



BRIEFING

EU migration to and from the UK

AUTHORS: Madeleine Sumption
Mihnea Cuibus
Peter William Walsh
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COMPAS
Centre on Migration,
Policy & Society



www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

How many EU migrants are there in the UK? How has the migration of EU citizens changed since Brexit? This briefing provides key statistics on EU migrants and migration in the UK.

Key Points

Net migration of EU citizens turned negative in 2022. Between the middle of 2021 and 2025, around 162,000 more EU nationals left the UK than arrived in the country.

There were approximately 4 million EU-born residents in the UK according to the 2021/22 Census. They made up 6% of the population and 37% of all those born abroad. Including dual nationals, 5.3 million people living in the UK held an EU passport.

At the time of the Census, the top origin country for EU-born residents was Poland (21%). That was followed by Romania (14%), Ireland (10%), Germany (7%), and Italy (7%).

Around 15% of all EU passport holders in the UK were part of an ethnic minority group, according to the 2021/22 Census. The highest shares of ethnic minorities were found among Dutch (60%), Portuguese (50%), and Belgian (47%) citizens.

EU migrants in the UK are most concentrated in London and parts of the East of England. However, they are more evenly distributed across the country compared to non-EU migrants.

Since the post-Brexit immigration system was introduced in 2021, only 5% of all visas were granted to EU nationals, mostly for work and study.

There were 2.3 million EU nationals in payrolled employment in the UK at the end of 2024, 13% lower than the peak reached in November 2019. Employment declined most in lower-skilled sectors like hospitality and administrative services. Median earnings among EU nationals surpassed those of UK and non-EU citizens in 2022.

In the 2023/24 academic year, 28,000 students domiciled in the EU enrolled on a new course in UK universities, 58% lower than in the last year under free movement. Their share among all international students fell to 8%, compared to a peak of 27% in 2016/17.

Around 6.4 million people applied to the EU Settlement Scheme, with a total of 8.7 million applications. These included repeat applications, such as those to upgrade from pre-settled to settled status, but also 744,000 late applications submitted after the initial deadline in June 2021.

Approximately 5.8 million people held status under the EUSS on 30 September 2025. That included 4.4 million people with settled status and 1.2 million with pre-settled status.

Around 11,000 EU citizens were refused entry at the UK border in the year ending 30 September 2025, making up 56% of all those denied entry.

Understanding the policy

Before Brexit, free movement rules gave EU citizens the right to live and work in the UK without requiring permission. From 1 January 2021, free movement ended, and EU citizens migrating to the UK are subject to more restrictive immigration rules, which are the same as those facing citizens from non-EU countries. Any person moving to the UK to live or work now requires a visa.

The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

The new immigration rules do not apply to EU citizens and their family members who were already living in the UK before free movement ended on 31 December 2020, or eligible family members of EU citizens who can join them at any point after this date. These people instead had to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and secure pre-settled or settled status. Irish citizens may apply to the EUSS but are not required to.

Settled status is a form of permanent residence in the UK, which is a prerequisite for becoming a UK citizen. Pre-settled status is designed for people who have been living in the UK for less than 5 years, while settled status is for those living in the UK for 5 years or more.

Initially, people with pre-settled status were all required to apply again to the EUSS in order to upgrade to settled status once they had accrued the necessary 5 years of residence. From January 2025, the government began using administrative data to automatically upgrade people to settled status if their records show they have met the residency requirement. Under the initial policy, settled status was permanent, but pre-settled status was designed to expire after 5 years. However, the government has automatically extended pre-settled status for everyone in order to avoid people losing their status (initially for 2 years, and currently for 5). Some – though not all – people with pre-settled status face restrictions on their access to certain benefits, such as Universal Credit.

Those living in the UK by 31 December 2020 were expected to apply to the EUSS by the deadline of 30 June 2021, although late applications are permitted where evidence is shown of reasonable grounds for missing the deadline. For more information about the EUSS, see [Unsettled Status – 2020: Which EU Citizens are at Risk of Failing to Secure their Rights after Brexit?](#)

The post-Brexit immigration system

Newly arriving EU citizens and their family members who are not eligible for the EUSS or entering the UK as visitors must obtain a visa in one of three main categories: work, family, or study. Under the rules for skilled workers, the main long-term work visa option for newly hired employees requires applicants to have a job offer for a role that meets skill and salary requirements. An overview of work-related migration policies and data are available in [Work visas and migrant workers in the UK](#).

Under the new immigration rules, EU citizens joining family members settled in the UK must meet a £29,000 income threshold. The same requirement does not apply if the person they are joining has status under the EU Settlement Scheme, provided the relationship existed at the end of the transition period and continues to exist at the time of application, or relates to a child born after the end of the transition period.

Under free movement, EU students paid the same tuition fees as 'Home' students and were entitled to the same subsidised tuition fee loans. However, following the end of free movement, the academic year 2020/21 was the last year that EU citizens enjoyed these benefits. From 1 August 2021, new EU students must apply for a student visa and have generally been subject to higher international student tuition fees.

Citizens of countries that are in the EEA but not the EU (namely Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein), as well as Switzerland, face effectively the same immigration rules as EU citizens (with some small differences for Swiss citizens). We use the term 'EU citizens' throughout the briefing for ease of understanding and because some data sources refer specifically to EU citizens. Note, however, that although Ireland is an EU country and included in some EU data, it is part of the Common Travel Area and hence subject to free movement rules, unlike other EU countries.

Understanding the evidence

The figures used in this briefing have some important limitations, particularly when looking at data since the Covid-19 pandemic, which seriously disrupted existing methods. The ONS is still developing new methodologies for estimating migration flows and stocks, which should lead to a more accurate picture of migrants in the UK over time.

Estimates of migration *flows* to and from the UK are based on the ONS's new methods for measuring migration using administrative data. These data sources have the potential to improve migration statistics, but are not yet labelled National Statistics as they have important limitations. ONS estimates for non-UK citizens rely on border data, including for EU nationals, starting from the most recent data release in November 2025. EU estimates were previously based on tax and benefit records from the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID). People who enter the UK and remain for at least 12 months, excluding short trips abroad, are counted as long-term immigrants. Those who leave for at least 12 months are counted as long-term emigrants. For the most recent estimates, ONS cannot yet confirm whether people who leave do so for at least 12 months. As a result, it must make assumptions about how long people will stay. These may not be accurate when behaviour is changing, for example, due to policy changes. In addition, border data are not complete, and unrecorded movements of people across the Irish border via the Common Travel Area create additional uncertainty. This is why provisional estimates can be substantially revised over time.

For estimates of the UK's resident EU *population*, this briefing primarily uses 2021/22 Census data. Our estimates combine data from the three separate censuses conducted by UK nations – the 2021 England and Wales Census, 2021 Northern Ireland Census, and 2022 Scotland Census. Previous estimates of the migrant population between censuses, based on survey data from the Annual Population Survey (APS), have become inaccurate after the pandemic due to falling response rates, and were discontinued by the ONS in 2021. This means the UK lacks a source of accurate data on migrant stocks between 2021 and 2025.

