



BRIEFING

Short-Term Migration in the UK: A Discussion of the Issues and Existing Data

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This briefing sets out to explain the often confusing issue of how we define a short-term migrant and looks at the estimated numbers of short-term migrants in the UK, how long they are staying, why they come to the UK and where they come from.

Key Points

The ONS publishes short-term migration estimates for England and Wales, using two definitions of a short-term migrant (migrants staying less than 12 months): those staying for a minimum of one month and those staying for at least three months.

The 1 to 12 months definition suggests a short-term migration in-flow (the number of short-term migrants travelling into England and Wales over a given period of time) of just over 1.1 million migrants in the year to mid-2014, while the 3 to 12 months definition puts the number at 317,000 migrants.

Employment and study reasons accounted for just over half of 3-12 month short-term migration to England and Wales. In the year to mid-2014, 87,000 people came for short-term study reasons, up from 69,000 the year before, and 79,000 came for employment reasons, up from 53,000 in 2013.

The estimates suggest an in-stock (the number of short-term migrants residing in England and Wales) of about 241,000 short-term migrants in the year to mid-2014 for the 1 to 12 months definition and about 129,000 for the 3 to 12 months definition.

The out-flow of short-term migrants (3 to 12 months definition) in the year to mid-2014 was 399,000 and the estimated out-stock (UK residents living for a short-period in another country) was 159,000.

In 2014, Australia is the most common country of previous residence of short-term migrants (inflow of 110,000 in the year to mid-2014) according to the 1 to 12 months definition, while USA is the most common country of previous residence for migrants staying 3 to 12 months (inflow of 34,000 in the year to mid-2014).

Newham was the top local authority in terms of the number of short-term migrants (UN definition) in 2014, followed by Manchester and Tower Hamlets.

Understanding the evidence

Most of the UK's migration statistics provided by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), including those on immigration, emigration and net-migration, refer to 'long-term migrants' defined as people migrating to the UK for at least 12 months. These data do not include people moving to or leaving the UK for less than 12 months.

However, the ONS also reports data on short-term migrants defined as someone staying in the UK for less than a year, and either at least one month or at least three months. In May 2016, the ONS published a note analysing the difference between the commonly reported long-term immigration figures and the number of people registering for National Insurance Numbers (NiNos), following public debates about why NiNo registrations were significantly higher than estimated long-term immigration (ONS 2016). The note argues that short-term migration is likely to be largely responsible for the gap.

The data used in this briefing come from the ONS Mid-Year Short-Term Migration Estimates for England and Wales. These refer to 'year to mid' estimates – for instance, the figures for 2014 reflect estimates for the year from mid-2013 to mid-2014. These estimates were published for the first time as fully accredited National Statistics in February 2011 and are constructed mainly with data from the International Passenger Survey.

The ONS publishes short-term migration figures for England and Wales, using two definitions of a short-term migrant: those staying for a minimum of one month or three months. These definitions are broader than the United Nations definition of short-term migration: moves made for between 3 and 12 months for employment or study.

Short-term migration figures are complicated by a number of factors in the measurement of short-term migrant numbers – not least, the understanding that many holiday makers and business travellers are covered in the data.

