other services	20%	14%	6%	3%	2%	1%
Manufacturing	19%	7%	11%	3%	7%	2%
Professional & technical	18%	11%	7%	4%	2%	1%
Finance & insurance	17%	10%	6%	4%	1%	1%
Retail	16%	10%	7%	2%	3%	1%
Agriculture	16%	6%	10%	N/A	5%	4%
Real estate	13%	8%	5%	2%	2%	1%
Construction	12%	5%	7%	2%	2%	3%
Education	12%	7%	4%	3%	1%	0%
Energy, water, mining	10%	5%	5%	1%	3%	1%
Arts & recreation	9%	5%	4%	3%	1%	1%
Public admin	6%	4%	2%	1%	1%	0%

Region
● UK
○ Scotland
○ Wales
○ Northern Ireland
○ London
○ North East
○ North West
○ Yorkshire & the Humber
○ East Midlands
○ West Midlands
○ East of England
○ South East
○ South West

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC payrolled employments in the UK by nationality, region and industrial sector, from July 2014 to December 2024.
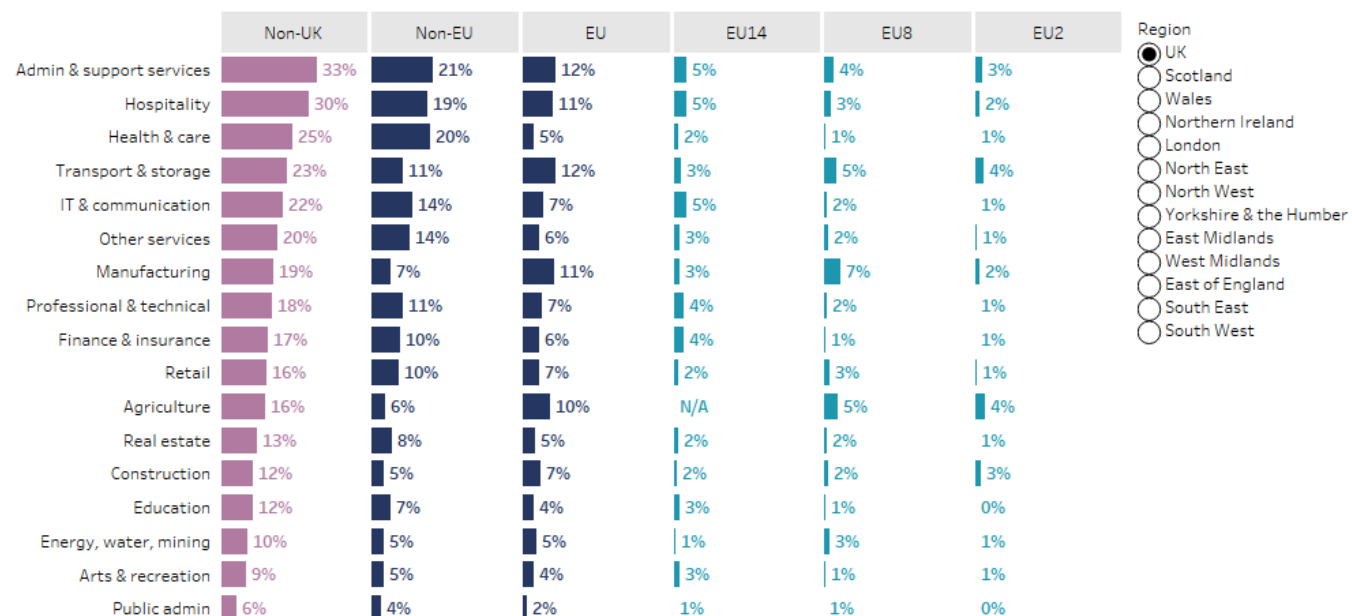
Note: Data do not include self-employed jobs, and a person can hold multiple employee jobs at one time. 'Original nationality' refers to an individual's nationality when they registered for a national insurance number; therefore, people who moved to the UK and became UK citizens before applying for a NINo a..

A fifth of employee jobs were held by adult non-UK nationals in December 2024, but their presence varied considerably across sectors (Figure 7). For example, adult non-UK nationals were overrepresented in administrative services, hospitality, and health and care but underrepresented in public administration and the arts.

In London, 63% of hospitality roles were held by non-UK employees, the highest proportion in any sector-region pairing across the UK. For context, 42% of employee jobs in London were held by non-UK nationals across all sectors.

