



BRIEFING

Non-EU Labour Migration to the UK

AUTHOR: DR SCOTT BLINDER

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This briefing examines labour migration to the UK among people who are not from the European Economic Area (EEA). Labour migrants are those whose primary reason for migrating or whose legal permission to enter the UK is for employment.

Key Points

Non-EEA labour migration increased over the 1990s and early 2000s, then declined from the mid-2000s until 2012. By 2015, inflows had begun to increase again.

Skilled, employer-sponsored workers (Tier 2 of the Points-Based System) are the largest category of entry visas issued for work.

A majority of non-EEA labour migrants coming to the UK are men.

A majority of newly arriving labour migrants are aged 25-44.

The largest numbers of non-EEA labour migrants are nationals of Asian countries, followed by the Americas.

Understanding the evidence

Labour migration involves people coming to the UK for the purpose of paid work. Depending on the source of data, measures of labour migration might include people who say that they are coming to the UK for a definite job or to look for work (International Passenger Survey data), or people who have permission to enter the UK on a work-related visa (administrative data on visas and passenger entries). In terms of data collection, administrative data on visas and border admissions provided by the Home Office are based on various data sources and capture those people who are covered by the UK's immigration control and related processes (Home Office, 2015). The International Passenger Survey (IPS) data is collected via face-to-face interviews with a sample of passengers who were passing through ports (airports, land borders etc.) into and out of the UK; because it is based on a survey, IPS estimates come with margins of error.

IPS and administrative data also differ on definitions of a migrant – IPS counts only those who intend to stay in the UK for at least a year, while visa and passenger entry data do not account for length of stay. This briefing focuses mainly on migrants who are from outside the European Economic Area and Switzerland, and who are therefore subject to immigration controls and tracked in Home Office data on visas issued and passengers entering at the border. Of course, many EEA and Swiss nationals do come to the UK to work, and are included in IPS data (along with British nationals). EEA/A8 migration is considered separately (see the briefing on 'EU Migration to and from the UK').

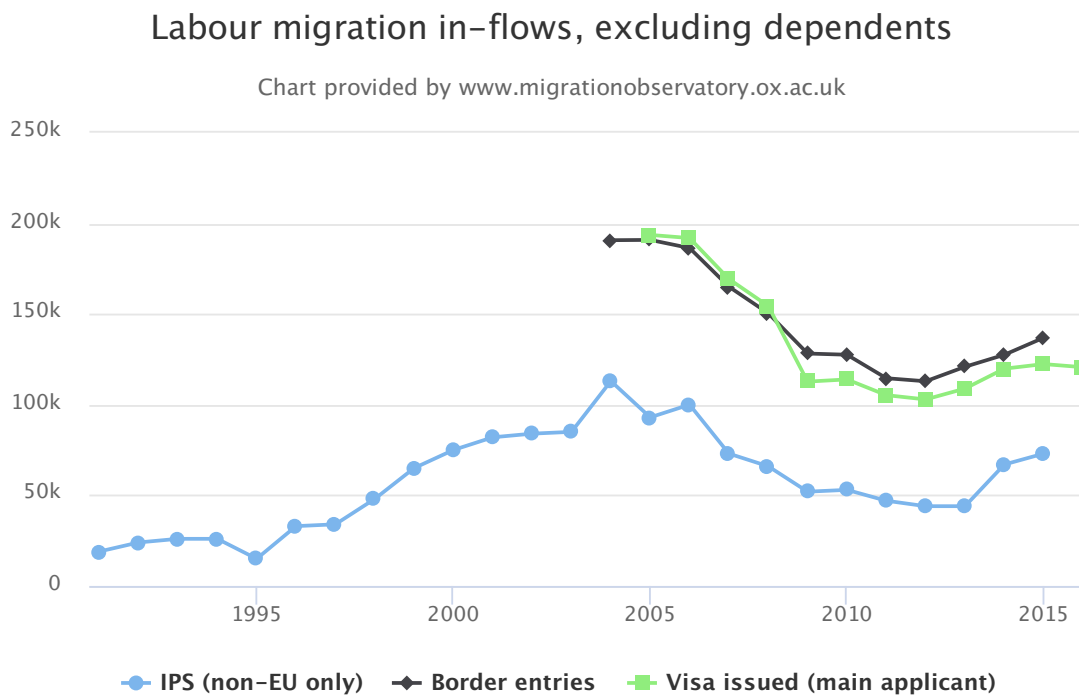
Visas and border admissions exceed IPS estimates of work-related migration. One reason for this is that some people are defined as migrants by the Office for National Statistics Long Term International Migration (LTIM) data, notably, those who intend to stay for less than 12 months. Other reasons why IPS data might be different from visa and border entry data (apart from the different migrant definition applied by IPS, visa and passenger data) could be the sampling variation of IPS; the fact that individuals may migrate for multiple reasons and this is not captured in visa and border data; and the time lag between when visa was granted and when the border crossing happened (Home Office, 2015).