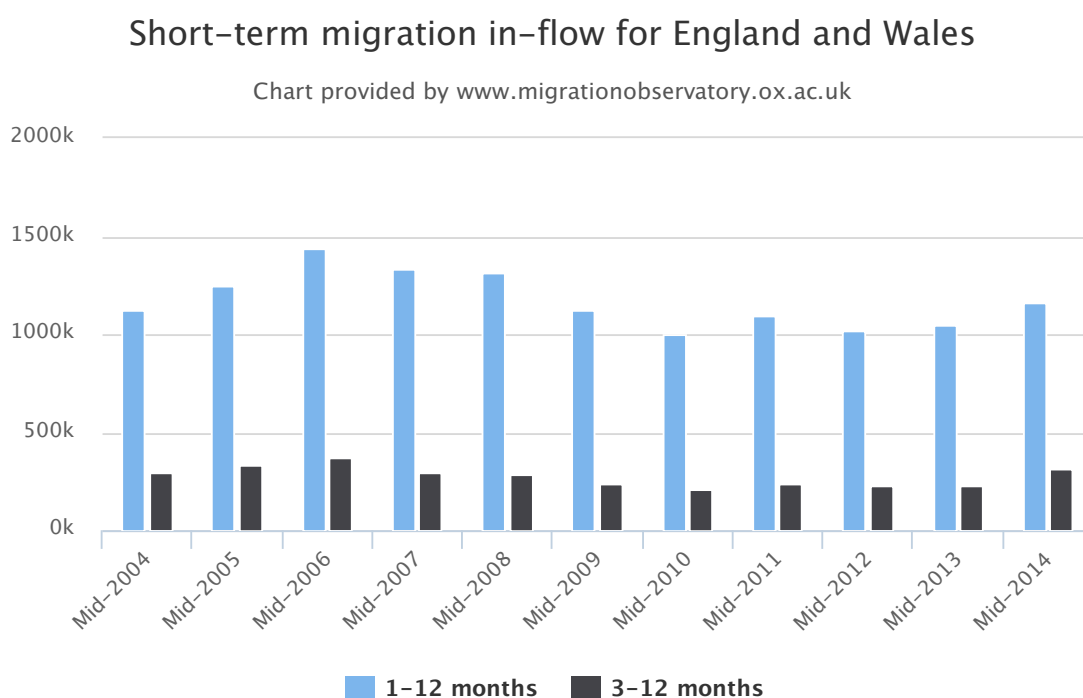
The ONS provides estimates of short-term in-flows of migrants (and out-flows of UK residents) and in-stocks of migrants (and out-stocks of UK residents). The term in-flow refers to the number of short-term migration visits from individuals that typically reside outside the UK (i.e. these individuals have to reside outside the UK for at least 12 months). In-stock denotes the stock of short-term migrants present in the UK during a specified period (number based on person years). The out-stock refers to the number of UK residents living for a short-period in another country. See the evidence gaps and limitations section for further details.

The 3-12 months definition puts the number of short-term migrants to England and Wales at 317,000 in the year to mid-2014

Figure 1 shows the number of in-flows of short-term migrants to England and Wales between the year ending in mid-2004 to the year ending in mid-2014 using the two definitions of short-term migrants; planning to stay (a) 1 to 12 months, and (b) 3-12 months.

Short-term migration in-flows to England and Wales had been on a downward trend since mid-2006. However the latest available data suggest a small increase, using both definitions. Figure 1 also suggests that there is a significant difference between the two definitions and estimates. While the 1 to 12 months definition suggests a short-term migration in-flow of just over 1.1 million in 2014, the 3 to 12 months definition puts the number at 317,000.

Figure 1



Source: ONS, Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales

Employment and study reasons in England and Wales account for just over half of 3-12 months stays

Table 1 reports short-term migrants' reasons for coming to England and Wales based on data for 2014, using the 3 to 12 months definition. Looking at the number of short-term migrants coming for study or work purposes is important because these two groups form the United Nations definition of short-term migration.

Latest data suggest that about 27% of 3-12 month short-term migrants come for study purposes; many are

Table 1 – Reasons for short-term visits 2014

Reason	Share
Employment	25%
Study	27%
Other	48%

Source: Office for National Statistics, Mid-2014 Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales

Note: Based on the 3-12 months definition. The reference period is year to mid.

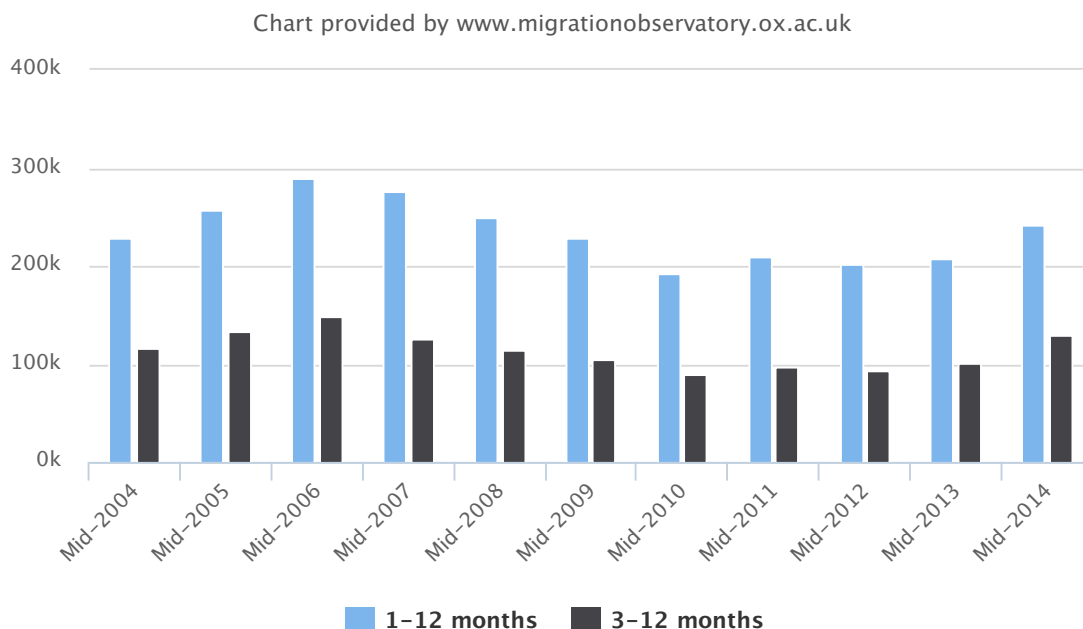
likely to come for short-term English courses. Around 25% come for employment in England and Wales. Those who come for employment may include non-EU nationals in different visa categories (including Intra-Company Transfers) and EU nationals who have free access to the UK labour market. The remaining 48% come for other reasons, including leisure, visiting friends or family, and doing business.