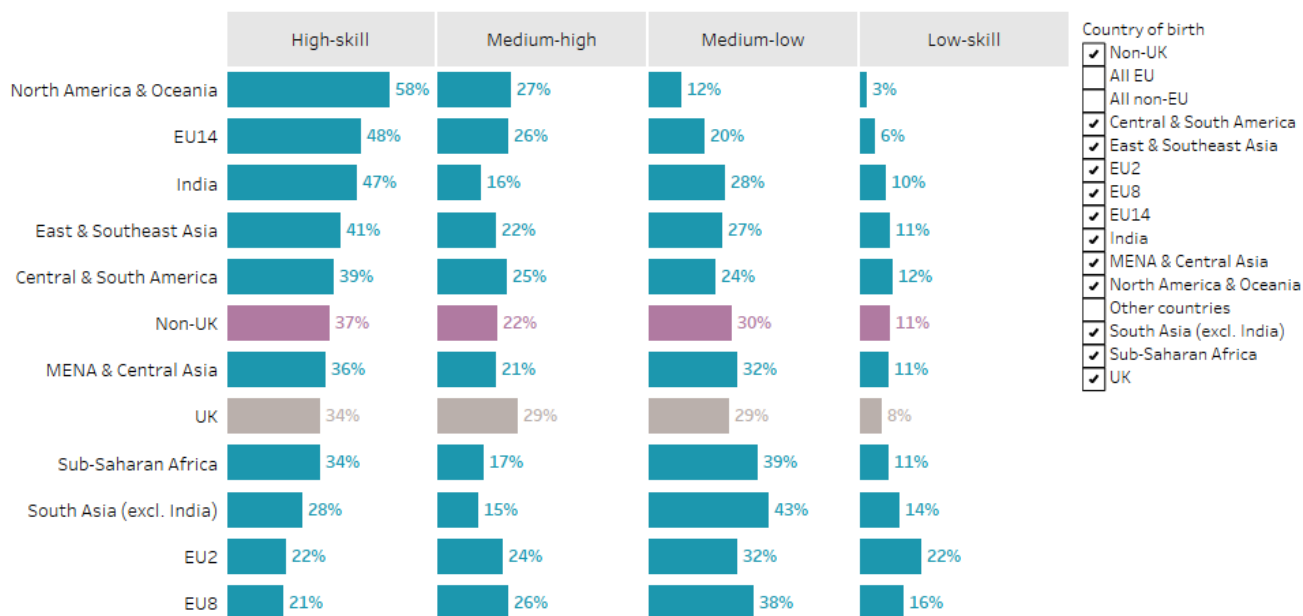## Non-UK workers were slightly more likely than UK-born worker to be in high-skill occupations

Taken as a whole, the occupational distribution of migrant workers did not differ much from that of UK-born workers in 2024, although migrants were slightly more likely to be working in jobs classed as both high- and low-skill than the UK-born (Figure 8). In this context, job skills mainly indicate the educational credentials and training required to perform a job, but do not consider other types of personal skills that are valued in the labour market. A majority of both migrants and UK-born workers were in middle-skilled jobs, which includes occupations such as associate professionals, administrative jobs, sales assistants and some care work.

There are considerable differences in the type of jobs workers do by region of birth, however (Figure 8). Almost 60% of workers born in North America and Oceania were in high-skilled jobs in 2024, the most common of which among the overall migrant population were IT specialists, teachers, managers, and nurses. By contrast, the share of workers born in new EU accession countries (EU8 and EU2) who were working in high-skill jobs was around 20%. Migrants from these countries were most likely to be working in low-skill occupations, which include jobs such as cleaners, waiters, and packers.

Figure 8

Job skill distribution of workers by country of birth, 2024
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

Country of birth	High-skill	Medium-high	Medium-low	Low-skill
North America & Oceania	58%	27%	12%	3%
EU14	48%	26%	20%	6%
India	47%	16%	28%	10%
East & Southeast Asia	41%	22%	27%	11%
Central & South America	39%	25%	24%	12%
Non-UK	37%	22%	30%	11%
MENA & Central Asia	36%	21%	32%	11%
UK	34%	29%	29%	8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	34%	17%	39%	11%
South Asia (excl. India)	28%	15%	43%	14%
EU2	22%	24%	32%	22%
EU8	21%	26%	38%	16%

Region
○ UK
○ London

Country of birth
☑ Non-UK
☐ All EU
☐ All non-EU
☑ Central & South America
☑ East & Southeast Asia
☑ EU2
☑ EU8
☑ EU14
☑ India
☑ MENA & Central Asia
☑ North America & Oceania
☐ Other countries
☑ South Asia (excl. India)
☑ Sub-Saharan Africa
☑ UK

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2024.