Our labour market analysis of EU migrants is based on payroll employment estimates produced by the HMRC using administrative tax data. They are built by combining information from the pay-as-you-go (PAYE) real-time information (RTI) database and the Migrant Worker Scan. While they only cover workers on a payroll, and hence exclude the self-employed, such estimates are considerably more accurate in describing post-COVID dynamics on the labour market.

In this briefing, data on international students in UK higher education come from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA categorises students by ‘domicile’: a person’s place of permanent residence before they start their course. This means that some non-UK nationals are UK-domiciled students. Data are sometimes restricted to “newly enrolled” students to indicate annual inflows. In 2021, HESA changed its data to make it more comprehensive. This means that the statistics for 2021 are not strictly comparable with those for previous years.

This briefing follows the ONS classification that distinguishes between 4 different groups of EU countries based on the year they joined the EU: EU14, EU8, EU2 and EU Other. The countries comprising these groups are available [here](#).

The term ‘migrant’ is used differently in different contexts. In this briefing, we use ‘migrant’ to refer to people who were EU citizens when they moved to the UK. Some data sources provide country of birth, and some provide nationality. Each definition has limitations. Using the country of birth has the drawback of including British citizens born abroad, such as the children of parents in the armed forces based overseas. However, defining migrants as the foreign-born has the benefit of including people who have come to the UK and naturalised – something that the nationality-based definition does not take into account. For further discussion of this terminology, see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Who Counts as a Migrant: Definitions and their Consequences](#).

How many EU nationals are migrating to and from the UK?

Since 2022, more EU citizens have left the UK than have arrived. Net migration of EU nationals was -70,000 in the year ending 30 June 2025. Around 155,000 EU citizens emigrated from the UK, while 85,000 immigrated. Most EU nationals who immigrated to the UK during this period already had status under the EUSS, around 53% of the total. This was a consistent pattern in recent years – as discussed below, relatively few EU nationals have been granted visas under the post-Brexit immigration system.

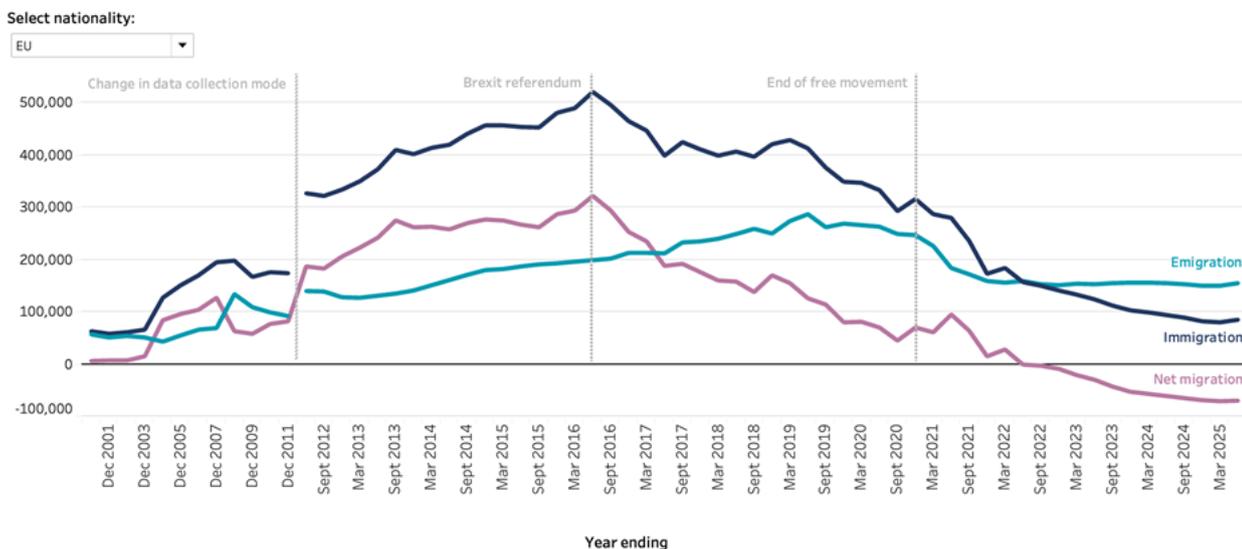
Between mid-2021 and mid-2025, the number of EU nationals living in the UK declined by a cumulative 162,000 because of migration. Net migration from the EU fell sharply after the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and continued declining after free movement ended on 31 December 2020. This followed a period of rapid growth in migration from the EU that began with the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004, briefly interrupted after the 2008 financial crisis.

Most of the decline in EU net migration has occurred because of a sharp drop in immigration, which fell by more than 80% from 2016 to 2025. Most of the drop occurred before any restrictions were introduced in 2021 – possible reasons for this include uncertainty about the political and social situation in the UK after Brexit, and a fall in the value of the pound, reducing the value of earnings in the UK. Migration from the EU had also been unusually high in the period before the referendum, meaning it may have been expected to somewhat decline anyway. Emigration initially increased after the referendum before stabilising at a lower level than before, though the large majority of EU migrants did not leave the UK.

Figure 1

Net migration of EU nationals turned negative after 2022

Estimates of net migration, immigration, and emigration, by year and nationality



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS long-term international migration data.

Notes: Data for 2000 to 2011 are based on estimates from the International Passenger Survey. From 2012 onwards, estimates are created using administrative records.



Overall net migration into the UK rose sharply after the new immigration system was introduced in 2021, reaching an all-time peak of 944,000 in the year ending 31 March 2023 (Figure 1). Yet numbers declined rapidly after the government introduced restrictions on immigration, to around 200,000 in the year ending 30 June 2025 (for more details, see [Net migration to the UK](#)).

How many EU migrants are there in the UK?

There were around 4 million EU-born people living in the UK at the time of the Census in 2021/22, approximately 50% more than in 2011. People born in the EU made up 37% of the foreign-born population, and 6% of the total population of the UK. Most of the growth in numbers between the censuses came from an increase in the number of residents born in EU8 and EU2 member states in Central and Eastern Europe, who made up 52% of the EU-born population in 2021/22.

Table 1

Around 4 million people born in the EU lived in the UK at the time of the Census

EU migrant population in the UK by passport held, country of birth, and UK country, Census 2021/22

Select country of origin:

EU (incl. dual UK/EU nationals) ▾

	Country of birth	Passport held
England & Wales (Census 2021)	3,643,000	4,372,634
Northern Ireland (Census 2021)	107,809	683,512
Scotland (Census 2022)	234,363	273,336
UK (Census 2021/22)	3,985,172	5,329,482

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of England & Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, and Scotland Census 2022.

