



BRIEFING

EU Migration to and from the UK

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This briefing provides an overview of migration to the UK from European Union (EU) member countries. It discusses inflows, new registrations for a National Insurance number (NINos), employment, and other key statistics on EU migrants in the UK.

Key Points

The population of EU born in the UK stood at just over 3.5 million in the first quarter of 2016.

As of the first quarter of 2016, approximately 2.2 million EU born were employed in the UK labour market

In 2015, inflows of EU nationals migrating to the UK stood at 269,000, up from 264,000 in 2014. Net migration of EU citizens was estimated at 184,000 in 2015, up from 174,000 in 2014

EU inflows accounted for close to 49% of total non-British inflows in 2015.

Half of all EU nationals coming to the UK in 2015 were nationals of countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later.

About 73% of EU nationals migrating to the UK came for work related reasons in 2015, followed by those who come for formal study.

The number of National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations to EU nationals in the second quarter of 2016 was 140,530 in total. Of those, 37% were EU14 nationals, 25% A8 nationals, and 38% were A2 and other Accession nationals.

Understanding the evidence

EU citizens are a key group in UK immigration policy as they enjoy free movement within the European Union and the government cannot limit their rights to live and work in the UK in the same way that it does for non-EU nationals. Following the UK's June 2016 referendum on EU membership, it is likely that there will be policy changes towards EU citizens. For the moment, however, the UK remains a member of the EU and free movement rights remain in place for both new and existing EU citizens.

The boundaries of the EU have changed significantly in the previous decades. A brief timeline of when EU members joined is as follows:

1. Pre-2004 - EU15 (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom)
2. 2004 - A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) plus Malta and Cyprus
3. 2007 - A2 (Bulgaria and Romania)
4. 2013 - Croatia

With the exception of the UK, Ireland and Sweden, all other pre-2004 EU member states decided to temporarily restrict labour market access to migrants from the A8 countries upon their accession to the EU in 2004. This was possible because the accession agreements allowed member states of the EU to impose restrictions on the immigration of citizens from the new member countries for a maximum of seven years. In the UK, A8 citizens were able to freely and legally take up employment from May 2004 as long as they

registered with the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). This requirement ended in 2011. The UK imposed restrictions on the access to labour markets of A2 citizens in 2007. These restrictions were lifted in January 2014, when citizens of these countries gained the same rights as all other EU citizens to live and work in any country in the union.

To facilitate the analysis and allow for more consistent classifications over time, statistics presented throughout the briefing show information for the EU as a total, in addition to breakdowns for EU14, A8, and then A2 & other accession countries grouped together (as of 2015 this includes Romania, Bulgaria, Malta, Cyprus and Croatia).

This briefing uses a variety of data sources (see the evidence gaps and limitations section below to understand challenges associated with these sources):

Labour Force Survey (LFS) data from the ONS: quarterly survey of private households that provides data on foreign born and foreign nationals living in the UK and participating in the UK labour market. Labour Force Survey (LFS). For this briefing LFS information refers to the Q1 release.

Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates of the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS): provide data on immigration, emigration and net migration of EU citizens based on a standard definition of a long-term migrant as a person who moves to a country for at least a year. The International Passenger Survey is the main source of information for these estimates, in addition to adjustments for asylum seekers and other groups ('Long-Term International Migration Flows to and from the UK').

Please note that the LTIM estimates used in this briefing are based on the revised estimates by the ONS. In early April 2014 the ONS published their report on the 'Quality of Long-Term International Migration estimates from 2001 to 2011', in which they revised the numbers of total net migration for the years 2001 to 2011. Based on the revision, total net-migration between 2001 and 2011 was underestimated by 346,000. There is evidence that the underestimation was predominantly driven by an undercount of migration from the A8 Eastern European countries. However, a revised version of inflows and outflows as well as breakdowns by citizenship or reason for migration, etc., is not currently available. As a result, estimates relating to any breakdown of inflows, outflows, or different reasons for migrating will not match the total net balance.

