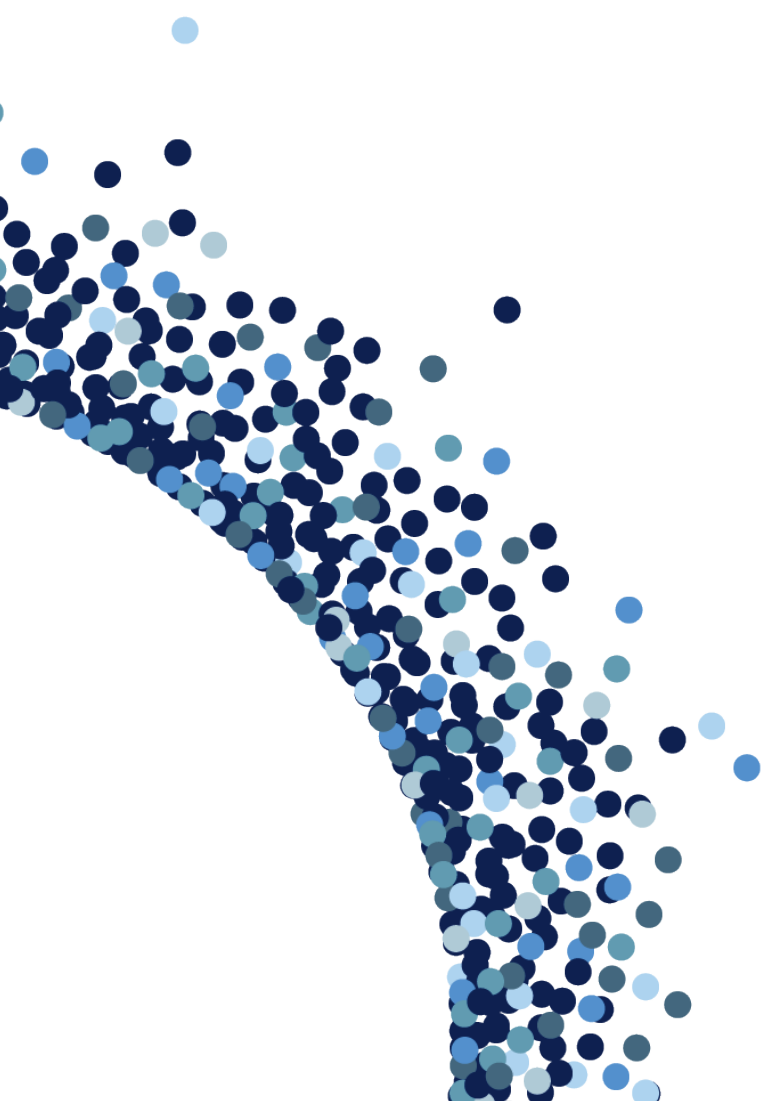




# BRIEFING

## EU migration to and from the UK



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[www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://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 has been negative since the pandemic and under the post-Brexit immigration system, with immigration falling by almost 70% compared to its 2016 peak.

In 2021, there were approximately 4 million EU-born residents in the UK, making up 6% of the population and 37% of all those born abroad.

The top origin country for EU-born residents is Poland (21%), followed by Romania (14%), the Republic of Ireland (10%), Germany (7%), and Italy (7%).

EU Migrants in the UK are particularly concentrated in London, although to a lesser extent than those from outside the EU.

EU nationals make up around 8% of employments in the UK, although their number has declined since 2019.

An estimated 6.1 million individuals had applied to the EU Settlement Scheme by the end of June 2023, but not all of them are resident in the UK.

As of June 2023, over 2.1 million people held pre-settled status and would need to reapply to EUSS to remain in the UK permanently.

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

New enrolments of EU students fell by 53% after post-Brexit rules took effect.

EU citizens now make up a majority (53%) of those refused entry at the UK border.

## 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, and is 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 for those living in the UK for 5 years or more. A person with pre-settled status can apply again to EUSS to receive settled status once they have accrued the necessary 5 years' residence. Under the initial EUSS policy, settled status was permanent but pre-settled status was designed to expire after 5 years. This meant that EU citizens who did not realise they had to reapply would be at risk of losing their status entirely. Following a court decision in 2022, pre-settled status will no longer expire, although it may still be necessary for people to re-apply to the EUSS to demonstrate that they have settled status. Some (but 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 the Migration Observatory report, [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 is classified as a middle-skilled or high-skilled occupation. An overview of work-related migration policies and data are available in the Migration Observatory briefing, [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 **£18,600 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 currently developing new methodologies for estimating migration flows and stocks, which should lead to a more accurate picture of migrants in the UK starting in late 2023 and 2024. In the meantime, we use a variety of sources to offer the best available overview of EU migrants in the UK. Note that different sources of data on migration often paint a slightly different picture, and there is often some uncertainty about exactly why they differ.

Estimates of migration *flows* to and from the UK come from the ONS's new, experimental data on long-term international migration. Making use of administrative records, the new methods have the potential to improve migration statistics but are not yet labelled National Statistics, and still have important limitations. Slightly different methodologies are currently employed for measuring EU and non-EU migration.

The data on EU migration flows comes from the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID). RAPID is based on administrative data on benefits and earnings datasets for anyone with a National Insurance number (NINo). It uses the UN definition of a long-term international migrant: a person who changes their country of usual residence for at least a year. The RAPID figures identify the nationality of the person at the time they registered for a NINo and thus include EU citizens who have subsequently naturalised as British citizens. They will exclude any EU citizens who did not register for a NINo until after naturalizing – although naturalisation rates have historically been low for EU citizens and remain relatively low despite recent increases ([Home Office, Section 4.2](#)). While previous RAPID estimates offered a breakdown of flows by nationality groups, such data were discontinued in 2020. Where equivalent RAPID data are not available, we use estimates based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Readers should note that these figures are thought to underestimate EU immigration, however.

For non-EU citizens, recent ONS estimates rely on border data known as “exit checks” (although they also include entry data). Such data currently only meaningfully cover non-EU citizens, although this will change over time as more EU citizens moving to and from the UK are incorporated into the visa system (rather than, for example, the EU Settlement Scheme). More details can be found in the Migration Observatory briefing, [Net migration to the UK](#).

For estimates of the UK's resident EU *population*, this briefing primarily uses 2021 Census data from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These figures are significantly more accurate than survey-based estimates from between censuses, such as those from the Annual Population Survey (APS). The latter are known to underestimate the migrant population, and their quality has declined over time, particularly since the pandemic. Except for Scotland, their use in this briefing is limited. However, Scotland has not yet released the results of its latest Census, meaning all Scottish data are derived from the APS. To produce our main estimates of the migrant population in 2021, we combine Census data from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland with estimates from the APS in Scotland for the year ending June 2021 (see Appendix).

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: EU-14, EU-8, EU-2 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 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](#).