Notes: (1) Irish citizens continue to have the right to live and work in the UK through Common Travel Area arrangements; Irish citizens thus do not need to apply to EUSS (though they can if they want to). (2) In the NI Census, 505k people reported holding only an Irish passport (not a UK one) and more than 90% of this group (459k people) were born in NI. (3) Scottish data is for 2022, not 2021. (4) Dual UK/EU nationals were only included in the total category EU (incl. dual nationals), and are excluded when selecting any of the nationality subgroups.



The total number of EU passport holders in the UK at the time of the 2021/22 Census was around 5.3 million, of which 634,000 people were dual UK-EU nationals. Numbers also included around 684,000 Irish passport holders living in Northern Ireland (people born there can choose to have British, Irish, or both citizenships). Excluding UK and Irish citizens – who have different rights as part of the Common Travel Area – the number of EU passport holders in the UK falls to 3.8 million.

There are no reliable data on the evolution of the migrant population in the UK after 2021. Estimates between the censuses were previously based on survey data, though a collapse in response rates has rendered such methods inaccurate. However, data on migration flows suggest it is likely that the number of EU nationals living in the UK has declined by around 160,000 between 2021 and 2025.

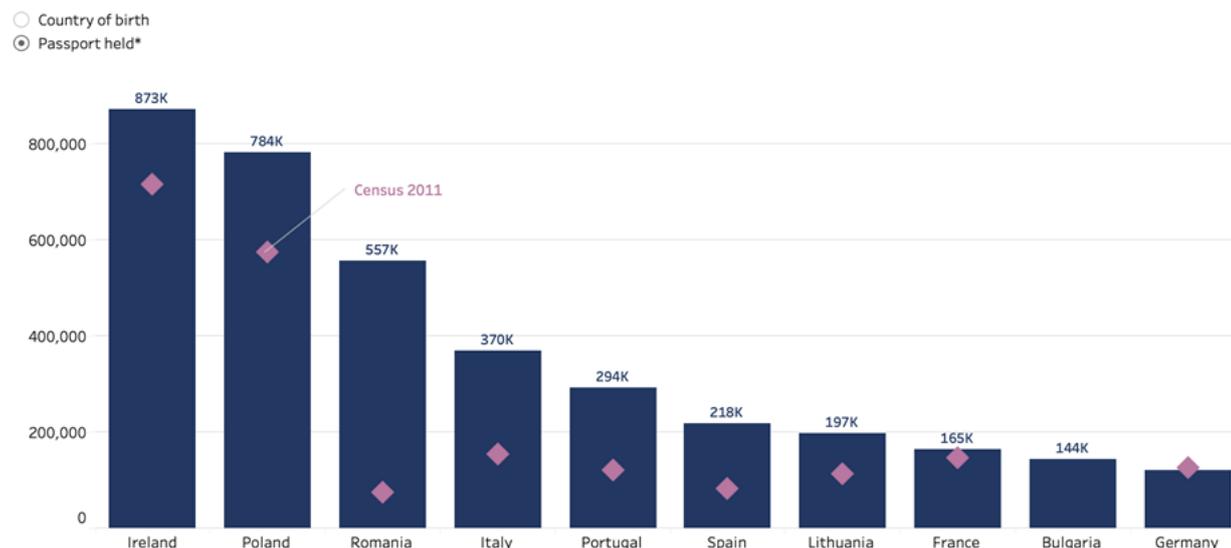
Where do EU migrants in the UK come from?

At the time of the 2021/22 Census, about a fifth of EU-born residents in the UK were Polish (21%, 841,000). The next largest groups were people born in Romania (14%), Ireland (10%), Italy (7%), and Germany (7%). Compared to the previous census in 2011, the largest increase in population was seen among migrants born in Romania – numbers rose almost 7 times from 83,000 to 558,000 – and Bulgaria, whose numbers increased from around 50,000 to 159,000. The number of people born in Italy and Spain also roughly doubled between the censuses. In contrast, the number of UK residents born in France and Germany remained relatively constant, and the number of Irish-born people declined.

Figure 2

Poland, Romania, and Ireland were the top countries of origin for EU migrants in the UK

Number of residents by country of birth and passport held, top EU countries of origin, Census 2011 and 2021/22



Source: England and Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, Scotland Census 2022.

Notes: *Data for Portugal, Bulgaria, and passports held excludes Scotland because of a lack of availability. Data on passports held also exclude dual UK-EU nationals.



The largest group among EU passport holders living in the UK were Irish citizens – 904,000, of whom 508,000 were living in Northern Ireland. They were followed by Polish (784,000), Romanian (557,000), and Italian (370,000) citizens.

How many EU migrants are part of an ethnic minority group?

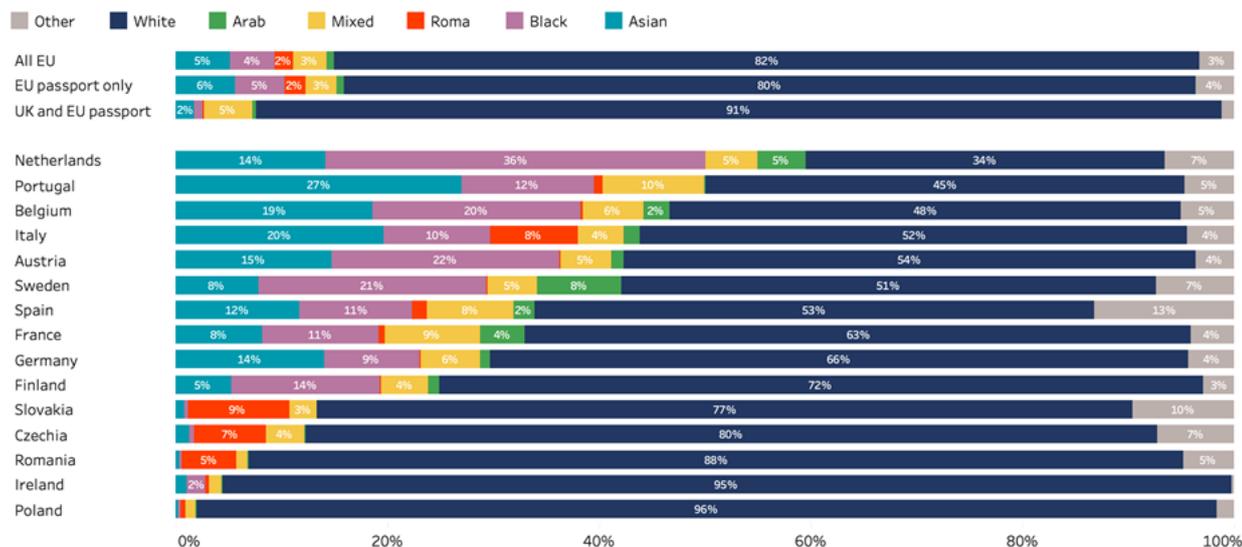
Around 15% of all EU passport holders in the UK – 799,000 individuals – identified themselves as part of an ethnic minority group at the time of the 2021/22 Census (not including any white respondents). The largest group among them were Asian EU nationals, 274,000 of whom lived in the UK, mostly from South Asia. They were followed by Black (226,000) and Mixed ethnicity (170,000) EU nationals.