National Insurance Number (NiNo) allocation data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): provide information about the allocations of new National Insurance numbers to EU workers. NiNos are issued once to people who are aged 16 or over and are working, planning to work or claim benefits in the UK, regardless of how long they intend to stay. Migrants may have lived in the UK prior to acquiring a NiNo, nonetheless these stats can provide an idea of the number of EU nationals that enter the UK labour market in a given quarter. As explained in ONS (2016), NiNo statistics cannot be directly compared to LTIM statistics, primarily because they include short-term migrants while LTIM only includes people moving for at least a year.

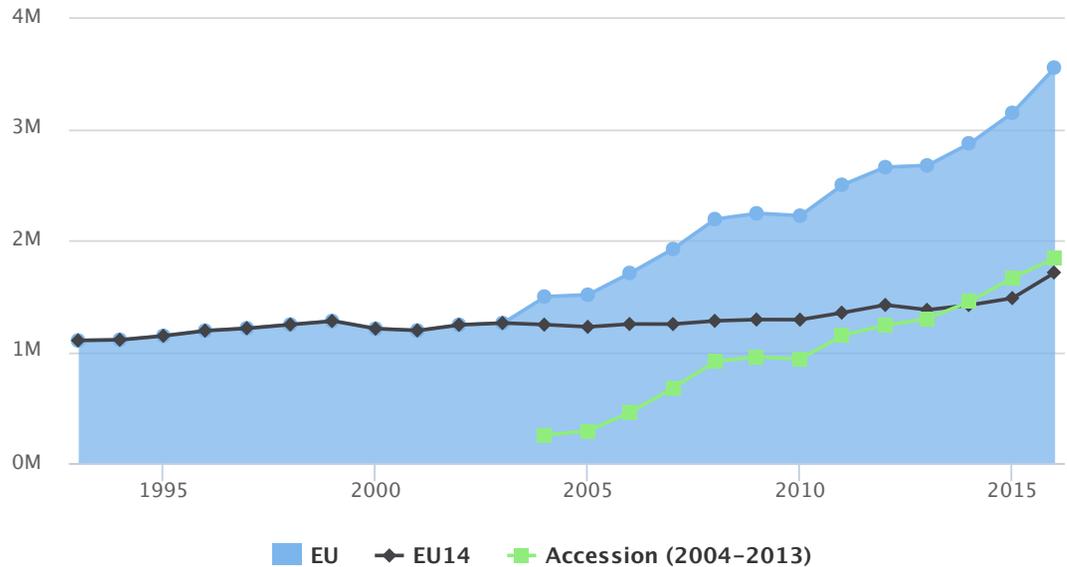
The population of EU born in the UK stood at just over 3.5 million in the first quarter of 2016

Figure 1 shows the number of EU born in the UK between Q1 1993 and Q1 2016 using information from the LFS. In contrast to other charts discussed in this briefing, this data refers to stocks of EU nationals who live in the UK, rather than flows of new migrants. For sample reliability purposes, nationals of all post-2003 accession countries are grouped together in this chart as accession born (A8, A2, Malta, Cyprus, and Croatia). Since the first

Figure 1

Number of EU-born in the UK, 1993–2016

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Note: Weighted LFS

Source: Office of National Statistics, Labour Force Survey

quarter of 1993, the population of EU born in the UK increased by 2.4 million. The population of Accession-born UK residents has increased by about 1.5 million since 2004, reaching 1.8 million residents in Q1-2016. Due to incompatibilities in the LFS over time, the number of accession born is not available prior to 2004.