The in-stock of short-term migrants saw an increase in the year to mid-2014

As shown in Figure 2, between 2004 and 2006 the in-stock of short-term migrants was on an upward trend, reaching a peak of 290,000 (1-12 months) or 149,000 (3-12 months) in mid-2006. This was followed by consecutive decreases between 2007 and 2010, down to 192,000 or 90,000 short-term migrants in mid-2010. For the period 2011-2013 the in-stock was stable at just over 200,000 (1-12 months) or 100,000 (3-12 months). For the year ending in mid-2014 the in-stock increased to 241,000 (1-12 months) or 129,000 (3-12 months).

Figure 2

In-stock of short-term migrants, 2004-2014



Source: ONS, Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales

Table 2 shows the mean length of stay in months among the in-stock of short-term migrants by reason for migrating and using the two available definitions. Among those staying for 3-12 months, the mean length of stay is 5.2 months. As could be expected the average stay is shorter using the 1 to 12 months definition. In 2014, it stood at 2.6 months on average. For short-term migrants coming for 3-12 months, the different reasons for migrating have similar intended lengths of stay, from 5.8 months (employment) to 4.9 (other). However, in the 1-12 months definition, those coming for employment reasons report a longer intended stay of 4.1 months, compared to those who migrate for other reasons at 2.4 months.

Table 2 – Mean length of stay for the in-stock by reason for visit for the different definitions (in months) for 2014

Definition	Employment	Study	Other	All
3 - 12 months	5.8	5.3	4.9	5.2
1 - 12 months	4.1	3.4	2.4	2.6
Difference	1.7	1.9	2.5	2.6

Source: Office for National Statistics, Mid-2014 Short-Term Migration Estimates for England and Wales.

Table 3 shows the shares of in-flows and in-stock who come for employment, study, or other reasons, using the two definitions. For the 1-12 months definition, 11% of in-flows and 16% of in-stock reported coming for employment. In the 3-12 months definition, 23% of in-flows and 24% of in-stock stated employment related reasons.

A look at the shares over time suggests that there has been a decrease in the share of short-term migrants that are coming for

employment related reasons in the 3-12 months definition (from 29% in 2006 to 21% in 2012), and an increase in those coming for study reasons (from 22% in 2006 to 30% in 2012).

Table 3 – Shares of in-flow and in-stock by reason for different definitions

	Employment	Study	Other
In-flows (1-12 months)	12%	17%	71%
In-stock (1-12 months)	17%	23%	59%
In-flows (3-12 months)	25%	27%	48%
In-stock (3-12 months)	26%	31%	43%

Source: Office for National Statistics, Mid-2014 Short-Term Migration Estimates for England and Wales.