The share of ethnic minorities varied widely by nationality. Slightly more than half of Portuguese passport holders in the UK, 51% of the total, were part of an ethnic minority group. The highest shares of ethnic minorities were found among Dutch (60%), Portuguese (50%), Belgian (47%), Italian (44%), and Austrian (42%) passport holders. In contrast, nationals of member states in Central and Eastern Europe were much more likely to be White, though there were significant Roma minorities among Romanian, Czech, and Slovakian citizens.

Figure 3

Around 15% of EU nationals in the UK were part of an ethnic minority group

Share of residents, by ethnic group and passport held, Census 2021/22



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of England & Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, and Scotland Census 2022.

Notes: Data for Scotland are for 2022, and summed up with the other data from 2021. Data on individual passports held were not available for Scotland, meaning Scottish data are only available for the aggregate categories. Data on multiple passport holders in Northern Ireland only include UK and Irish passport holders, meaning small numbers of UK and other EU dual nationals are excluded (though the total numbers are small). The Roma category includes Gypsies and Travellers.



Where do EU migrants live in the UK?

According to the 2021/22 Census, the highest concentrations of EU-born residents relative to population can be found in London and the East of England. The local authority with the highest share of EU-born residents was Boston in Lincolnshire (20%). Of the top 10 local authorities by share of EU-born population, seven were in London, including the rest of the top five – Kensington and Chelsea (19%), Haringey (18%), the City of London (18%), and Westminster (18%).

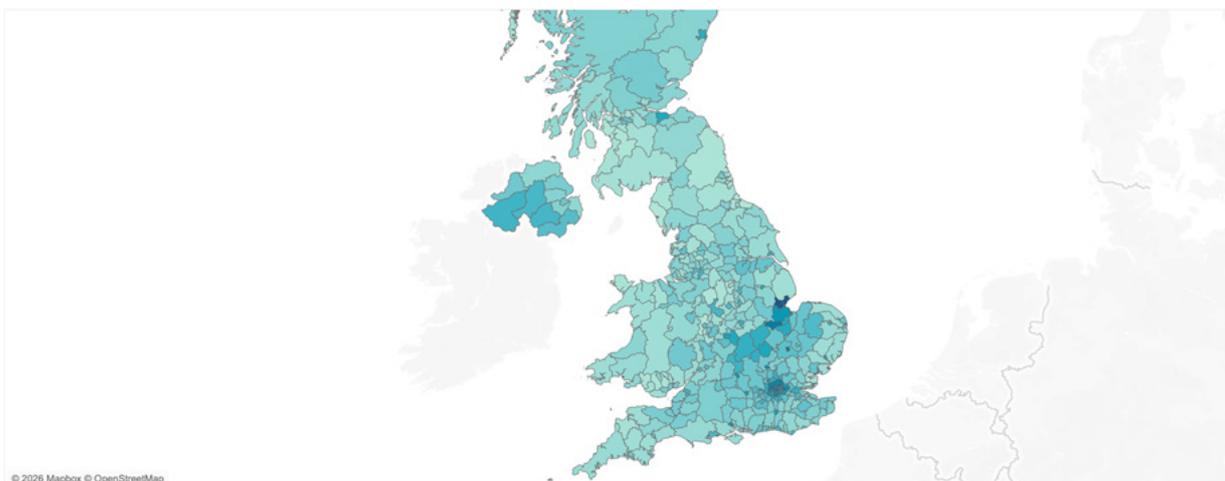
Compared to non-EU migrants, EU migrants are less likely to live in London. There were about 1.1 million EU-born residents in London at the time of the census, or 28% of the UK total. Among non-EU migrants, the share who lived in London was almost 37%, with 2.4 million residents. The EU-born were a minority of the migrant population in most local authorities, although there are some exceptions, particularly in the East of England. For more details, see [Where do migrants live in the UK?](#) and the [Local Data Guide](#).

Figure 4

EU migrants are concentrated in London and the East of England

Number and share of people born in the EU or holding an EU passport, by local authority, Census 2021/22

- Country of birth
- Excluding Irish
- Number
- Passport held
- Including Irish
- Share of population



Source: England and Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, Scotland Census 2022.

Note: People born in Northern Ireland can choose between an Irish and British passport, or have both.

**How many visas are granted to EU nationals?**

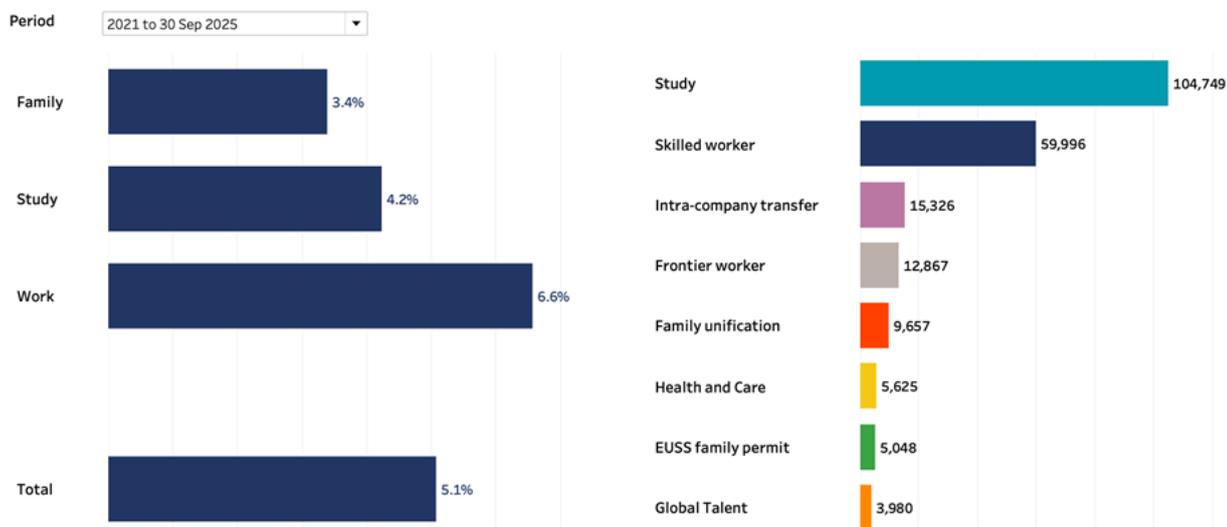
Uptake of the post-Brexit immigration system remains very low among EU nationals. These made up around 5% of all work, study, and family visas granted between 1 January 2021 and 30 September 2025. Around 241,000 EU citizens were granted visas in this period, of which half were work visas. These figures include short-term workers and “frontier workers” — a one-off cohort of people who do not live in the UK but conducted some work here before the end of 2020.