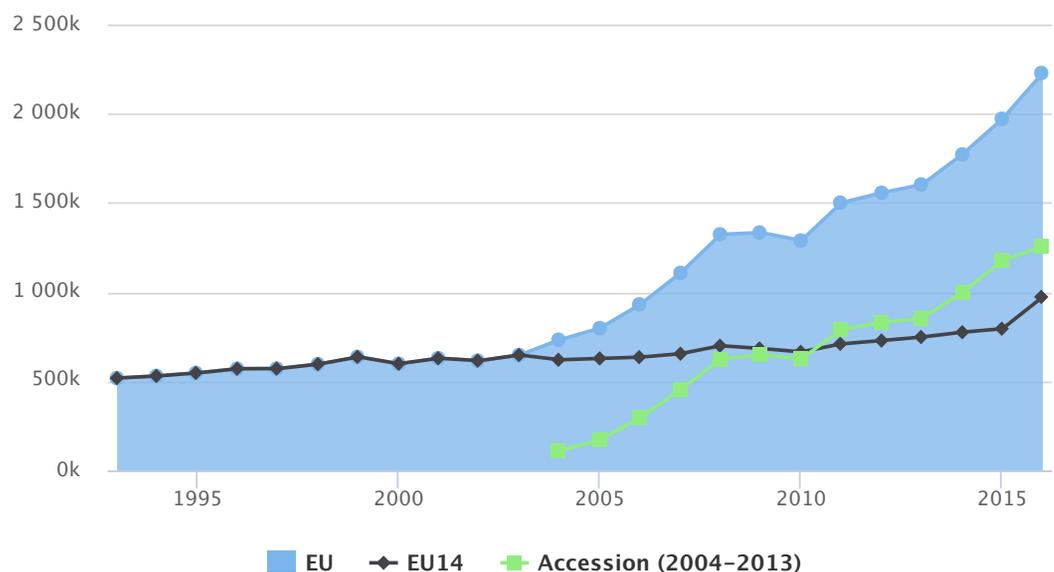
As of Q1 of 2016, approximately 2.2 million EU born were employed in the UK labour market

Figure 2 shows the number of those in employment who are EU born, using information from the LFS. The chart identifies those who are 16 years old and older and who are in paid employment, both as employees or self-employed (includes also certain government schemes).

Figure 2

Number of EU-born in paid work (16 and older), 1993–2015

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Note: Weighted LFS

Source: Office of National Statistics, Labour Force Survey

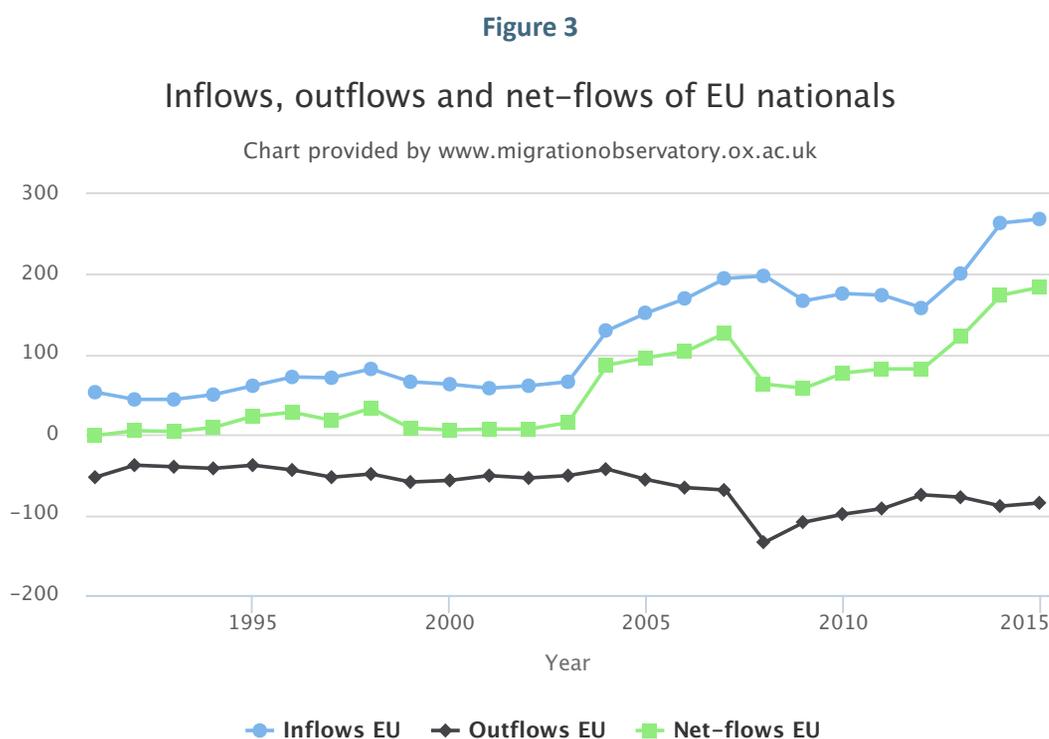
There is a general upward trend in the number of EU born in the UK labour market over time, reaching its peak in the first quarter of 2016

with about 2.2 million EU workers. The trend is primarily attributed to increases in the number of accession workers over time, although the number of EU14 born in employment has seen gradual increases as well. In 2004, about 85% of employed EU born were from EU14 countries, whereas in 2016 this stood at 44%. It is also worth noting that since 2011, the number of accession born has surpassed the number of EU14 born in employment.