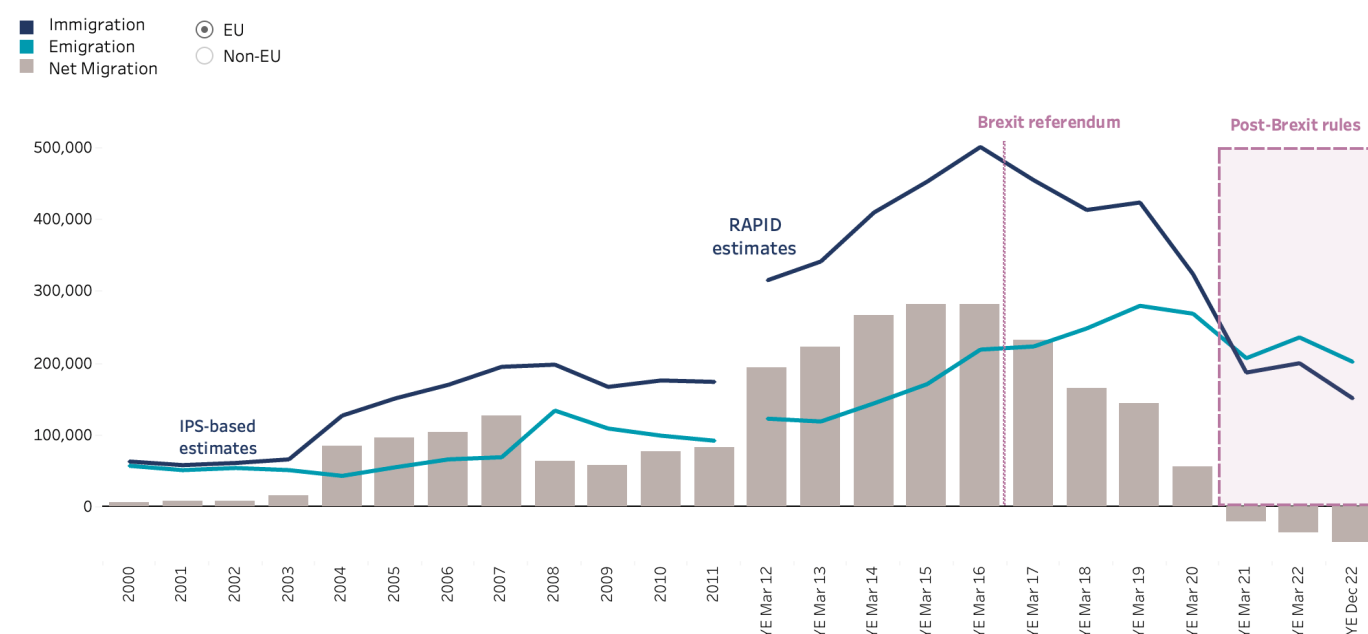
## Net migration of EU citizens has been negative since the pandemic and under the post-Brexit immigration system, with immigration falling by almost 70% compared to its 2016 peak.

In the year ending December 2022, the long-term net migration of EU citizens to the UK was negative, at -51,000, according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates published in May 2023. Net migration from the EU turned negative in 2020, after the beginning of the pandemic, and continued falling in 2021 and 2022 (Figure 1). This marks a significant change compared to the previous two decades of positive EU net migration. In this time, there were two major peaks in migration from the EU. The first occurred shortly after the 2004 enlargement of the EU and ended following the financial crisis in 2008. The second came in 2013–15, mostly driven by an increase in immigration from the EU-2 countries (Romania and Bulgaria) after restrictions on their right to work in Britain were lifted. In the year ending March 2016, EU net migration peaked at over 280,000, with more than 500,000 EU nationals moving to the UK.

Most of the decline in net migration has occurred because of a sharp drop in immigration (Figure 2), which declined by almost 70% from 2016 to 2022. Long-term EU migration fell before any new policies restricting it came into force – between 2016 and 2020, immigration fell by 35% and net migration declined by more than 80%. Possible explanations for this decline include the fall in the value of the pound, reducing the value of money earned in the UK compared to other EU countries; uncertainty about the political and social situation in the UK after Brexit; and the fact that EU migration had been unusually high in the pre-referendum period and thus might be expected to have fallen anyway. Nonetheless, the figures available so far suggest that the large majority of EU migrants did not leave the UK.

**Figure 1**

### Estimated long-term immigration, emigration, and net migration to the UK EU and non-EU citizens, 2000 to 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS data.

Notes: 2000 to 2011 are IPS-based calendar-year estimates; 2012 to 2019 are from RAPID and are for financial years ending 6 April. From 2020, data is for years ending 31 March and non-EU migration is measured differently, using administrative data.

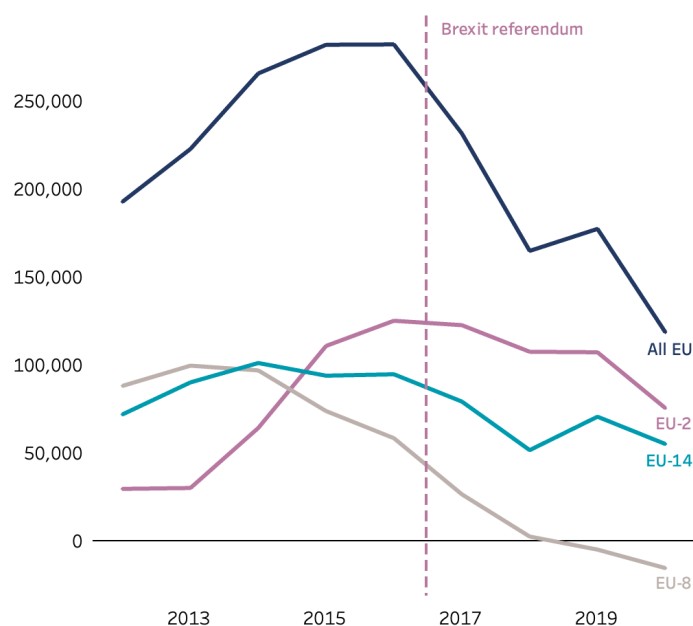


In the same period, overall net migration into the UK continued to rise, reaching an estimated 606,000 in 2022. The fall in EU migration was compensated by a sharp rise in migration from non-EU citizens since 2021. For more information on net migration to the UK, see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Net migration to the UK](#).

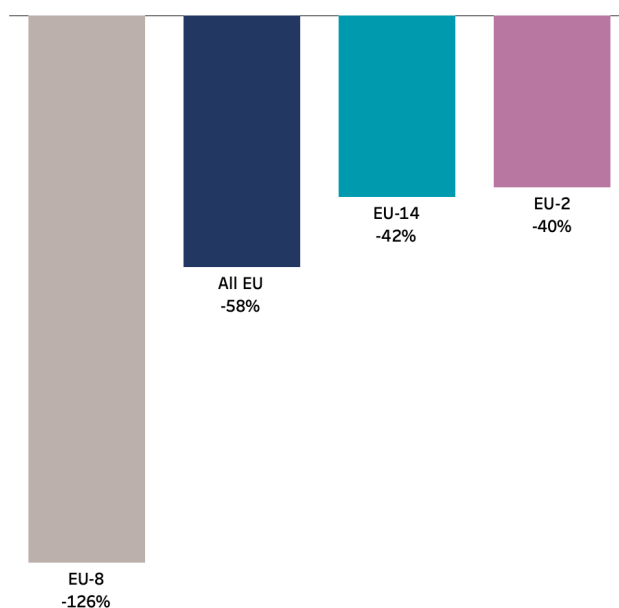
The decline in EU net migration particularly affected EU-8 nationals: those from Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004, such as Poland. Between the 2016 and 2020 fiscal years, net migration of EU-8 citizens fell by 126%, from 59,000 to -15,000. By contrast, net migration from both EU-14 and EU-2 countries fell by around 40% in the same period (Figure 2). It is unclear if this trend continued after 2020, when the sharpest drop in overall EU net migration was observed, as the pandemic disrupted the collection of migration statistics (for more detail, see Evidence Gaps and Limitations).