Note: Figures refer to people aged 16 to 64 and include the self-employed. The classification of jobs as low or low-medium skilled is based on the four-category classification developed by the ONS in 2020. In this context, job skills mainly indicate the educational credentials that are required to perform a job and do not consider other types of personal skills that are valued in the labour market.
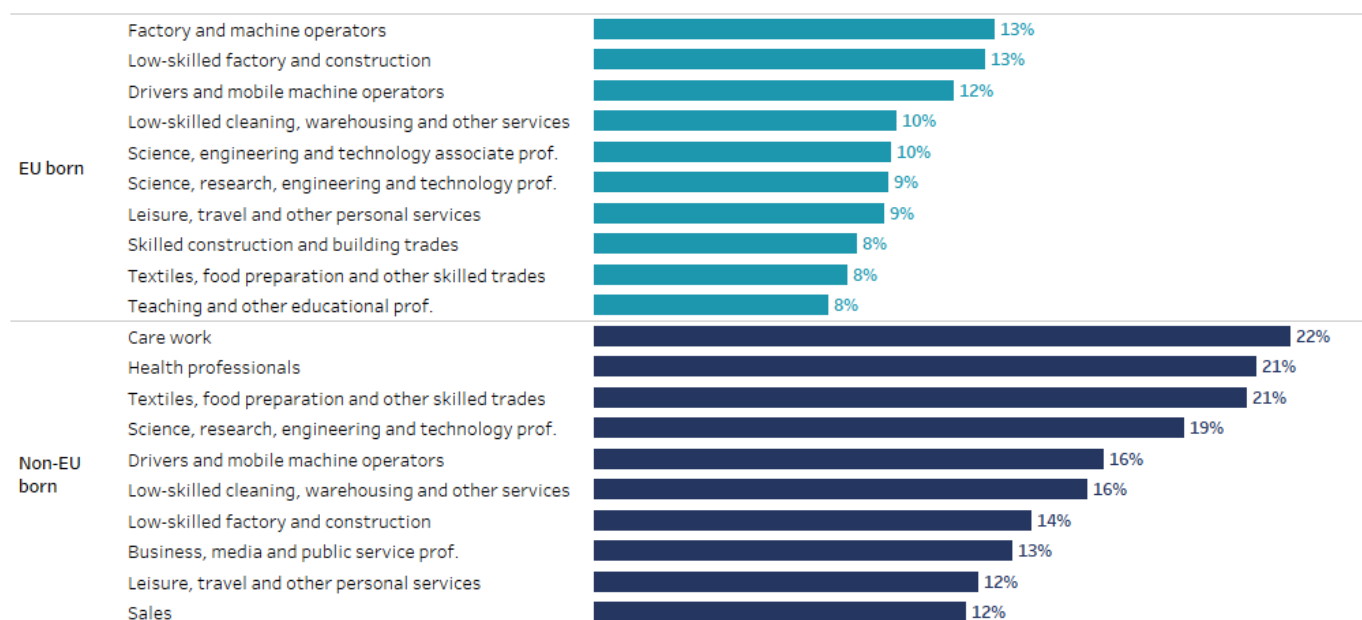
Figure 9 shows the ten occupations that were most reliant on workers born in EU and non-EU countries. Care workers and health professional jobs, such as doctors and nurses, had the highest share of non-EU-born workers in 2024. By contrast, factory and machine operators—which includes jobs such as machine operators in food factories and assemblers—had the largest share of EU-born workers.