Separate data published on an ad hoc basis by HMRC (2016) show that in the year ending 5th April 2014, 2.54 million people who were EEA nationals when they registered for a National Insurance Number were recorded by HMRC as having been employed at some point in the year. This is higher than the estimate of 1.8 million EU citizens employed in 2014, according to the LFS (Figure 2). However, these figures cannot be compared directly. The HMRC data include temporary migrants who come and go during the course of the year, as well as long-term migrant residents who work for just a short time; the LFS, by contrast, estimates the number of current residents employed at a given point in time and excludes many short-term migrants, and therefore is expected to be lower. As a result it is difficult to know from these data whether and to what extent the LFS may be undercounting EU migrant workers.

In 2015, inflows of EU nationals migrating to the UK stood at 269,000, up from 264,000 in 2014. Net migration of EU citizens was estimated at 184,000 in 2015, up from 174,000 in 2014

Figure 3 uses data from the LTIM series to show the inflows, outflows and net-flows of long-term international migrants (i.e. those saying that they intend to stay in the UK for at least 12 months) from the EU for the period 1991-2015 based on nationality or citizenship. Note that the inflow and outflow numbers for the period 2001-2011 cannot be compared directly with those from 2012 onwards because of problems with the IPS data described above in the 'Understanding the Evidence' section of this briefing.



Source: Office of National Statistics, LTIM/IPS
 Note: Estimates for EU nationals between 2001 and 2011 have not been revised by the ONS. The numbers for this period cannot be directly compared to numbers from 2012 onwards.

Inflows of EU nationals migrating to the UK stood at 269,000 in 2015, up from 264,000 in 2014. EU inflows were mainly flat for the 1991-2003 period, averaging close to 61,000 per year. Citizens from new EU member states are included in the data from 2004 onwards, after which the estimated EU migration inflows increased considerably.

Outflows of EU nationals from the UK remained relatively stable between 1991 and 2007, with an average of 51,000 out-migrants per year. Out-migration of EU nationals peaked in 2008 (-134,000) and 2009 (-109,000), likely due to the 2008 recession. Net migration from the EU, the difference between those coming and those leaving, was 184,000 in 2015, 102,000 higher than in 2012.

EU inflows accounted for close to 49% of total non-British inflows in 2015

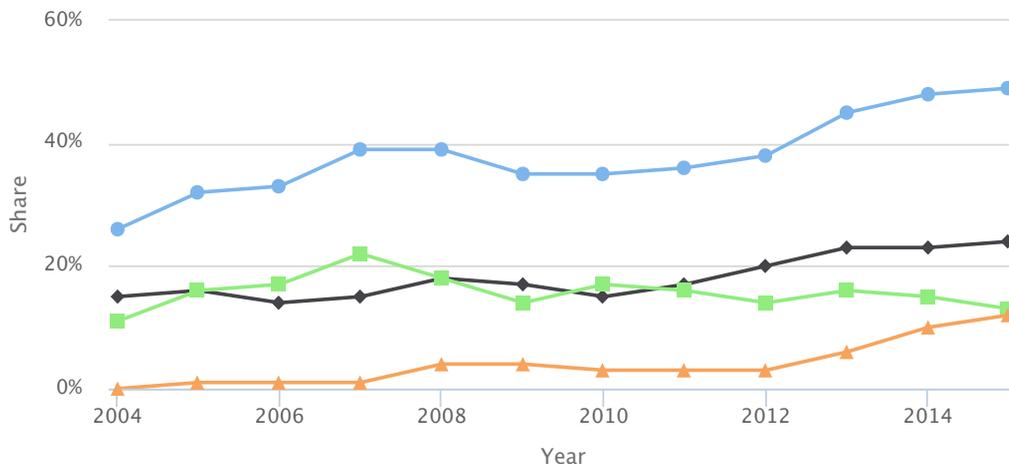
As shown in Figure 3, inflows of EU citizens accounted for close to 49% of total non-British inflows in 2015. Nationals of EU14 countries accounted for about 24% of total non-British inflows, while A8 nationals accounted for 13% of non-British inflows. Inflows from A2 and other Accession countries increased from 3% in 2012 to 12% in 2015.