The out-flow and out-stock of short-term migrants is usually higher than the in-flow and in-stock

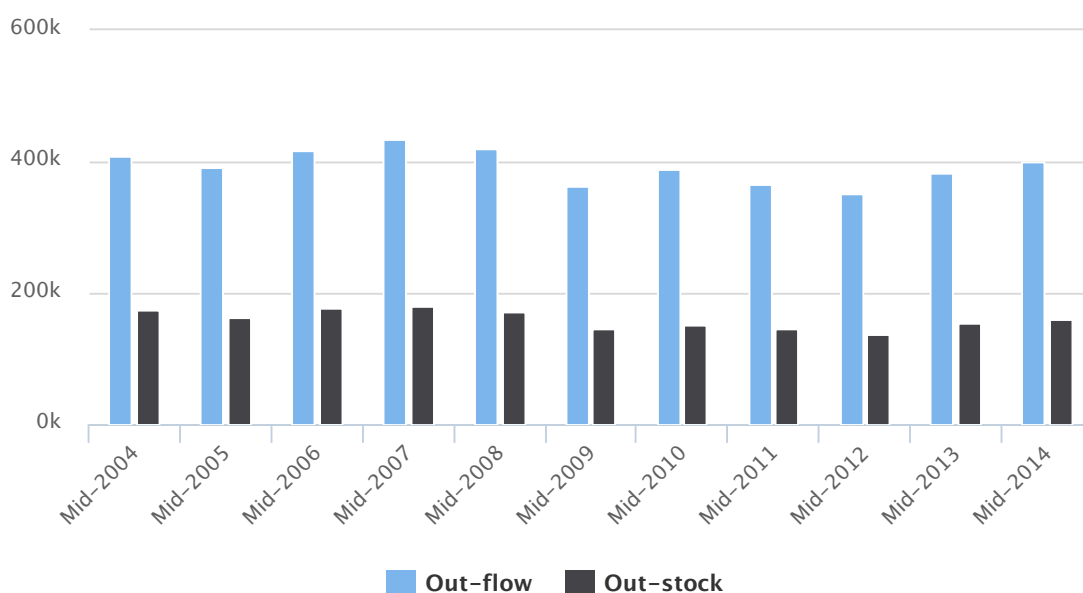
The out-flow and out-stock of short-term migrants refer to individuals who are usually resident in England and Wales making short-term visits abroad. The short-term migration out-flow and out-stock usually exceeds the short-term in-flow and in-stock. However, it is not as straightforward to talk about net figures for short-term migration as it is for long-term migration, given that these estimates refer to short-term moves within a year.

Figure 3 reports the out-flow and out-stock series for the 3 to 12 months definition. The out-flows and out-stock of short-term migrants in the year ending in mid-2014 stood at 399,000 and 159,000 respectively.

Figure 3

Out-flow and out-stock of short-term migrants, 2004–2014

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



Source: Office for National Statistics, Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales

In terms of the mean length of time abroad for the out-stock (3-12 months), the mean length of stay was 4.8 months in 2013. Those who spent time abroad for work reasons stayed on average for 6 months, while those who left temporarily in order to study spent on average 6.8 months abroad.

In 2014, Australia is the most common country of previous residence of short-term migrants according to the 1 to 12 months definition, while USA is the most common country of previous residence for the 3 to 12 months definition

The main sources of short-term migrants to England and Wales in 2014 were the USA, Australia, Poland, Spain and France (using the last country of residence as the indicator, 1 to 12 months definition). In the case of Poland, there was a large increase in the in-flow of short-term migrants from mid-2004 (see Figure 4), reaching a peak in the year to mid-2006 (221,000 short-term migrants from Poland). Since its peak, the number of short-term migrants from Poland has been on a downward trend.

Table 4 – Top countries of previous residence for short-term migrants, 2014

	Australia	Poland	France	USA	Spain	India
Mid-2014	110	86	59	98	85	71

Using the 3 to 12 months definition, the top countries of previous residence for short-term migrants in 2014 were USA, India, Poland, Spain, and Romania. The in-stock of migrants presents a somewhat