**Figure 2**

### Estimated net migration of EU citizens to the UK Financial years ending 6 April, 2012 to 2020



### Decline in net migration of EU citizens to the UK 2016 to 2020



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS RAPID data (2021).

Note: Includes only long-term migration of those moving or leaving the UK for at least one year.



## In 2021, there were approximately 4 million EU-born residents in the UK, making up 6% of the population and 37% of all those born abroad

In 2021, there were approximately 4 million EU-born residents in the UK, according to Census data from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and survey-based data from Scotland (see Understanding the Evidence). The number of EU-born residents in the UK increased by around 50% between the 2011 and 2021 Census (from 2.7 million), reflecting a decade of positive net migration. The EU-born population increased faster than the overall population, with its share rising from 4% to 6% by 2021. However, its share among the total foreign-born population rose only slightly, from 35% to 37%. This shows that even as net migration from the EU increased sharply, it continued to make up a little over a third of overall migration.

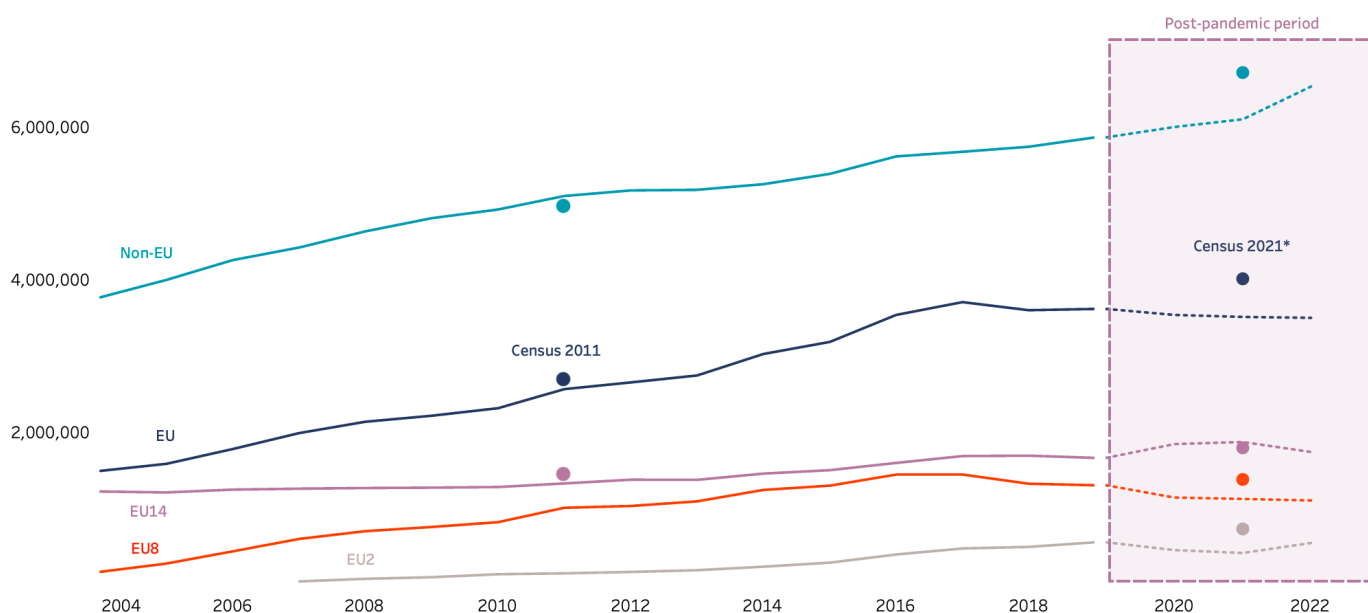
A large part of the growth in the EU-born population came from an increase in the number of residents from newer EU-8 and EU-2 member states in Central and Eastern Europe, which now make up a majority (52%) of the EU-born population (1.4 million and 700,000, respectively). The share of those born in older EU-14 member states in Western and Southern Europe fell from 54% in 2001 to 45% in 2021 (1.8 million).

While it is clear that the EU-born population increased significantly in the decade to 2021, changes in the size of this population in recent years are more uncertain. Estimates of the foreign-born population between censuses, based on data from the Annual Population Survey, are less accurate and can significantly underestimate the migrant population (see Evidence Gaps and Limitations). Estimates for the year ending June 2021 show the EU-born population at 3.5 million, around half a million lower than the figure found by the 2021 Census. The same data shows the EU-born population in the UK peaking in 2017 and declining since, although the ONS has separately estimated that net migration remained positive until 2020.

**Figure 3**

### Foreign-born population in the UK, by origin

Annual Population Survey, 2004-2022, and Census 2011 and 2021



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey, 2004-22, and Census 2001 and 2011 data.

Note: Scotland has yet to release results from its latest 2022 Census. 2021 Census estimates use data from the censuses in England & Wales and Northern Ireland, to which Scotland estimates from the APS are added. EU8 and EU2 disaggregated population data from the 2011 Census was unavailable.



## The top origin country for EU-born residents is Poland (21%), followed by Romania (14%), the Republic of Ireland (10%), Germany (7%), and Italy (7%)

According to our 2021 population estimates, about a fifth of EU-born residents in the UK are Polish (21%, 826,000). The next largest groups are people born in Romania (14%, 554,000), Ireland (10%, 389,000), Germany (7%, 298,000), and Italy (7%, 298,000). Compared to the previous census in 2011, by far the largest increase in population was seen among those born in the EU-2 countries, Romania and Bulgaria. The Romanian-born population increased almost 7-fold, from a little over 82,000 in 2011. Over the same period, the Bulgarian-born population grew from under 50,000 to around 159,000. The number of UK residents born in Southern European states like Italy, Spain, and Greece also more than doubled in the ten years to 2021. There was substantial variation among top origin countries (Table 1), with smaller increases in the number of people born in Poland and France, a relatively constant number of German-born residents, and a notable fall in the number of those born in the Republic of Ireland.



Yearly population estimates based on the APS seem to indicate a decline in population since 2017–19 among those born in top Eastern European origin countries like Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Lithuania that is not visible among those from Western or Southern European member states. However, data collection problems since the pandemic have made these estimates much more uncertain, meaning more data is needed to confirm the trends (see Evidence Gaps and Limitations).

Table 1

### Top countries of origin for EU migrants in the UK

By country of birth and nationality, 2004 to 2021

- ☒ Country of birth  
☐ Nationality

Country	Estimated population in the UK, Census 2021*	% of total EU population in the UK	Trend, 2004 to June 2021
Poland	826,420	21%	
Romania	554,452	14%	
Republic of Ireland	389,027	10%	
Germany	298,418	7%	
Italy	297,927	7%	
Lithuania	188,612	5%	
Spain	176,520	4%	
Portugal	169,045	4%	
France	166,521	4%	
Bulgaria	159,353	4%	

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of 2021 Census data from England&Wales and Northern Ireland, and ONS data on UK population by country of birth and nationality, 2004 to year ending June 2021.

Note: Long-term trend data uses population estimates derived from the Annual Population Survey so are not directly comparable with the Census. Data for 2021 covers the year ending in June 2021, when the statistic was discontinued.

\*Scotland is yet to release its latest Census, so figures for it are APS-derived estimates.