However, it is important to note that the ONS has concluded that immigration from the A8 and other Accession countries was underestimated in the mid-2000s (ONS, 2012), as described in the 'Understanding the Evidence' section above.

Figure 4

EU member country groups as share of non-British nationals

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



● EU inflows as % of non-British
 ◆ EU14 inflows as % of non-British
■ A8 inflows as % of non-British
 ▲ A2 & other Accession inflows as % of non-British

Source: Office of National Statistics, LTIM/IPS

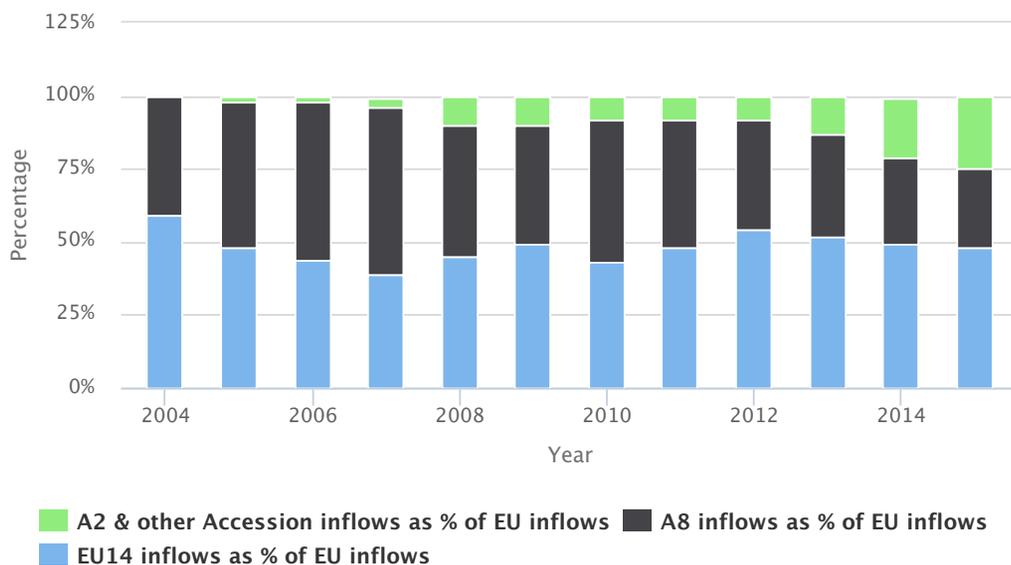
Note: in Figures 4 & 5, estimates for EU nationals between 2001 and 2011 have not been revised by the ONS. The numbers for this period cannot be directly compared to numbers from 2012 onwards and are likely to understate flows of A8 nationals.

Half of all EU nationals coming to the UK in 2015 were nationals of accession countries

Figure 5

EU member country groups as share of EU inflows

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



■ A2 & other Accession inflows as % of EU inflows
 ■ A8 inflows as % of EU inflows
■ EU14 inflows as % of EU inflows

Source: Office of National Statistics, LTIM/IPS

In Figure 5 we can see EU inflows broken down by EU14, A8 and A2 & other Accession nationalities. Overall, half of EU inflows in 2015 were from nationals of EU-14 member countries and the other half from nationals of accession member countries. In 2015, inflows of nationals from A2 & other Accession countries (A2, Croatia, Malta, Cyprus) represented 25% of all EU inflows, up from 13% in 2013 and 8% in 2012. Inflows of A8 nationals accounted for 27% of EU inflows in 2015.