Note that the visa data in this briefing provides includes figures for 'out-of-country' or 'entry clearance' visas only. Those work visas which are issued 'in-country' to allow extended leave to non-EEA nationals already in the UK are not considered further here, to limit the focus of this briefing to migrants entering the UK.

Non-European labour migrant arrivals increased until mid 2000s, declined until 2012 and have recently increased

Non-European labour migration increased from 1991 until the mid-2000s then decreased until 2012 after which it increased again in 2013 and 2014, according to multiple data sources. The growth over the 1990s and early 2000s is shown in IPS data on non-EU labour migration in Figure 1. IPS estimates of non-EU labour migration increased from 19,000 in 1991 to a peak of 113,000 in 2004 before declining to 44,000 in 2012 rising to 73,000 in 2015.

Figure 1



Note: IPS data include both of those come to the UK for a definite job and those who look for job. Border entries data include only main visa holders and other pre-PBS and Non-PBS work categories but exclude dependants. Visa main applicants include PBS, Pre-PBS and Non-PBS as well as all other work category visas.

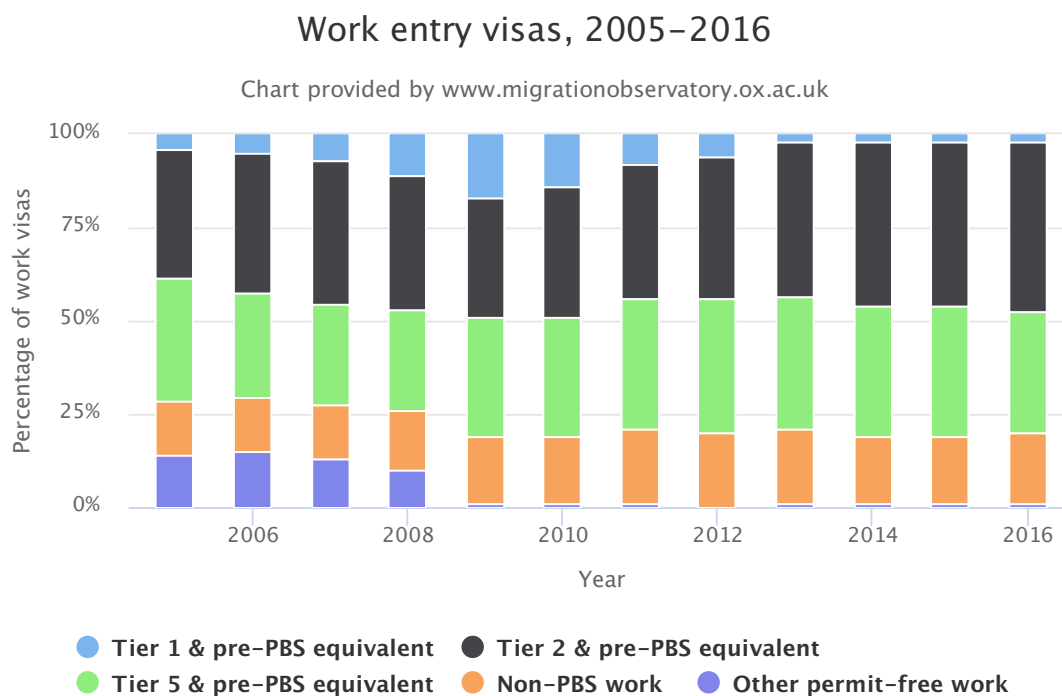
The decline from the mid-2000s to 2012 is also apparent in administrative data, as well as the increase after 2013. Work-related entry visas declined from 193,600 in 2005 to 102,900 in 2012, before increasing to 120,700 in 2015. Border admissions show a similar trend but slightly higher absolute numbers, as shown in Figure 1.