Figure 9

Top 10 occupations with the highest share of EU and non-EU born workers, 2024
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

○ UK
○ London

EU born
- Factory and machine operators — 13%
- Low-skilled factory and construction — 13%
- Drivers and mobile machine operators — 12%
- Low-skilled cleaning, warehousing and other services — 10%
- Science, engineering and technology associate prof. — 10%
- Science, research, engineering and technology prof. — 9%
- Leisure, travel and other personal services — 9%
- Skilled construction and building trades — 8%
- Textiles, food preparation and other skilled trades — 8%
- Teaching and other educational prof. — 8%

Non-EU born
- Care work — 22%
- Health professionals — 21%
- Textiles, food preparation and other skilled trades — 21%
- Science, research, engineering and technology prof. — 19%
- Drivers and mobile machine operators — 16%
- Low-skilled cleaning, warehousing and other services — 16%
- Low-skilled factory and construction — 14%
- Business, media and public service prof. — 13%
- Leisure, travel and other personal services — 12%
- Sales — 12%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey, 2024.

Note: Age 16 to 64 only. Based on two-digit occupation coding. Occupation names have been adapted to facilitate understanding. Data for Community and civil enforcement occupations is unavailable due to small sample sizes.
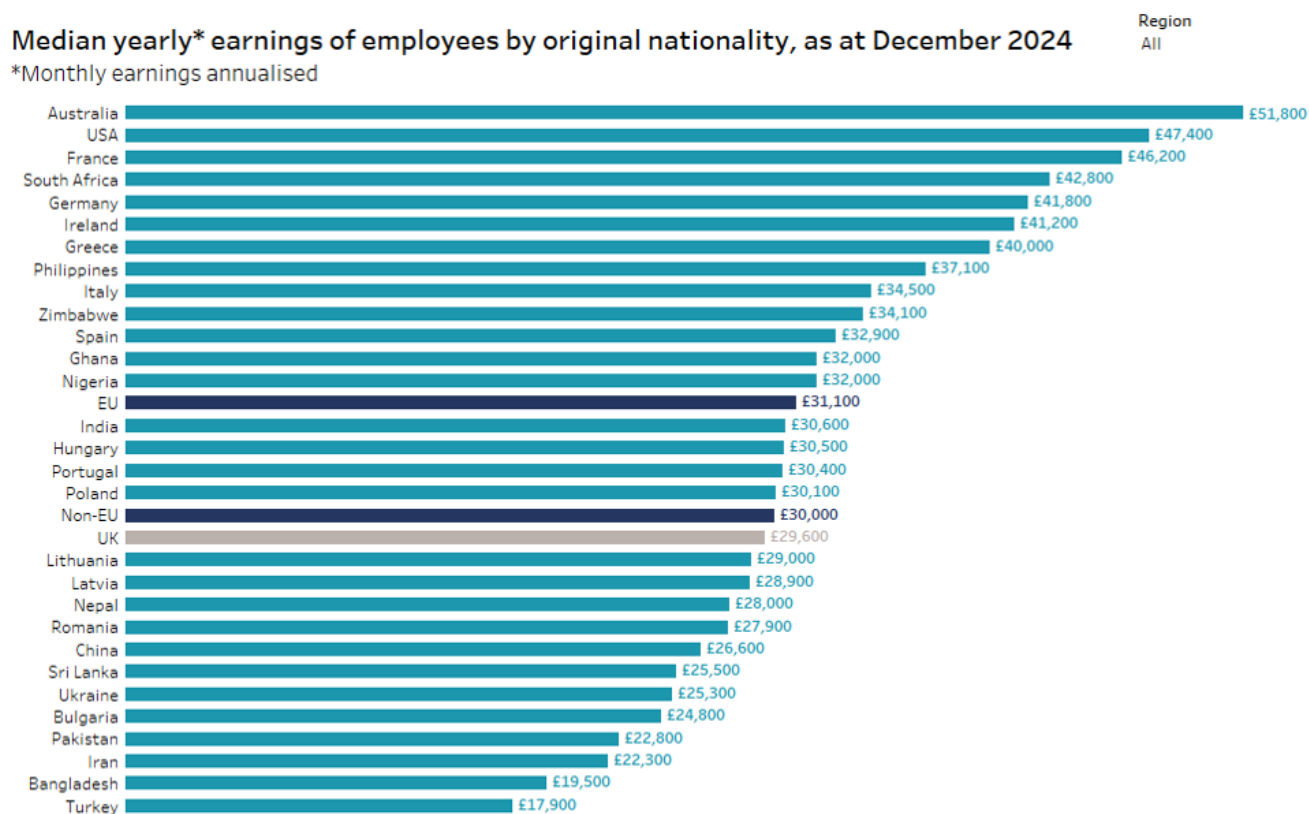
The annualised median earnings of EU and non-EU employees were slightly higher than UK nationals in December 2024

Employees' earnings are closely related to the occupations they hold. Migrant groups most concentrated in high-skilled jobs tend to have higher earnings, which in turn can depend on a range of factors, including their level of education, English language proficiency, and motivations for migration.