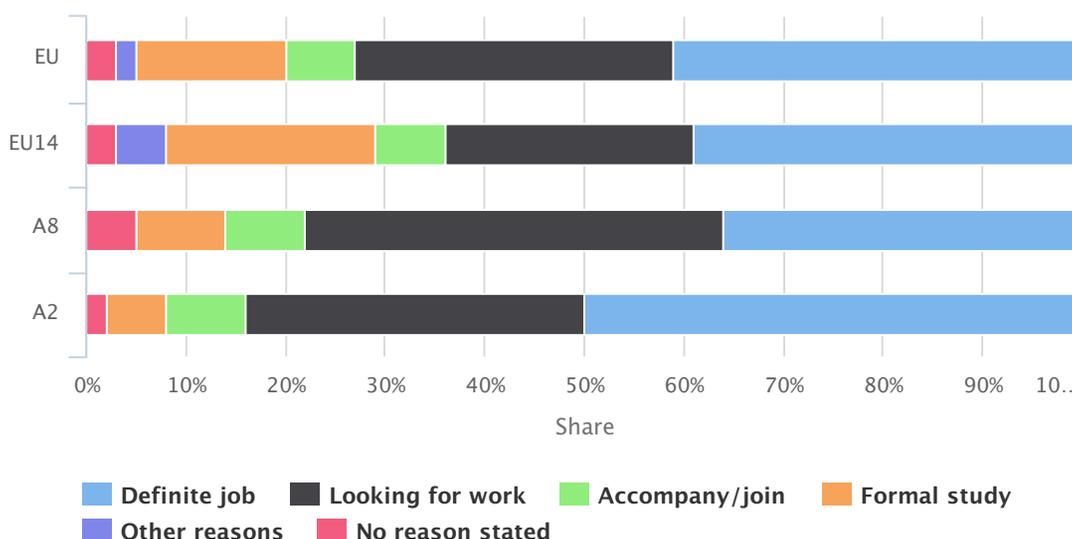
About 73% of EU nationals migrating to the UK come for work related reasons, followed by those who come for formal study

Figure 6 shows the shares of inflows of EU nationals to the UK in 2015 by citizenship and main reason for migrating. Among all EU nationals, 41% reported coming to take up a definite job and a further 32% to look for work. When focusing on EU14 nationals, 39% came for a definite job followed by 25% reporting looking for work, and 21% for studies. A8 nationals were more likely to report coming to look for work, at 42%.

Figure 6

Inflows of EU nationals to the UK by reason for migrating, 2015

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Office of National Statistics, LTIM/IPS

Note: The shares may not add to 100 due to rounding

The number of National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations to EU nationals in the second quarter of 2016 was 140,530 in total. Of those, 37% were EU14 nationals, 25% A8 nationals, and 38% were A2 and other Accession nationals

Figure 7 provides the number of new NINo allocations to EU nationals in the UK. The inflow dynamics over time in NINo allocations are similar to the ones suggested by the LTIM data. Until 2004 the numbers were small, followed by an increase leading up to 2007 (first quarter). At that peak, quarterly NINo allocations to A8 citizens were about 111,000 (first quarter of 2007). Since then there has been an overall downtrend in NINo allocations to A8 citizens and the numbers have since stabilized at around 45,000 allocations per quarter. According to the latest estimate, there were 35,072 new NINo registrations to A8 nationals in the second quarter of 2016.

The group with consistent increases over time in new NINos includes nationals of A2 & other Accession member states, especially Bulgaria and Romania. The first peak for new NINo registrations to A2 nationals was the third quarter of 2008 with 12,630 new NINos. However, this peak was quickly surpassed. Between the first quarter of 2014 and the second quarter of 2016, new NINo allocations to other EU nationals averaged ~55,900 per quarter and surpassed the quarterly levels for A8 nationals.