Skilled, employer-sponsored workers (Tier 2) are the largest category of work entry visas

Data are available since 2005 on how many visas go to various types of labour migrants as main applicants. Under the Points-Based System in place since 2008, this includes Tier 1 highly-skilled workers, Tier 2 skilled workers with job offers, Tier 5 temporary workers, as well as other categories outside of the Points-Based System, such as domestic workers in private households and those granted permission to work due to UK ancestry. These categories had rough equivalents in the more complicated set of pre-PBS labour migration schemes.

As shown in Figure 2, Tiers 1 and 2 together made up less than half of the total of 120,600 work visas issued in 2015, with 2% (2,000) in Tier 1 and 45% (54,800) in Tier 2. Tier 5 visas were 32% (39,700) of work visas in 2016. Non-PBS and Other permit-free categories comprised (19%) of 2016 work visas.

Figure 2



The number of Tier 1 visas for main applicants decreased from a peak of 18,850 in 2009 to a low of 1,600 in 2013 then increased to 2,700 in 2015, then increased to 2,000 in 2016. The fall around 2013 accompanied the phasing out of Tier 1 (General) for points-tested migrants and Tier 1 (Post Study) for graduating foreign students. The General and Post study categories had made up 74% and 23% of Tier 1 visas, respectively, in 2009. (Statistics on sub-categories are not illustrated in the figures in this briefing.) By 2016, Tier 1 (2,000 main applicants) comprised primarily Entrepreneurs (54% of the category, or 800 main applicants) and Exceptional Talent (20%, or 306 applicants).

Within Tier 2, the largest category in 2016 was Intra Company Transfers (ICTs) (36,000 main applicants, or 66% of the Tier 2 total of 54,800). ICTs refer to employees transferring from a non-UK workplace to a UK workplace within the same company. Another 33% (18,000) of Tier 2 went to a Tier 2 (General) category, for those coming to work for a new employer. The remaining 1% went to ministers of religion, sports people, and work permit holders from the pre-PBS system.

The majority of Tier 5 visas in 2016 went to youth mobility schemes (52%, or 22,300 visas), for people not over 30 years of age to stay and work in the UK for at most two years. Most of the rest of Tier 5 visas went to creative and sporting workers (16%), government authorised exchanges (15%), religious workers (4%) and charity workers (4%).

Visas in non-PBS work categories went mainly to domestic workers (18,600) and people whose right to enter is based on UK ancestry (4,100).

Labour migrants more likely to be male and young

Looking at the demographic characteristics of labour migrants, they are more likely than other groups of migrants to be young and male. LTIM estimates show that among those citing a definite job or looking for work as their reason for migrating, a majority have been male in every year dating back to 1991, including 60% in 2015. As seen in Figure 3, the labour pathway is more male-dominated than study and family (which are majority-female).

Figure 3

Gender & reason for migration, all nationalities, 1991–2015

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



Source: ONS, Long-Term International Migration, Table 3.11a

Note: The work category includes two reasons for migration, “definite job” and “looking for work,” except in 1995 when “looking for work” was coded as “other”.

years since 1991, with the majority of the remainder aged 15-24. Again, these estimates (shown in Figure 4) refer to all nationalities, including British and European arrivals.