The share of EU nationals among all those granted visas to the UK increased from 3.9% in 2021 to 6.4% in the year ending 30 September 2025 as arrivals from outside the EU fell sharply. The share of EU nationals among those granted work visas also increased from 4.5% to 9.2%. However, their share remains much lower than before Brexit – for example, EU citizens made up 58% of all foreign nationals moving to the UK for the long term in the year ending 31 March 2019.

Figure 5

EU nationals make up around 5% of all visas granted under the post-Brexit system

Share of visas granted to EU nationals by visa category and number of visas granted to EU nationals by top visa types, by period



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release, Table Vis_D02.

Notes: 'Family' visas comprises family unifications visas, EEA family permits, and EU Settlement Scheme family permits. 'Work' visas excludes Frontier Worker visas. 'Total' visas excludes BNO visas, visas issued under the Ukraine schemes, and visitor visas since EU citizens do not require a visa to visit the UK.



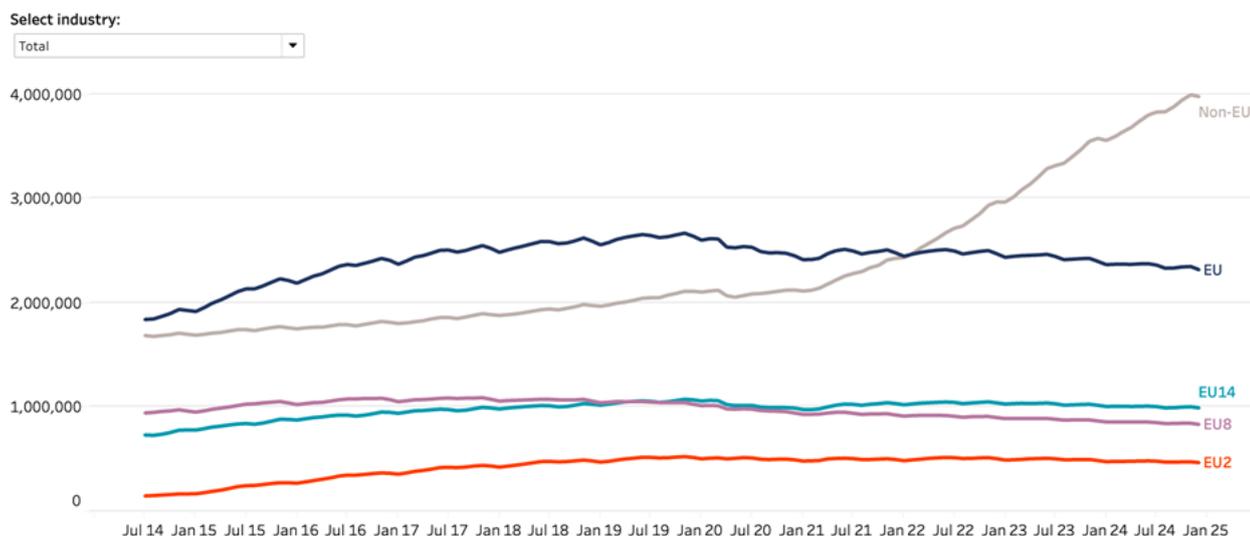
How many EU nationals work in the UK?

Around 2.3 million EU nationals were in payrolled employment in the UK at the end of 2024, making up 7% of all employments. EU nationals made up a majority of foreign employees in the UK before the start of 2022, though a surge in the number of non-EU migrants in the labour market subsequently reversed this longstanding pattern.

Migrants from the EU work in a wide range of occupations and industries. The largest sectors that employed them at the end of 2024 were administrative and support services (332,000), retail (296,000), manufacturing (265,000), and hospitality (248,000).

Figure 6

The number of EU nationals employed in the UK declined after 2019, while non-EU employments surged
 Number of payrolled employments, by month, nationality, and industry



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC data on payrolled employments, July 2014 to December 2024. Estimates produced using HMRC's PAYE real time information (RTI) data and Migrant Worker Scan.
 Note: Data covers employments rather than employees, meaning individuals with more than one job will be counted multiple times. Those who are self-employed are not included.



The number of EU employments peaked at around 2.6 million in November 2019, after a period of rapid growth in the 2010s that was driven to a large extent by Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, whose number in employment more than tripled between 2014 and 2019. By the end of 2024, the number of EU employments had declined by 13% compared to this peak, with the steepest fall of 20% among EU8 citizens. This contrasts with an 88% increase in the number of non-EU employments during the same period.

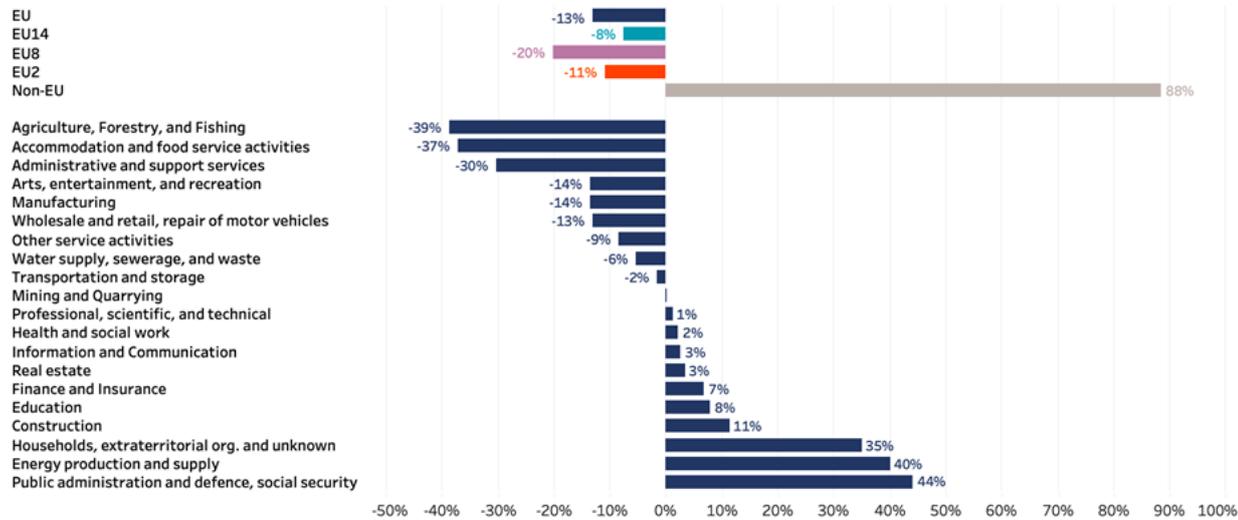
The decline in EU workers is likely to be a result of the combined effect of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. EU employments dropped in 2020 and only partly recovered in 2021 before continuing to steadily decline. As shown in Figure 5, take-up of the new immigration system remains very low among EU citizens, with relatively small numbers coming to the UK for work.