In December 2024, the median earnings of people who had an EU or non-EU nationality when they first registered for a national insurance number were slightly higher than those of UK nationals (Figure 10). HMRC publish median earnings data for nationals of 48 countries, with the highest among nationals of English-speaking countries. Australian nationals' annualised median earnings were £51,800, followed by New Zealanders (£50,400), Americans (£47,400), and Canadians (£47,100). The employee population of each of these groups is relatively small, however.

Focusing only on larger nationality groups – that is, those holding over 100,000 jobs – Irish employees had the highest median earnings, while Bangladeshi and Pakistani employees had the lowest (Figure 10). These differences by nationality will largely reflect different visa types and reasons for migration to the UK, with higher earnings among people arriving on skilled work visas and lower earnings among those arriving as refugees or partners of British residents. The relatively low earnings among Chinese nationals might result in part from the fact that many are in the UK on student visas—international students cannot work more than 20 hours per week.

Figure 10

Median yearly* earnings of employees by original nationality, as at December 2024
*Monthly earnings annualised

Region
All

Nationality	Earnings
Australia	£51,800
USA	£47,400
France	£46,200
South Africa	£42,800
Germany	£41,800
Ireland	£41,200
Greece	£40,000
Philippines	£37,100
Italy	£34,500
Zimbabwe	£34,100
Spain	£32,900
Ghana	£32,000
Nigeria	£32,000
EU	£31,100
India	£30,600
Hungary	£30,500
Portugal	£30,400
Poland	£30,100
Non-EU	£30,000
UK	£29,600
Lithuania	£29,000
Latvia	£28,900
Nepal	£28,000
Romania	£27,900
China	£26,600
Sri Lanka	£25,500
Ukraine	£25,300
Bulgaria	£24,800
Pakistan	£22,800
Iran	£22,300
Bangladesh	£19,500
Turkey	£17,900

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC payrolled employments in the UK by nationality, region and industrial sector, from July 2014 to December 2024.

Note: Figures include part-time employees but do not include self-employed individuals. 'Original nationality' refers to the person's nationality when they registered for a national insurance number. The figures for non-UK nationalities therefore include people who subsequently became UK citizens; however, migrants who moved to the UK and became a UK citizen before applying for a NINo are recorded as UK-origin. The original nationality groups presented are those which held over 50,000 jobs as at December 2024. *Annualised* earnings are calculated by multiplying monthly earnings by 12.

Earnings data is also available for recent arrivals – that is, people who were issued an entry visa between April 2019 and March 2023 – including breakdowns by industry and occupation. In the 2023/24 financial year, the median earnings of Skilled Workers were £56,600, while Health and Care (H&C) workers earned £30,900. The partners of Skilled Workers and H&C workers had lower median earnings (£30,200 and £22,100, respectively). People granted family visas had the lowest median earnings in 2023/24, at £20,200.