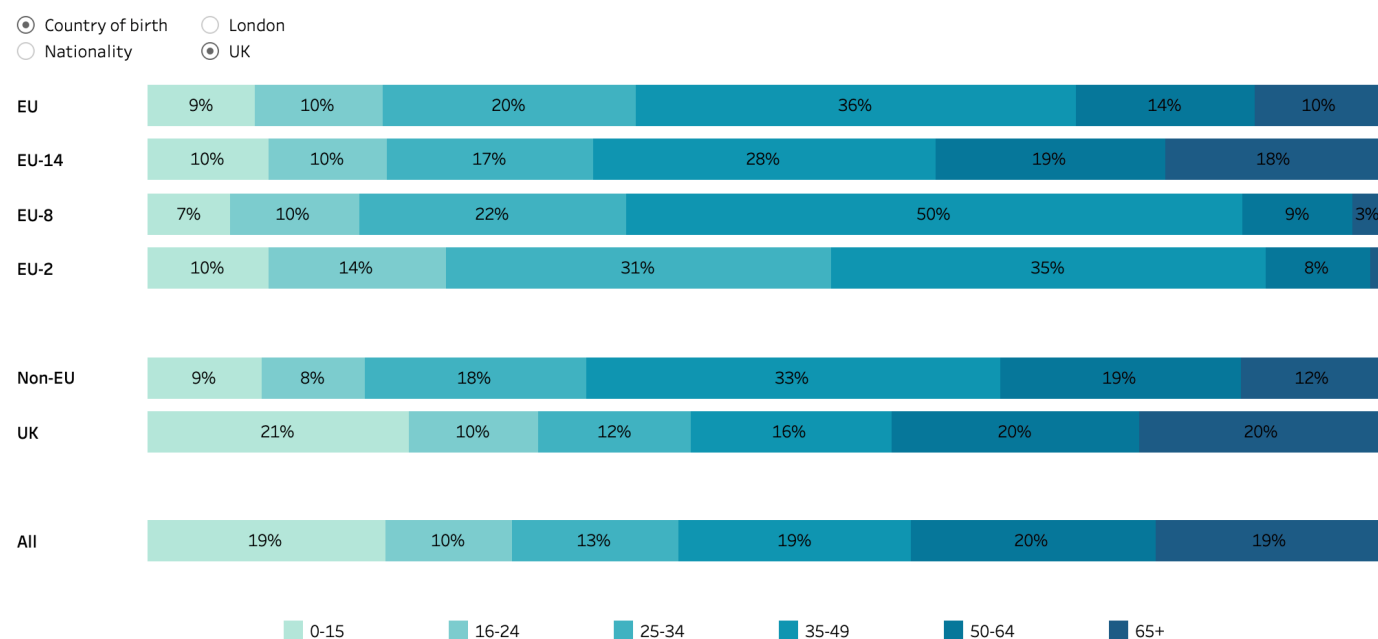


EU-born migrants are more likely to be in the 25 to 34-year-old age group compared to non-EU migrants, but especially compared to the UK-born (Figure 4). About 9% of EU-born migrants were children in 2022. However, the number of EU *citizen* children is much higher at 17%. This is because there is a substantial number of UK-born EU citizen children. (Some people born in the UK are automatically UK citizens, but this is not always the case and depends on the residence status of the parents at the time the child is born.) For more details on citizenship and children, see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Citizenship and naturalisation for migrants in the UK](#).



**Figure 4****Age distribution of UK residents by country of origin**

By country of birth and nationality, 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey 2022.



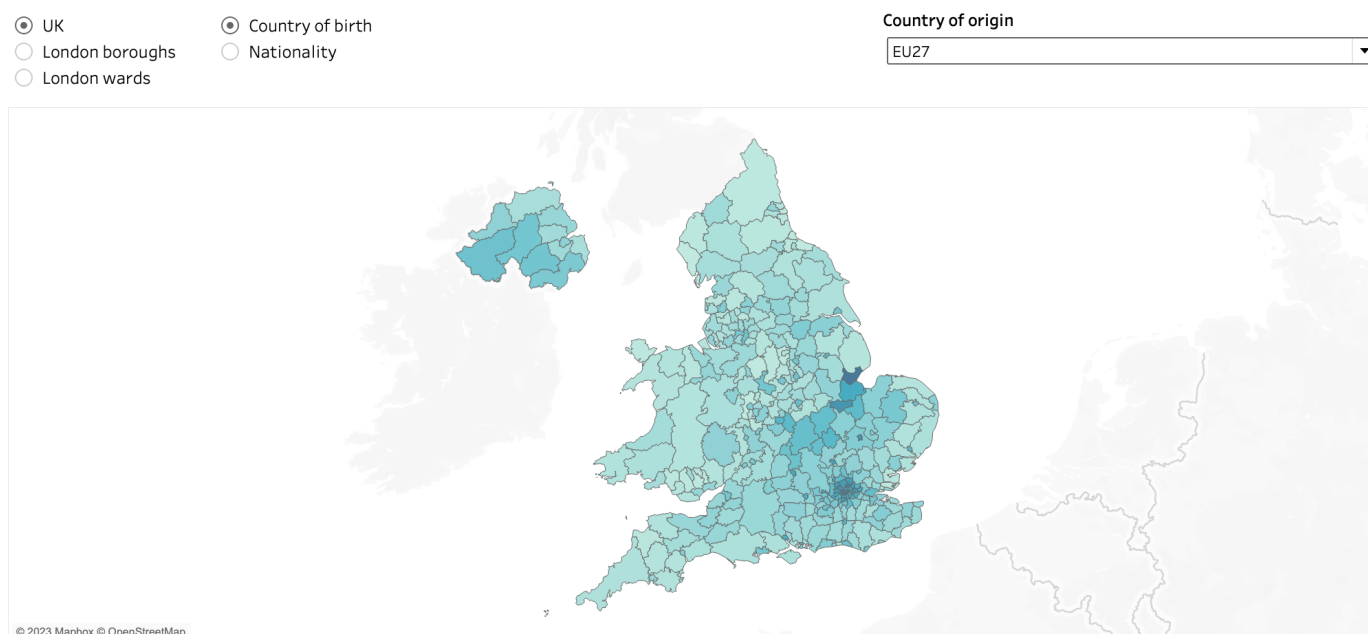
## EU migrants in the UK are particularly concentrated in London, although to a lesser extent than those from outside the EU

According to the 2021 Census, the highest concentrations of EU-born residents relative to population can be found in London and the East of England (Figure 5). 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, 7 were in London, including the rest of the top 5 – 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 are about 1.1 million EU-born residents in London, or 28% of the UK total; among non-EU migrants, the share that live in London is almost 37% (2.4 million). The EU-born are a minority of the migrant population in most local authorities, although there are some exceptions, particularly in the East of England. More information is available in the Migration Observatory briefing, [Where do migrants live in the UK?](#) and the Migration Observatory's [Local Data Guide](#).

**Figure 5****EU migrants by local authority and country of origin**

England &amp; Wales and Northern Ireland Census 2021



Source: England &amp; Wales and Northern Ireland Censuses, 2021

Note: Scotland has yet to release its latest census results. London results are shown for electoral wards and boroughs. UK-level data is at local authority level. Nationality data is only available for select countries of origin.