There are also visible shifts in the balance of jobs that EU workers do in the UK. The new immigration system greatly restricts options for EU nationals to work in lower-skilled occupations. Between November 2019 and December 2024, employments of EU citizens fell most in sectors such as hospitality (-37%) and administrative services (-30%). Manufacturing (-14%) and retail (-13%) were also affected. EU employments grew in more highly skilled sectors like finance (+7%) and public administration (+44%).

Figure 7

EU employments in the UK fell by 13% between their peak in November 2019 and December 2024

Changes in payrolled employments between November 2019 and December 2024, by nationality group and industry



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC data on payrolled employments, July 2014 to December 2024. Estimates produced using HMRC's PAYE real time information (RTI) data and Migrant Worker Scan.
 Note: Data covers employments rather than employees, meaning individuals with more than one job will be counted multiple times. Those who are self-employed are not included.

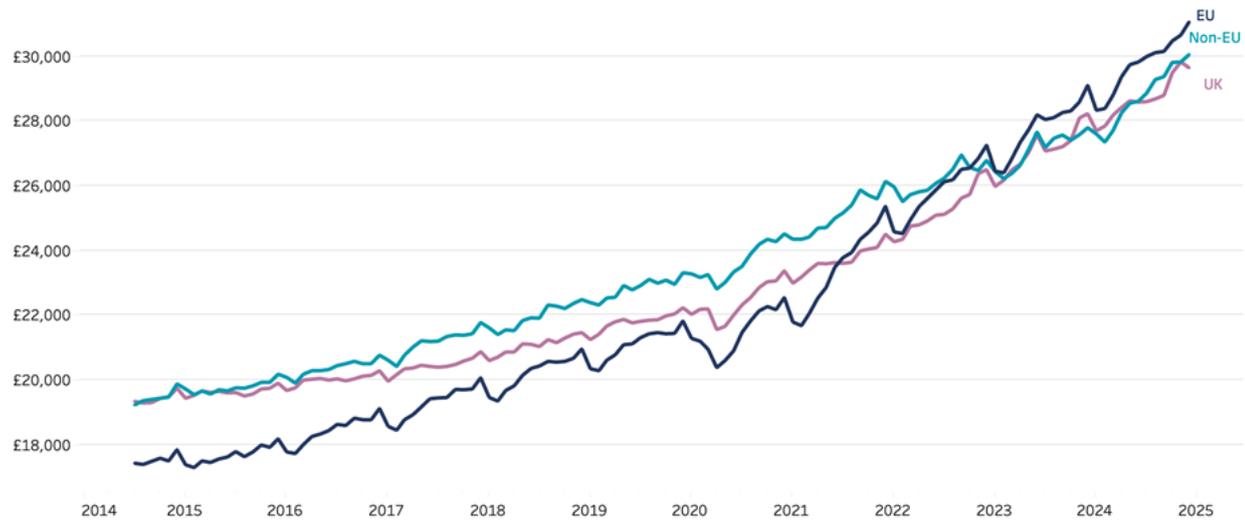


EU nationals employed in the UK had median earnings of £31,100 a year at the end of 2024. Earnings among EU nationals overtook those of other groups in 2022 after being historically lower.

Much of the increase is likely driven by changes in the composition of the migrant population in the UK – large numbers of recent non-EU arrivals in sectors with low pay like social care, selective emigration of EU nationals employed in sectors with lower wages, and low recent immigration meaning most EU citizens have now spent longer periods of time in the UK, with incomes [increasing significantly over time](#) among all migrants. For more details, see [Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview](#) and [EU Citizens in the UK Labour Market](#).

Figure 8

After 2022, median earnings of EU nationals employed in the UK surpassed those of UK and non-EU citizens
 Annualised median earnings, payrolled employees, by month and nationality



Source: HMRC PAYE data for payrolled employees.

Notes: Median monthly earnings are multiplied by 12 and rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. Nationality refers to the citizenship declared when first applying for a National Insurance number (some foreign nationals will have acquired British citizenship in the meantime). Data only include payrolled employees and not the self-employed.



How many EU nationals study in the UK?

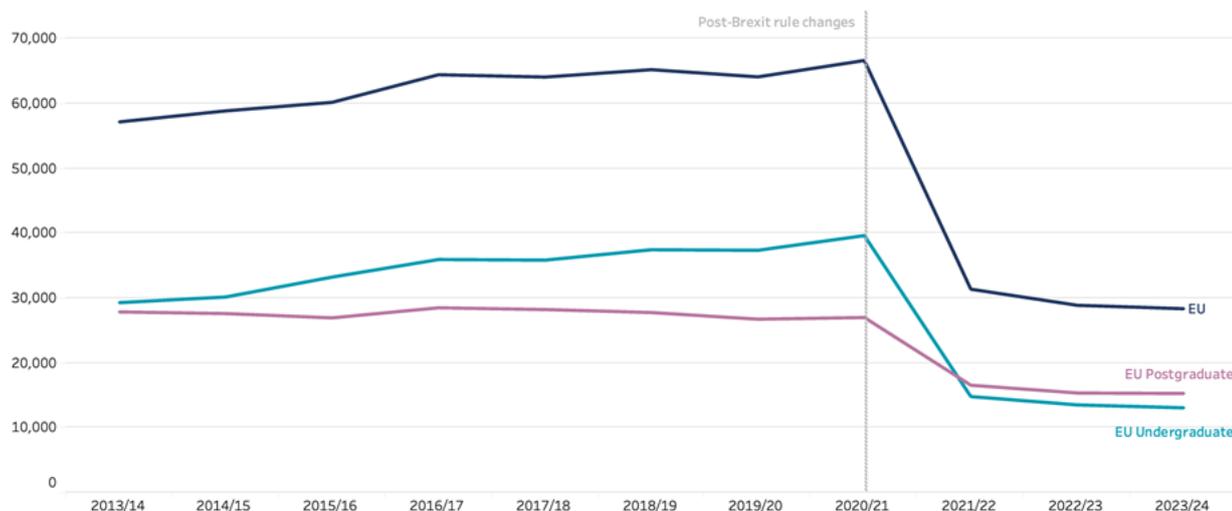
Post-Brexit rule changes led to a sharp decline in the number of international students from the EU. Around 28,000 EU-domiciled students enrolled on a new course in British universities in the 2024/25 academic year, compared to 67,000 in the last year under free movement. Most of this decline happened immediately after the new rules were introduced.

From the 2021/22 academic year, EU nationals became subject to the same rules as non-EU citizens. Those include needing to apply for a study visa and pay higher international student tuition fees, without entitlement to government-subsidised loans. The increase in the cost of tuition has affected postgraduates less than undergraduates, whose fees were previously capped at the same level as for domestic students. The result has been a steeper drop in EU enrolments among undergraduate students.

Figure 9

The number of EU students in UK universities fell to less than half the level before Brexit

Number of EU-domiciled students enrolling for a new course in a UK university, by academic year and level of study



Source: HESA Higher Education Student Statistics.