Highly educated migrant workers are often overqualified for their jobs

Compared to UK-born individuals, migrants were more likely to work in jobs for which they are overqualified—i.e., their education level is above that typically required for the job. The indicator of overqualification used here shows the share of highly educated workers (those with university degrees or with higher education qualifications below degree level, such as nursing) working in low- and medium-low-skill jobs (Figure 11).
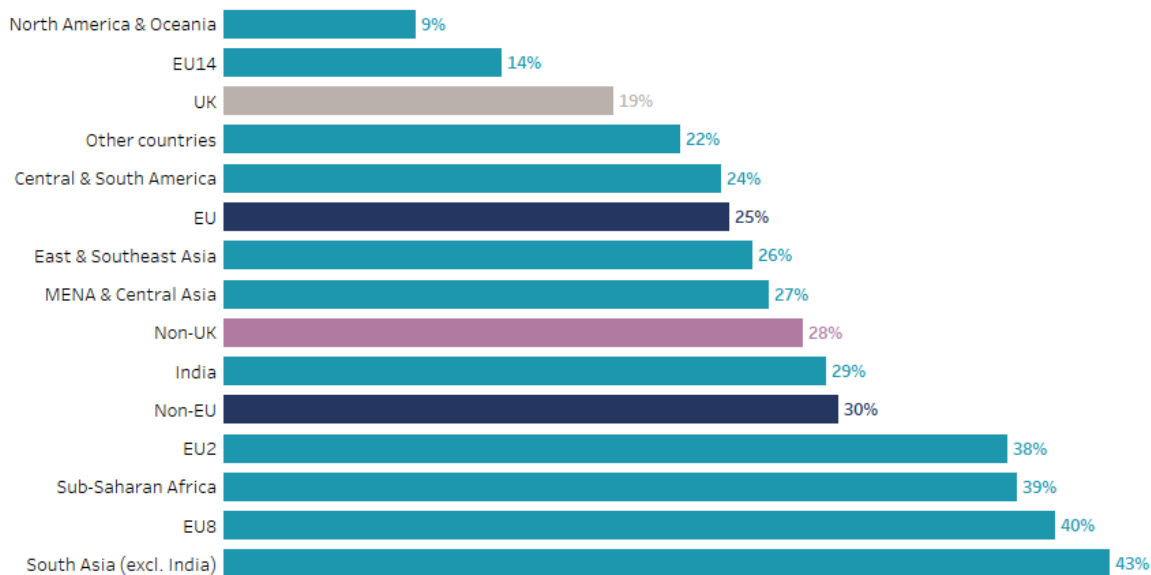
Only migrant workers born in North America and Oceania and EU14 countries were less likely to be overqualified for their jobs than the UK-born in 2024. By contrast, workers born in South Asian countries (excluding India) were the most likely to be overqualified.

Some of the factors explaining migrants' high over-qualification rates include employers' failure to recognise foreign qualifications, migrants' lack of information about the job searching process in the UK, or a lack of UK-specific skills, such as language ability.

Figure 11

Share of highly-educated workers in low- and medium-low skill jobs by country of birth, 2024
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

Region: ● UK ○ London

Country of birth	Share
North America & Oceania	9%
EU14	14%
UK	19%
Other countries	22%
Central & South America	24%
EU	25%
East & Southeast Asia	26%
MENA & Central Asia	27%
Non-UK	28%
India	29%
Non-EU	30%
EU2	38%
Sub-Saharan Africa	39%
EU8	40%
South Asia (excl. India)	43%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2024.

Note: Age 16-64 only. The classification of jobs as low or low-medium skilled is based on the four-category classification developed by the ONS. In this context, job skills mainly indicate the educational credentials that are required to perform a job and do not consider other types of personal skills that are valued in the labour market. Highly-educated workers are those with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, or with higher education qualifications below degree level (e.g. BTEC Higher Nationals, diploma in higher education, nursing). Workers with unspecified qualifications are excluded from the analysis.
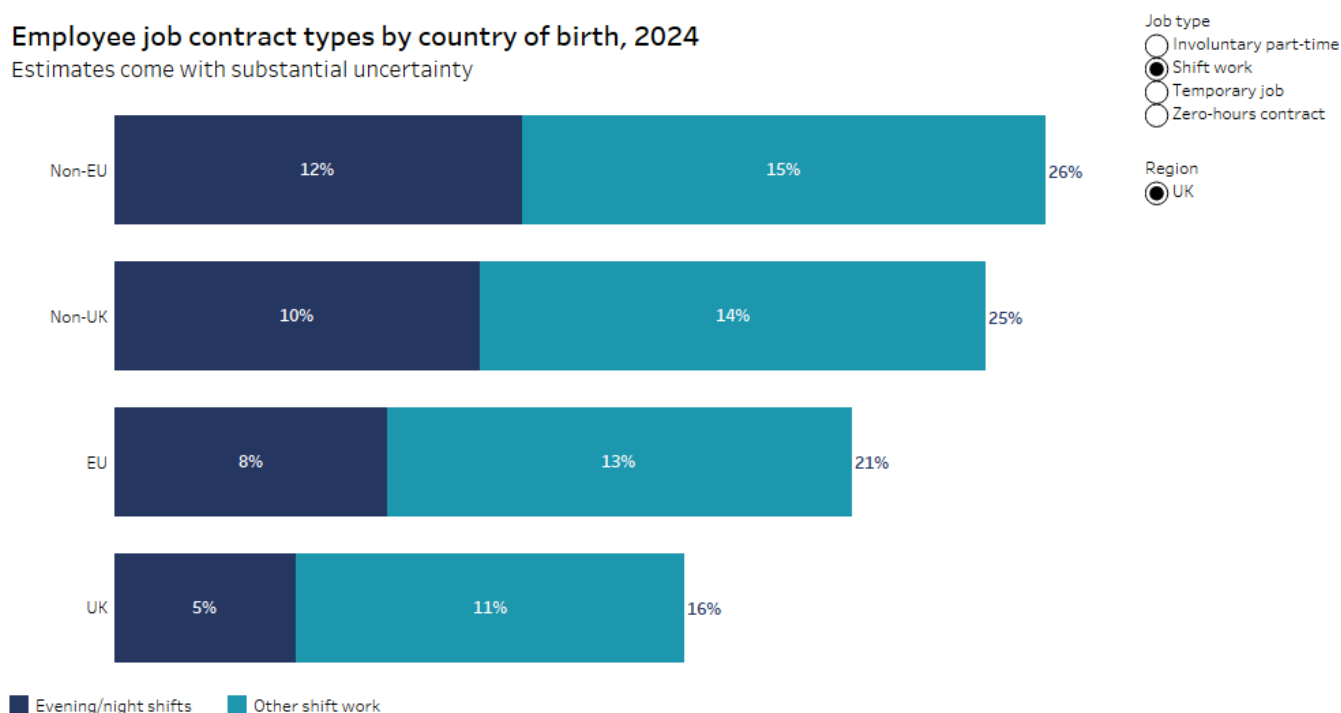
Foreign-born workers were more likely to work during night shifts and in non-permanent jobs than the UK-born