## EU nationals make up around 8% of employments in the UK, although their number has declined since 2019

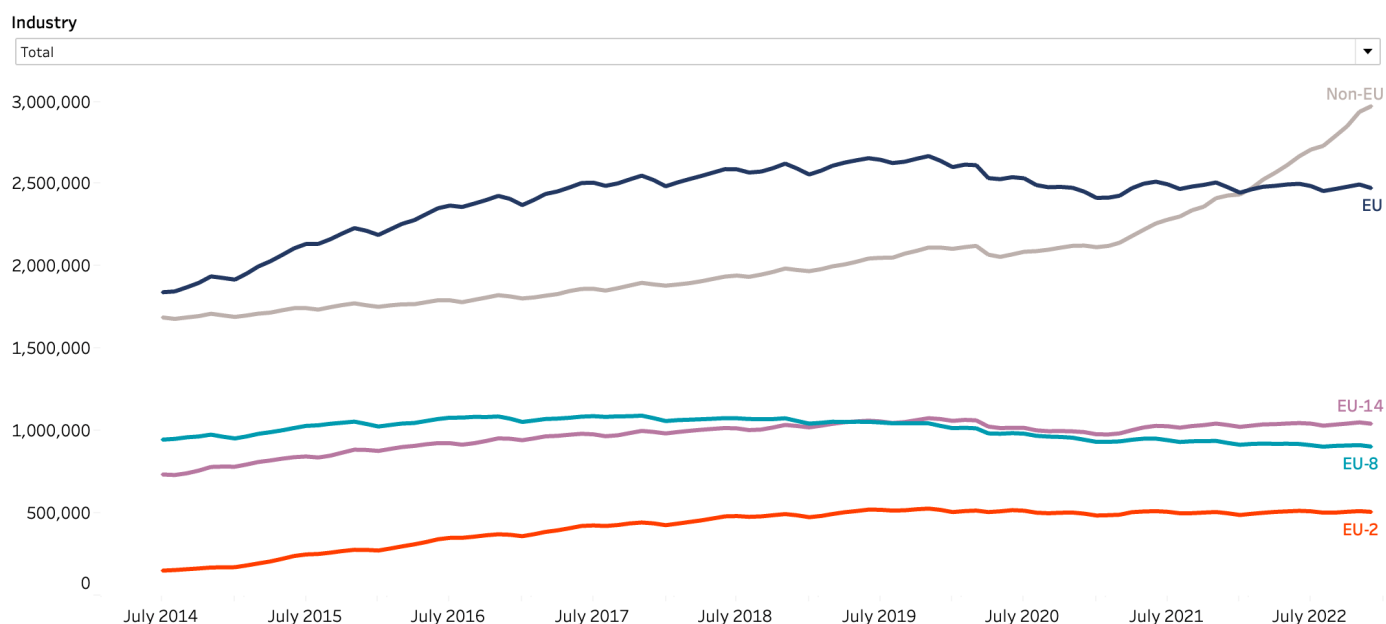
As of December 2022, almost 2.5 million EU nationals were in payrolled employment in the UK, making up about 8% of the total. Among them, the largest group were nationals of EU-14 countries (1 million), followed by those coming from EU-8 (900,000) and EU-2 (505,000) countries. Before the start of 2022, EU nationals made up a majority of foreign employees in the UK, yet their number has since been overtaken by those of non-EU migrants in the labour market (Figure 6). Migrants from the EU work in a wide range of occupations and industries – at the end of 2022, their largest employers in the UK were the administrative and support services (388,000), retail (318,000), hospitality (289,000), and manufacturing sectors (285,000).

Before 2019, the number of EU employments grew steadily – by 45% between July 2014 and November 2019, compared to a much smaller rise among non-EU migrants. Much of the increase was driven by EU-2 nationals from Romania and Bulgaria, whose number more than tripled over the same period of time. The employment of EU nationals, however, peaked in November 2019 at around 2.66 million, and declined sharply during the pandemic, falling by more than 7% as of December 2022. Once again, the sharpest decline in numbers was found among EU-8 nationals. For this group, employments in the UK plateaued around 2016–17 and fell by more than 14% between 2019 and 2022.

Figure 6

## Payrolled employments by nationality and industry

July 2014 to December 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC data on payrolled employments, July 2014 to December 2022. 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.



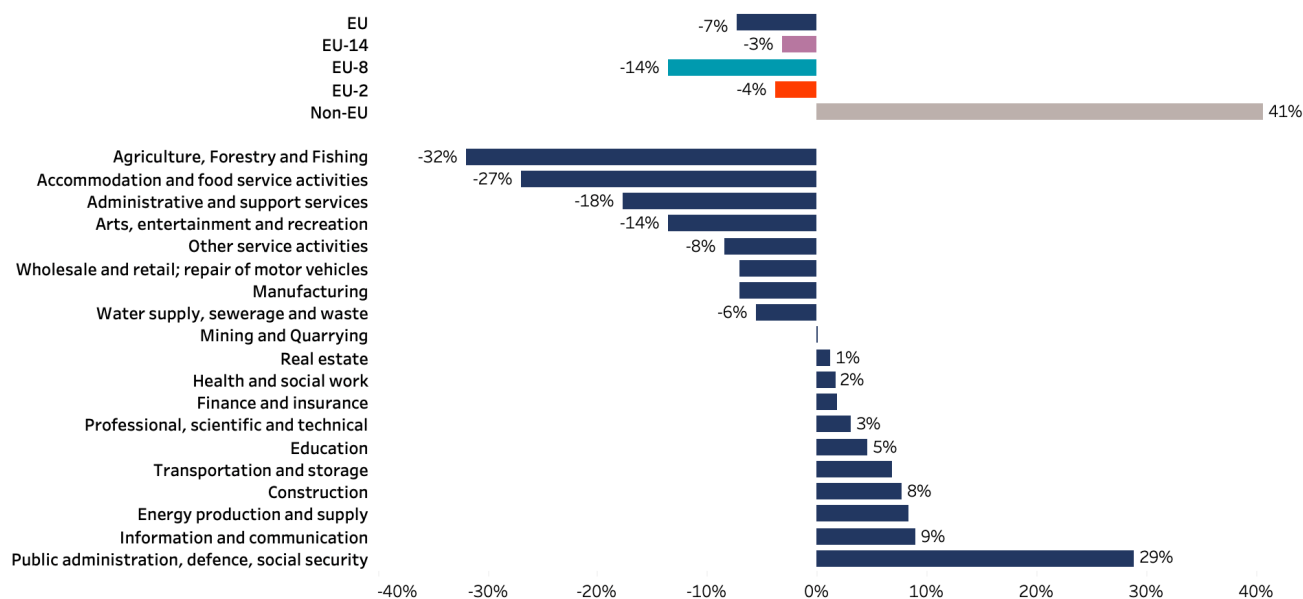
The decline in EU workers is likely to be a result of the combined effect of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. The employment of EU nationals dropped sharply during 2020 and has only partly recovered since. EU numbers did not bounce back as the economy recovered from the pandemic, as would have been expected had free movement continued. Indeed, take-up of the new immigration system among EU citizens in 2021 and 2022 was very slow (as discussed further below), in contrast to a sharp increase in migration from non-EU countries. At the same time as the employment of EU nationals fell, non-EU nationals' employee numbers rose by more than 40%. This pattern can be seen across many key economic sectors (Figure 7).