Note: Data is disaggregated by students' last domicile - their last country of residence before coming to the UK - rather than nationality, meaning some British and non-EU citizens living in the EU will be included in the figures.



While the number of EU students declined, that of other international students in the UK increased sharply between 2018/19 and 2022/23. The introduction of restrictions on the rights of students to bring dependants to the UK led to a slight decline in the following year. In 2023/24, around 400,000 non-EU students enrolled on a new course in UK universities. That meant that EU students made up just 8% of new international students, compared to almost 27% in the 2016/17 academic year (for more details, see [EU Students in the UK after Brexit](#) and [Student migration to the UK](#)).

How many people applied to the EU Settlement Scheme?

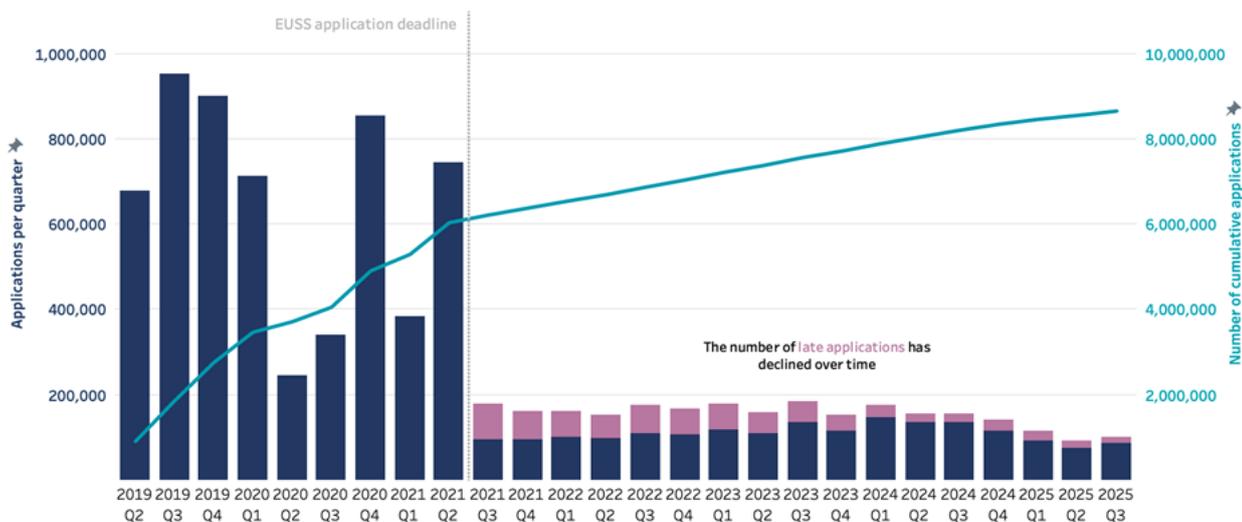
Most EU citizens and their family members already living in the UK before the end of free movement were required to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to continue living in the UK legally after 30 June 2021 (see [Understanding the Policy](#)).

By the end of September 2025, an estimated 6.4 million people had applied to the EUSS. This included 5.8m EU citizens, 65,000 EEA or Swiss citizens, and 531,000 non-EEA family members. These figures are lower than the 8.7 million *applications* during the same period, because around 1.8 million people applied more than once. People with pre-settled status were initially required to apply again in order to secure settled status, though the government introduced a system of automated upgrades using administrative records in January 2025.

Figure 10

Around 8.6 million applications were submitted to the EUSS by the end of September 2025

Number of applications submitted to the EU Settlement Scheme, by quarter and cumulative



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of EUSS Statistics, EUSS_MON.

Notes: The same individual can submit multiple applications under the EUSS, including those asking to move from pre-settled to settled status. Applications include those from EU citizens as well as EEA nationals and non-EU family members.



The original deadline for applications to the EUSS was 30 June 2021. Another 1.9 million applications were made after this date by joining family members or repeat applicants, mostly those applying to upgrade to settled status. In addition, 744,000 first-time late applications were submitted to the EUSS between the original deadline and 30 September 2025. These can result in a grant of status if the applicant can prove they were in the UK before 31 December 2020. Around 38% of all late applications concluded by 30 September 2025 resulted in a grant of status. It remains unknown how many people are in the UK without status despite having been eligible to apply for the EUSS, or how many might still apply in the future. The number of late applications has declined over time, though 55,000 late applications were submitted in the first nine months of 2025 (for more details, see [What Now? The EU Settlement Scheme After the Deadline](#)).

The number of EU citizens who applied to the EUSS is much higher than the population of EU citizens living in the UK at any given snapshot in time. For example, excluding UK and Irish nationals, there were 3.8 million EU citizens living in the UK at the time of the census. In contrast, 5.8 million EU citizens applied to the EUSS. This difference is likely to be a combination of two main factors. On the one hand, emigration means that many EUSS applicants may no longer live in the UK. Anyone who lived in the UK before the end of 2020, no matter how briefly, was potentially eligible to apply to the scheme. Many such migrants have since left the country. On the other hand, official statistics may underestimate the size of the EU migrant population. More accurate estimates based on the Census partly address this, yet some [uncertainties remain](#).

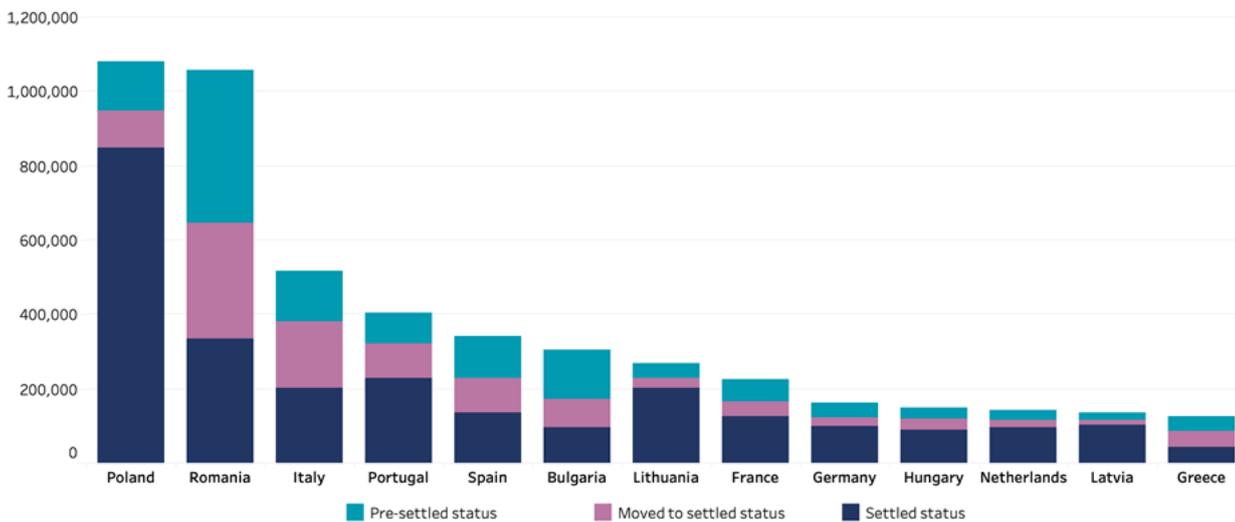
How many people have status under the EU Settlement Scheme?