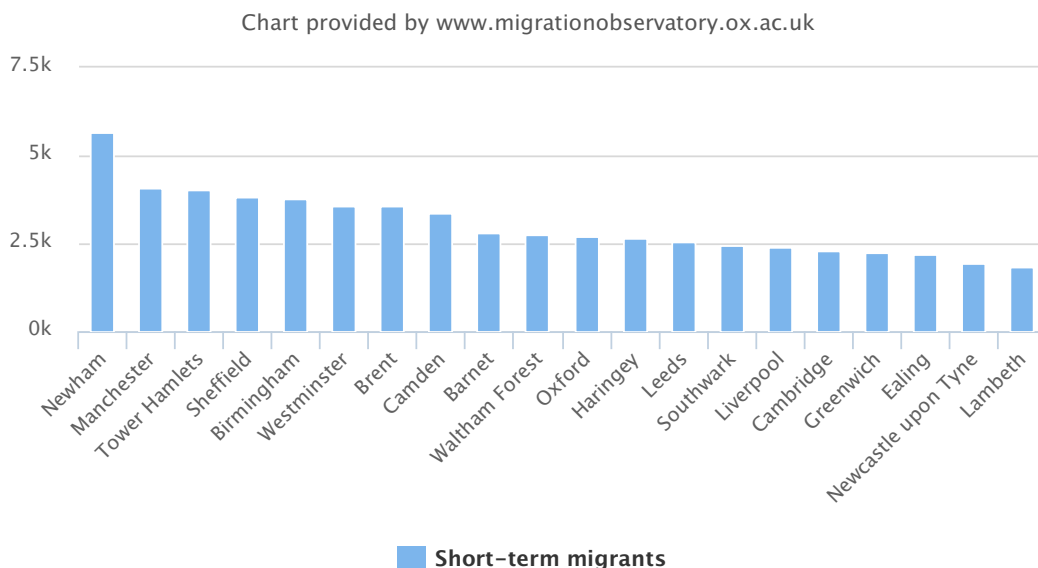
similar pattern to the in-flows in regards to the last country of residence. USA and India lead the group with a stock of about 12,000 and 14,000 short-term migrants respectively in 2014.

Newham was the top local authority in terms of the number of short-term migrants (UN definition) in 2014, followed by Manchester and Tower Hamlets

Using the UN definition of short-term migrants, it is also possible to compare short-term migration across local authorities and regions in England and Wales. According to the UN definition of short-term migration (3 to 12 months for work or study), the inflow of short-term migrants to England and Wales in the year to mid-2014 was about 163,500. As might be expected, the region with the highest number of short-term migrants has consistently been London (at least since 2008); in the year to mid-2014, there was an inflow of 59,300 short-term migrants to London. In the same period, London was followed by the South East and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Figure 4

Top 20 local authorities by number of short-term migrants, 2014



Source: ONS, Short-term Migration Estimates for England and Wales, mid-2014

The top local authority in terms of the number of UN-defined short-term migrants was the borough of Newham in London, with an inflow of 5,700 (see Figure 6). Outside of London, the top local authorities were Manchester (4,000) and Tower Hamlets (4,000).

Evidence gaps and limitations

The ONS has been comparing results for two definitions of a short-term migrant: 1) an individual who moves from (to) outside the UK to (from) England or Wales for 1–12 months and 2) an individual who moves from (to) outside the UK to (from) England or Wales for 3–12 months. There is no information available for international short-term moves to and from Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Drawing mainly on data from the IPS, the ONS's short-term migration estimates rely on interviews at the end of the migrants' stay. In contrast, information collected at the start of the migration process is the base of ONS estimates of long-term international migration.

The following example illustrates the necessary assumptions and limitations of the estimation of short-term migration: assume that only three short-term migrants (3–12 months definition) enter the UK in a given year. Short-term migrant number one stays for 120 days, short-term migrant number two stays for 120 days and short-term migrant number three stays for 125 days. In this example, the in-flow of short-term migrants is equal to 3 because three migrants entered the country and all stayed more than 3 months but less than 12 months. For the whole year, the in-stock is 1, because on average there is one migrant present for the whole year. This number comes from adding the stay of the three migrants in terms of days ($120 + 120 + 125$) and dividing by 365. The ONS refers to this estimate as the Long-Term Migrant Equivalent (ONS 2007). The estimate provides a number based on person years that is equivalent to long-term migration stays. If short-term migrant number three stays for 150 days, but only 125 of those days fall in the year under consideration, the short-term migration in-stock estimates for that year will not change. The additional 25 days will count in the short-term migration in-stock estimates of another year.

In order to estimate the average length of stay, the ONS adds all the days spent in the UK by migrants that entered in a certain year and divides this total by the number of migrants. For example, using the previous example of three short-term migrants, they would add the number of days (divided by 30 in order to express the days in months), that is: $(120/30 + 120/30 + 125/30) = 12.17$. Then this number would be divided by the number of short-term migrants (3), that is $12.17/3 = 4.1$. Therefore, the average length of stay in this example is 4.1 months. Moreover, the average length of stay only accounts for short-term migrants who began their visit in the year of interest, regardless of the year of completion. Hence, if short-term migrant number three stays for 150 days, then all of those days would enter the average length estimate even if 25 of those days fall in the following year.

References

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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.



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