Over time, Brexit and the new immigration system are also expected to shift the balance of jobs that EU workers do in the UK. Compared to free movement, the new system greatly restricted the options for EU citizens to work in occupations that are not classified as skilled (i.e. not requiring at least A-Level or equivalent education and meeting salary thresholds). The pandemic has also affected the balance of jobs available. Employment in some industries, like [manufacturing](#), remains significantly lower than before the pandemic even in 2023, while the number of workers in sectors like health and care has continued to [grow](#).

Figure 7

### Changes in payroll employment of EU nationals since November 2019 peak

By nationality group and sector, November 2019 to December 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of HMRC data on payrolled employments, July 2014 to December 2022. 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.



Employment figures from December 2022 reveal the first effects of this transformation. Compared to November 2019, employment of EU nationals fell particularly sharply in key sectors such as hospitality (-27%) and administrative services (-18%), but also retail and manufacturing (-7% each). In more highly skilled sectors like education, public administration, or information and communication, the number of workers from the EU continued to grow, albeit much more slowly than that of workers from outside the EU.

For more detail on the labour market situation of EU migrants in the UK, see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview](#).

### An estimated 6.1 million individuals had applied to the EU Settlement Scheme by June 2023

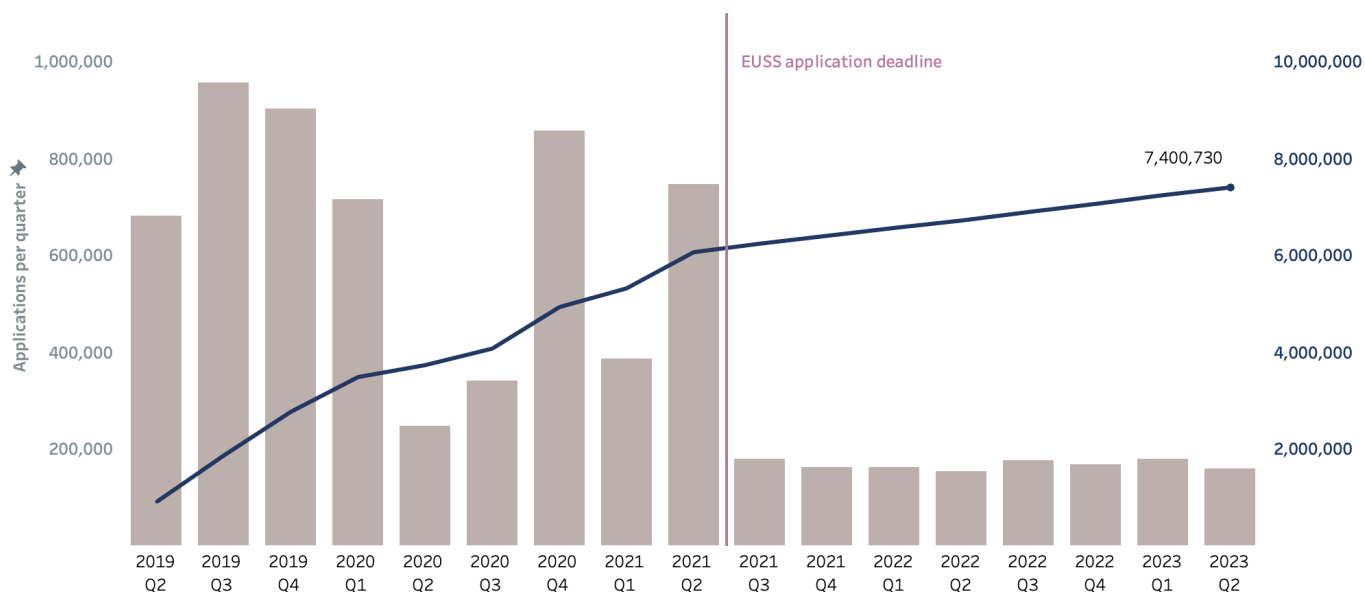
Most EU citizens and their family members already living in the UK before the end of free movement were required to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to continue living in the UK legally after 30 June 2021. (See the 'Understanding the Policy' section above for more details.)

One unexpected outcome of this scheme was the high number of people who applied. By the end of June 2023, an estimated 6.1 million people had applied to EUSS. This includes 5.6m EU citizens, 62,000 EEA/Swiss citizens, and 487,000 non-EEA family members. These figures are lower than the 7.4 million *applications* during the same period, because around 1.1 million people had applied more than once. Indeed, people with pre-settled status are eventually required to apply again in order to secure settled status.

Figure 8

**Applications submitted under EU Settlement Scheme**

Quarterly and cumulative number of applications, 2019 Q3 to 2023 Q2



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of EUSS Statistics, year ending June 2023, EUSS\_MON.

Note: 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 under the EUSS was 30 June 2021. Although most (82%) of the applications have been made by this date, another 1.3 million were submitted in the two years to 30 June 2023, at a relatively steady rate of around 50,000 applications a month (Figure 8). A large share of these are made by repeat applicants or joining family members. However, there were also about 500,000 late applications. Such applications can result in a grant of status if the applicant can prove they were in the UK before 31 December 2020. According to a response to a Freedom of Information request submitted by the Migration Observatory, 48% of late applications that had received a final decision by the end of 2022 resulted in a grant of status. Data from the same period also showed EU-2 nationals were over-represented in this group, making up almost half (47%) of all late applications.

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 not consistently declined over time and remains at over 15,000 a month as of June 2023. For a more in-depth discussion of the number of people who have not applied to the EUSS, see [What Now? The EU Settlement Scheme After the Deadline](#).

The 5.6 million EU citizen applicants by 30 June 2023 is 1.6 million higher than the official estimate of approximately 4 million EU citizens living in the UK in 2021. This difference is likely to be a combination of two main factors. On one hand, emigration means that some EUSS applicants 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](#).

## As of June 2023, over 2.1 million people held pre-settled status and may need to reapply to EUSS to remain in the UK permanently

By the end of June 2023, an estimated 2.2 million people held pre-settled status and thus may need to reapply to EUSS if they want to remain in the UK permanently (see 'Understanding the Policy', above, for details). The majority of these, 1.9 million, are EU citizens.