At the end of September 2025, around 5.8 million people held status under the EUSS. Of these, 4.4 million had settled status, including 1.2 million who successfully applied to upgrade from pre-settled status. Around 43% of all those initially granted pre-settled status had upgraded to settled status – a share that varies by nationality, from 57% of Italians to 20% of Swedish citizens. Another 55,000 people were upgraded to settled status using automated checks between January and September 2025.

Approximately 1.4 million people still held pre-settled status at the end of September 2025. The largest groups among them were Romanians (413,000), Italians (135,000), and Poles (131,000). It is unclear how many will need to reapply to obtain settled status, and how many may be covered by the new system of automated upgrades. A number of people with pre-settled status are also likely to have left the UK with no plans to return. Although pre-settled status was originally meant to last 5 years, the Home Office automatically extends it by another five years for those who have not yet upgraded to settled status. In theory, people lose their pre-settled status if they spend long periods of time outside the UK. The period was 2 consecutive years for absences that occurred before May 2024, and was extended to 5 consecutive years for later absences. However, there are no data on whether the Home Office has begun the process of removing pre-settled status from people with long absences from the UK.

Figure 11

The top 5 nationalities made up 59% of the 5.8m people granted status under the EUSS by 30 September 2025
 Number of people granted status under the EU Settlement Scheme, top nationalities



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of EUSS statistics, EUSS_03_UK and EUSS_RA_04.
 Note: Data excludes applicants who did not receive a grant of status or whose applications are still pending.



How many EU nationals are refused entry to the UK?

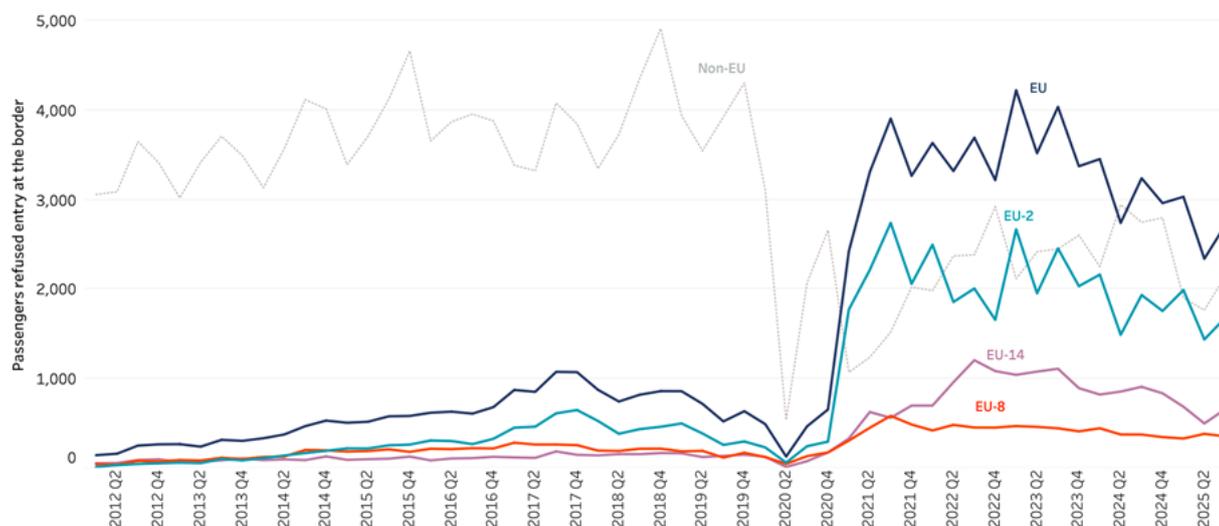
Around 11,000 EU citizens were refused entry at the UK border in the year ending 30 September 2025. That was 14% lower than the year before, though EU nationals still made up a majority (56%) of all those refused entry during the period, which has been the case since Brexit took effect at the start of 2021. The largest group among those stopped at the border were citizens of EU2 countries, particularly Romanians (about 5,600 or 29% of all those refused entry in the year ending 30 September 2025).

The end of free movement greatly increased the circumstances under which border officers could turn EU citizens away at the border. While EU citizens do not require a visa to enter the UK to visit, [border officers have the discretion](#) to turn them away if they believe that they are likely to break immigration rules, such as by working without permission. The decline in the number of EU nationals refused entry to the UK in recent years is likely connected to both officials and travellers better adapting to the new rules, though it remains unclear whether this decline will continue. A variety of factors can affect the number of people refused entry, including overall travel volumes, decision-making by border officers, and travellers' knowledge and understanding of rules.

Figure 12

The number of EU nationals refused entry at the border increased sharply after Brexit

Passengers refused entry at the border, by quarter and nationality



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, table Ret_D01.

Note: Comprises people being stopped at both UK ports and juxtaposed controls. These figures were previously labelled in Home Office statistics as passengers 'refused entry'; this has changed because not everyone initially stopped at the border will ultimately be refused entry. Numbers exclude asylum claims made at ports of entry.

**Evidence Gaps and Limitations**

The quality of some of the UK's key migration data sources declined during the Covid-19 pandemic. While some, notably the ONS's migration flow estimates, have now improved thanks to new methods, others continue to fall short. Survey-based estimates of the population, such as those from the APS, have been particularly affected. The overall response rate of the APS, already below 50% in 2019, fell further during the pandemic. Additionally, migrant non-response to government surveys increased more than that of the UK-born, making comparisons with previous data unreliable. Pending the development of new methodologies, the ONS discontinued their yearly population data on nationality and country of birth in June 2021 – a major limitation since there is no other source of this data outside of the census, which is only conducted once every 10 years.

New data sources are being developed that improve our understanding of EU migration. In particular, the new HMRC data on the number of payrolled employees by industry and nationality at the time of registering for a National Insurance Number represents an important step forward. In future, there is scope to improve the published administrative data, for example, with more detail on migration and employment by individual country or region of birth.

Different sources of data on migration and migrants in the UK are not always consistent with each other. There are various reasons for this, including differences in how data sources define migrants; known uncertainty in the estimates, which come with margins of error; and unknown sources of error, such as those arising from the fact that not everyone agrees to participate in official surveys. This means that it is often sensible to look at the overall picture across several data sources, rather than focusing on short-term changes in a single dataset.

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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.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk

About the authors

Madeleine Sumption
Director,
The Migration Observatory

Ben Brindle
Researcher,
The Migration Observatory

Peter William Walsh
Senior Researcher,
The Migration Observatory

Press contact

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

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