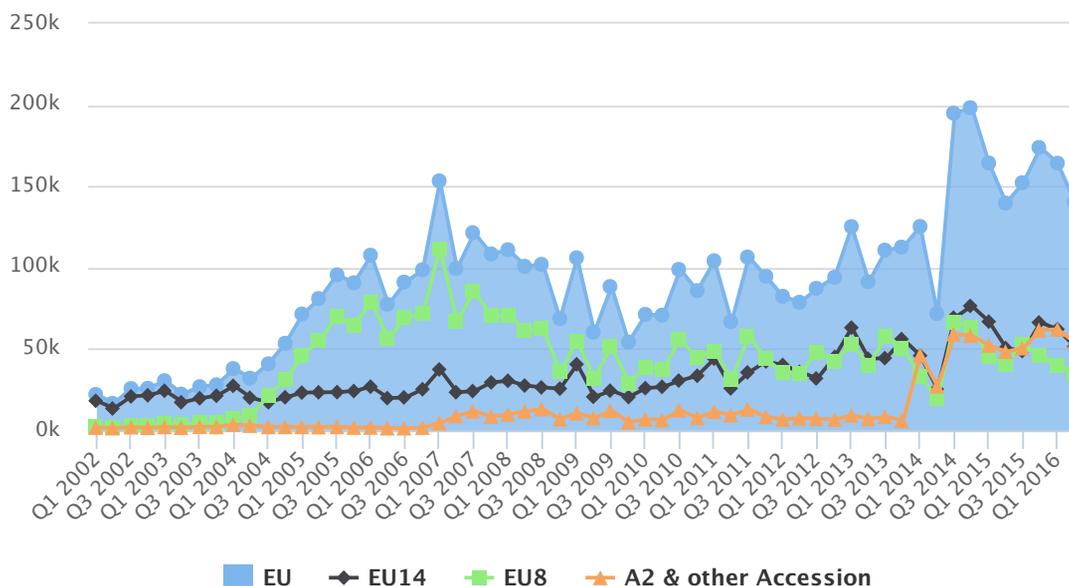
As mentioned in previous materials of the Migration Observatory, it is important to highlight that NINo registrations are not a direct count of new migrants coming to the UK. Some of the people who are allocated new NINos could have been resident in the UK prior to applying, for example as students, short-term residents, among others.

Moreover, being allocated a NINo does not provide any indication of how long a person will remain in the UK. Finally, evidence suggests that some migrants from A2 countries either had problems registering for NINos before January 2014, or may have been in the UK and working without having applied for a NINo, or not working. The ONS has analysed some of these issues in more detail (see ONS, 2016).

Figure 7

NINo allocations to EU workers, 2002–2016

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Department of Work and Pensions

Evidence gaps and limitations

The ONS’s LTIM estimates rely heavily on the IPS, which is an imperfect data source. It is a sample survey, which is voluntary and relies on people outlining their intentions (see the Data Sources and Limitations section of the Migration Observatory website for further discussion of the limitations of this data source).

It is also essential for the reader to keep in mind that the total net migration figures have been revised upwards for the years that span between 2001 and 2011. This change in estimates came alongside a published report by the ONS in early April 2014. Based on the revision, total net-migration between 2001 and 2011 was underestimated by 346,000. There is evidence that the underestimation was predominantly driven by an undercount of migration from the A8 Eastern European countries. However, the figures have not been revised to reflect undercounts in inflows and outflows and there are no revised figures with breakdowns by reason for migration or citizenship. In simple terms, if for example one is looking at inflows and outflows for these years, the difference will not match the revised net balance of that year. This also applies to any other breakdown beyond the total net balance for each year between 2001 and 2011.

The high level of immigration from the A8 to the UK after accession (713,000 for the 2004–2012 period) was not anticipated in reports used by the Home Office at the time; analysis at the time of the accession (Dustmann et al. 2003) suggested that flows were going to be much smaller. Due to a lack of historical data on migration from A8 countries to the UK, the projections for post-enlargement immigration from the A8 countries to the UK were based on a model whose parameters had to be estimated using data from other countries. Another problem with the projections was that this large-scale migration contrasts with the dynamics of previous EU accessions such as Spain and Portugal. In those cases, there were no significant migration movements (Vargas-Silva, 2011).

Similarly to the IPS, the LFS is also a voluntary sample survey and while it provides data on EU migrants in the UK, certain groups are excluded, such as those who do not live in a “private household” – which would include students living in dormitories, or people living in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation. NINo allocations do not indicate when a worker enters the country and are, therefore, just a rough measure of new registrations of workers and not of the stock of migrants. The reliability of NINo allocations for measuring inflows of workers is further limited by the fact that not all migrants request a NINo number.

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Further Readings

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Related Material

- Migration Observatory briefing – Long-Term International Migration Flows to and from the UK www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/long-term-international-migration-flows-and-uk
- Migration Observatory Election 2015 Briefing – Why do International Migrants Come to the UK? www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/election-2015-briefing-why-do-international-migrants-come-uk
- Migration Observatory briefing – Geographical Distribution and Characteristics of Long-Term International Migration Flows to the UK www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/geographical-distribution-and-characteristics-long-term-international-migration-flows-uk

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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.

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