Figure 12 compares UK- and non-UK-born employees' working patterns and job contracts in 2024. In some cases, there was little difference between the two groups. For example, the share of workers in part-time jobs because they could not find a full-time job was relatively low for both the UK-born and migrants. Similarly, while migrant workers were marginally more likely to be in non-permanent jobs or have a zero-hours contract, these shares were low. Around a third of migrants with zero-hours contracts in 2024 worked in social care or as wait staff or bar staff.

Figure 12

Employee job contract types by country of birth, 2024
Estimates come with substantial uncertainty

Job type
○ Involuntary part-time
● Shift work
○ Temporary job
○ Zero-hours contract

Region
● UK

Country	Evening/night shifts	Other shift work	Total
Non-EU	12%	15%	26%
Non-UK	10%	14%	25%
EU	8%	13%	21%
UK	5%	11%	16%

■ Evening/night shifts   ■ Other shift work

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2024 and quarter 2 of the Labour Force Survey 2024 (for shift work data).

Note: *Other part-timers* are workers in part-time jobs because they are studying, ill or disabled, or did not state a reason for working part-time. Working patterns which involve working nights are: three-shift working; continental shifts; sometimes days, sometimes nights; and night shifts.

However, a quarter of non-UK-born employees worked in jobs involving some kind of shift work, compared to 16% of UK-born employees. Shift work is defined as work that takes place outside typical working hours (i.e., 9am to 5pm, from Monday to Friday. It is more common in sectors that require 24-hour service (e.g., nursing and care homes) or where service is concentrated at certain times of the day (e.g., restaurants, night clubs), and could involve working on different time schedules each day of the week, on weekends, on split shifts (e.g., full shifts divided into two distinct parts with a gap of several hours in between) or during night time.

In 2024, 10% of migrant employees worked night shifts, compared to 5% of UK-born employees. Night shift work is thought to negatively affect both physical and mental health and work performance through its impact on sleep and circadian rhythms.

Evidence gaps and limitations

Both the Annual Population Survey and HMRC PAYE RTI are cross-sectional datasets. As a result, we cannot follow individuals over time and, therefore, we do not know whether migrants' labour market position has improved or worsened since their arrival to the UK. In general, migrants' integration in the labour market is likely to improve the longer they stay in the UK. See the Migration Observatory commentary, Upward Mobility: Earnings Trajectories for recent immigrants, for an in-depth discussion.

The aggregate occupational categories used in this briefing (e.g., 'high-skilled' or 'low-skilled') are also imperfect as a measure of occupational skills. While using aggregated occupational groups is useful for providing an overview of the skills required to perform a certain job, in practice, they can contain a wide range of occupations, including workers with quite different levels of education, pay or working conditions.

Acknowledgement

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 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.
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