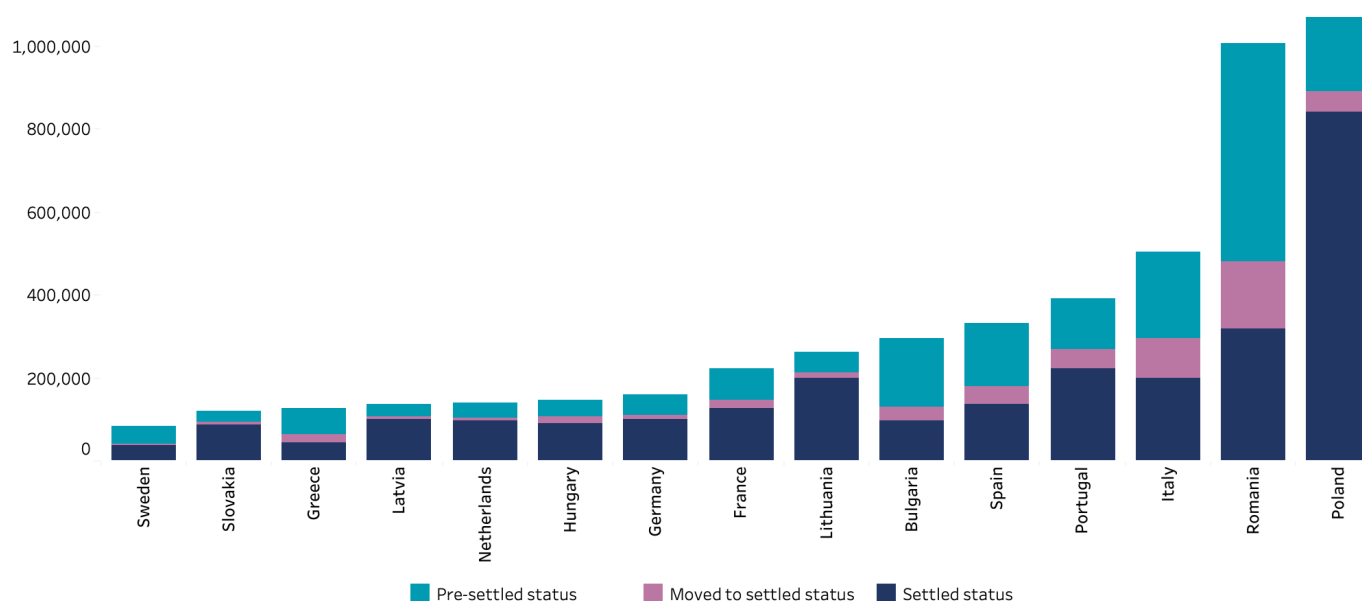
By the end of June 2023, approximately 608,000 people had moved from pre-settled to settled status, suggesting that around 22% of those granted pre-settled status had upgraded to settled status. This share varied by nationality, ranging from 8% of Swedish citizens to 31% of Italians. The largest number of people who held pre-settled status at the end of June 2023 were Romanians (529,000), followed by Italians (208,000) and Poles (178,000).

Note that the share of people with pre-settled status who upgrade to settled status will never reach 100%. This is because some people with pre-settled status have left the country with no plans to return, and others will break their period of continuous residence due to absences from the UK. Without further data to understand who is still living in the UK, it will not be possible to identify what share of pre-settled status holders who are still living in the UK have received settled status. At the time of writing, what would happen to people who did not reapply remained uncertain (see the 'Understanding the Policy' section).

**Figure 9**

### Grants of status under the EU Settlement Scheme, by nationality

Top nationalities, as of 30 June 2023



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of EUSS statistics, June 2023, 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.



## Since the post-Brexit immigration system was introduced in 2021, only 5% of visas were granted to EU nationals

Uptake of the post-Brexit immigration system remains very low among EU nationals. In the two-and-a-half years since free movement ended, from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023, EU citizens made up around 5% of all visas granted, excluding visitor visas and those issued under the BNO and Ukraine schemes. This includes around 129,000 EU citizens granted visas, a majority of whom (75,000 or 58%) were issued 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. Long-term immigration levels from EU citizens coming under the post-Brexit immigration system will thus be substantially lower. If we exclude frontier workers, around 63,000 EU citizens were issued a work visa between January 2021 and June 2023, making up more than 6% of the total. This included over 34,000 EU citizens who were granted skilled worker visas (including health and care visas). The number of EU citizens granted visas has somewhat increased since 2021 (Figure 10) but failed to keep up with the growth in visas issued to non-EU nationals. In 2021, EU migrants made up 6.4% of all visa grants and 8.6% of work visas issued; this had fallen to 4.3% and 5.7%, respectively, in the year ending June 2023.

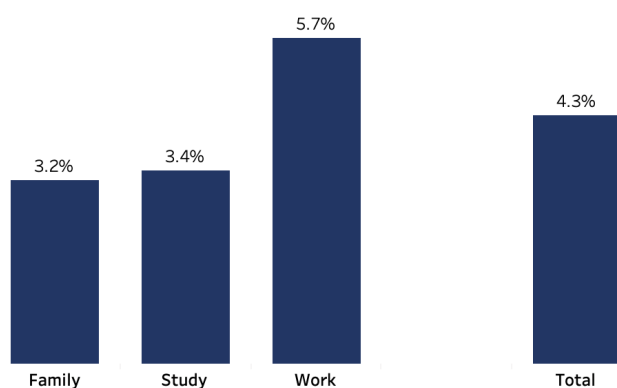
By contrast, in the year ending March 2019, even after EU migration had already fallen substantially post-referendum, an estimated 410,000 EU citizens made up 58% of non-UK citizens moving long-term to the UK (see Figure 1, above). The share of EU citizens is thus substantially down compared to its trend before the pandemic and Brexit, although the figures may still change over time as people adjust to the new system.

**Figure 10**

### Share of visas granted to EU citizens, 2021 to June 2023

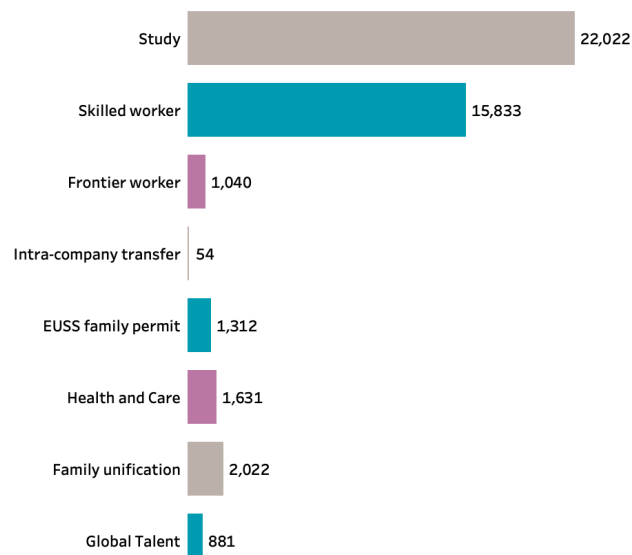
Main applicants and dependants, by visa category

YE June 2023



### Number of visas granted to EU citizens, 2021 to June 2023

Main applicants and dependants, top visa types



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.





## New enrolments of EU students fell by 53% after post-Brexit rules took effect

Post-Brexit rule changes have also led to a sharp decline in the number of international students from the EU. In the 2021/22 academic year, the number of EU-domiciled students enrolling for a new degree in a UK university fell by 53% compared to the year before, from almost 67,000 to a little over 31,000. The decline has been particularly steep among new undergraduate students – new enrolments fell by 63% from 2020/21, compared to only 39% among post-graduate students (Figure 11).

Starting from the 2021/22 academic year, EU citizens have been subject to the same rules as non-EU citizens, including the need 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 undergraduates more than post-graduates. Whereas post-graduate fees have always varied widely depending on the type of course, undergraduate fees for EU students were previously capped at the UK level of £9,250 a year; this has now increased by up to 345%, to between £11,400 and £32,000 a year.

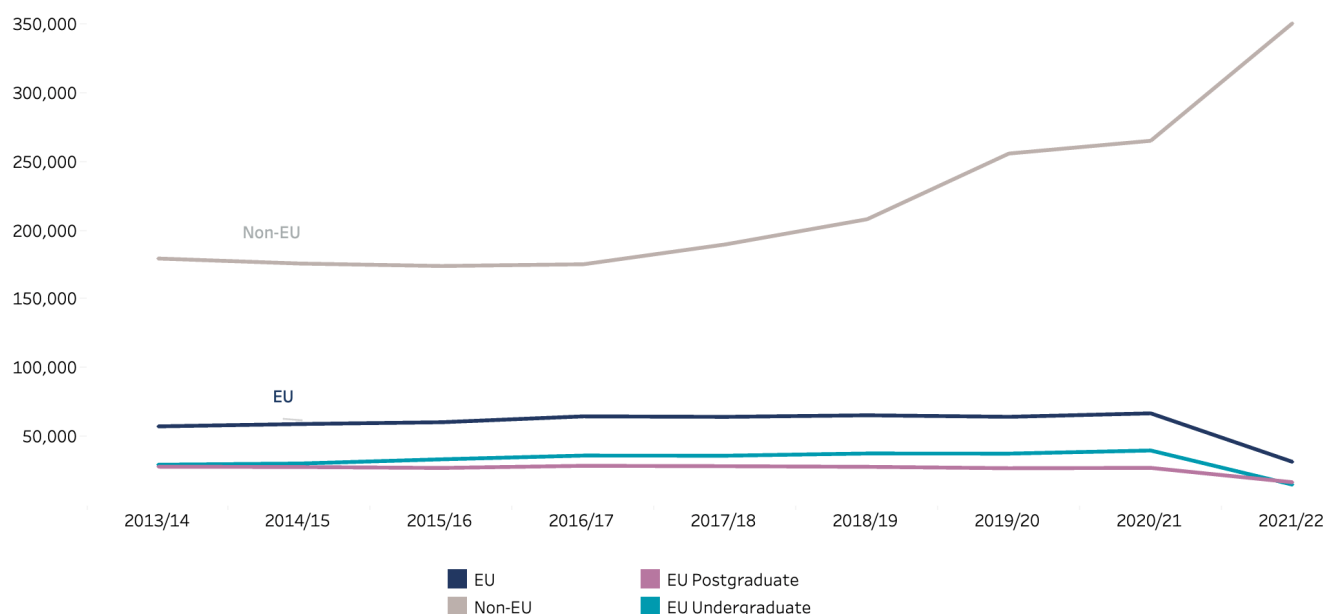
While EU student numbers have declined, those of other international students in the UK rose significantly, reaching an all-time high of 350,000 in 2021–22 after a yearly increase of more than 32%. The number of non-EU students started growing in 2016/17 and has roughly doubled since. As a result, EU students now make up just 8% of new international students, compared to almost 27% in the 2016/17 academic year.

For more information on international students in the UK, see the Migration Observatory's briefing on [Student migration to the UK](#).

**Figure 11**

### Number of new enrolments at UK universities, by domicile

Academic years, 2013/14 to 2021/22



Source: HESA Higher Education Student Statistics, 2021–22 academic year.

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.



## EU citizens now make up a majority (53%) of those refused entry at the UK border

In the first half of 2023, around 7,600 EU citizens were initially refused entry at the UK border, a majority (53%) of all those refused entry. This is the result of a sharp increase since post-Brexit rules took effect at the beginning of 2021 (Figure 12). The largest group among those stopped at the border in the first six months of 2021 were citizens of EU-2 countries, particularly Romanians (about 3,800 or 49% in the first half of 2023).

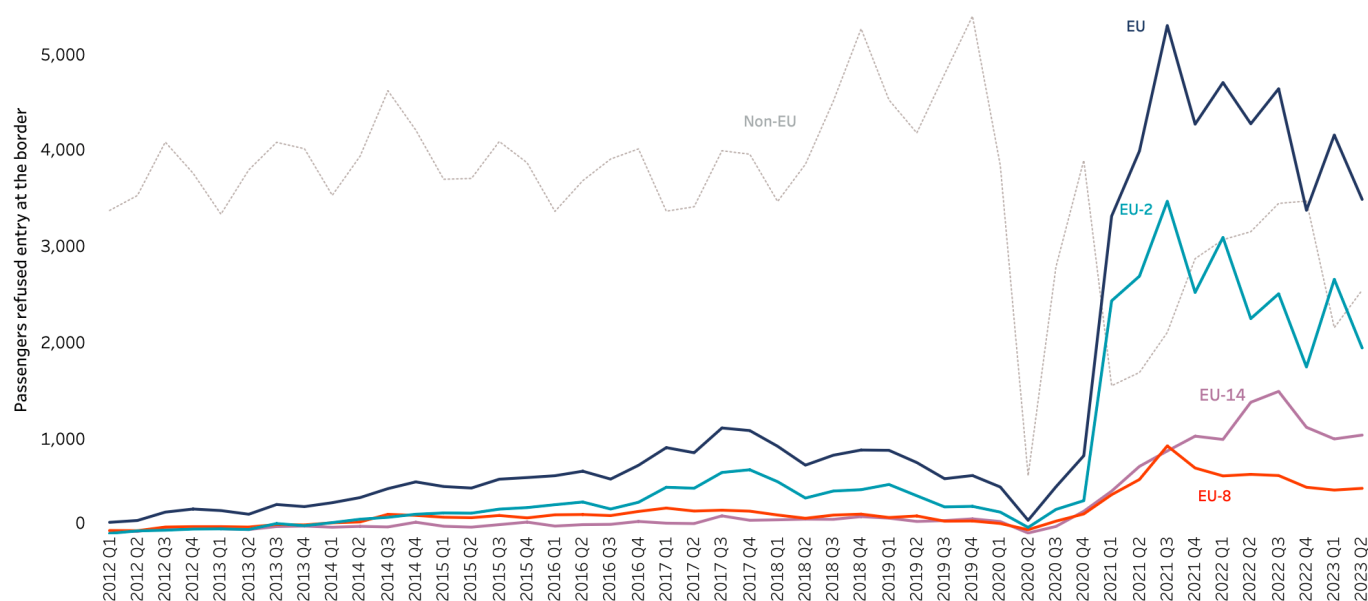
The end of free movement greatly increased the circumstances under which border officers could turn EU citizens away at the border. While EU citizens do not require a visa to enter the UK to visit, [border officers have the discretion](#) to turn them away if they believe that they are likely to break immigration rules, such as by working without permission. The sharp increase in EU nationals refused entry to the UK in 2021 sparked media controversy and [concern](#) in European capitals after [reports](#) of some EU citizens being detained and refused entry despite holding status under the EUSS. The Home Office responded with a [clarification](#), stating that EU citizens refused entry to the UK should not be detained and instead released on immigration bail while they are arranging their return.

While there has been a decline in the number of EU nationals refused entry to the UK since 2021, it remains unclear whether this trend will continue as both officials and travellers better adapt to the new rules. 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 changes.

**Figure 12**

### Passengers refused entry at the border, by citizenship

Quarterly data, Q1 2010 to Q2 2023



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, table Stp\_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.



## Appendix

Our main estimates of the 2021 migrant population are obtained by combining data from the latest Census and the APS. The former are still not available in Scotland, meaning APS-derived estimates for the year ending June 2021 were used. The calculations are shown below for different nationality groups, by both country of birth and passport held.

**Figure A1**

### EU migrant population in UK countries

By country of birth and passport held, 2021

	Country of birth	Passport held
England & Wales (Census 2021)	3,643,000	3,885,000
Northern Ireland (Census 2021)	107,809	579,038
Scotland (APS YE June 2021)	258,000	231,000
UK (Census + APS 2021)	4,008,809	4,691,337

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Census and Annual Population Survey, Year ending June 2021.

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 covers nationality instead of passport held, although differences should be small.



## Evidence Gaps and Limitations

The Covid-19 pandemic greatly reduced the quality of some of the UK's key migration data sources. 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.

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, represent 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 that 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.

### Acknowledgements

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

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