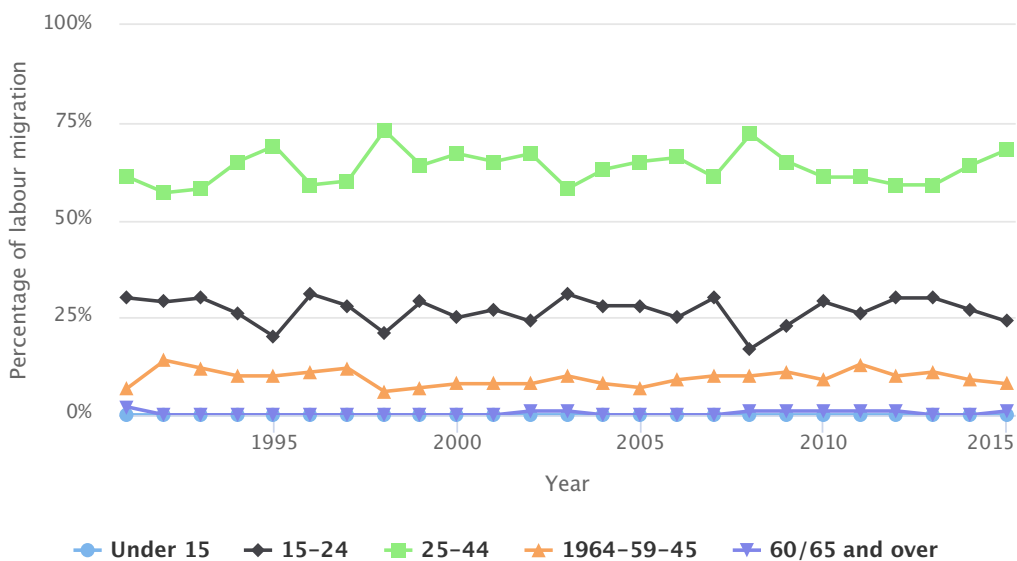
Note that these gender data include European as well as non-European migrants. (ONS does not make available data disaggregated simultaneously by gender, nationality, and reason for migration. Data on gender, nationality and occupation at time of migration to or from Britain are available, but have large margins of error and fluctuate considerably from year to year.)

According to IPS estimates of age composition, 60% or more of labour migrants have been aged 25-44 in most

Figure 4

Ages of labour migrants, all nationalities, 1991–2015

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

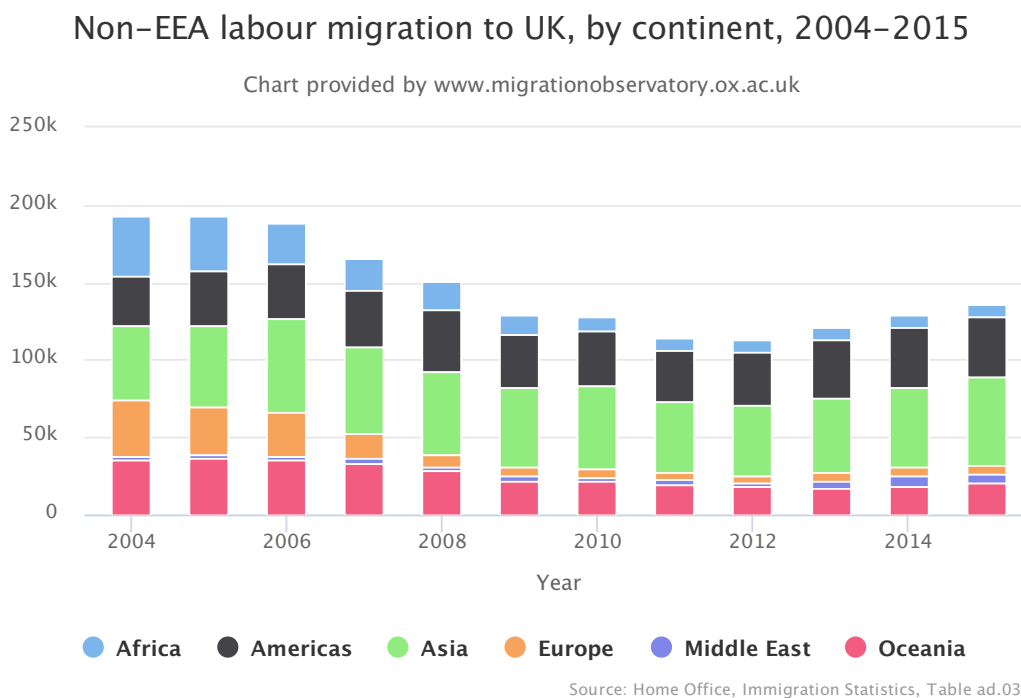


ONS, LTIM Table 3.11b

Notes: (1) The ambiguity of the two oldest age categories comes from ONS statistical tables. (2) Percentages may not sum to 100% each year due to rounding.

Passenger entry data by nationality show that the largest group of labour migrants is nationals of Asian countries, followed by labour migrants from the America, Oceania and Africa (Figure 5).

Figure 5



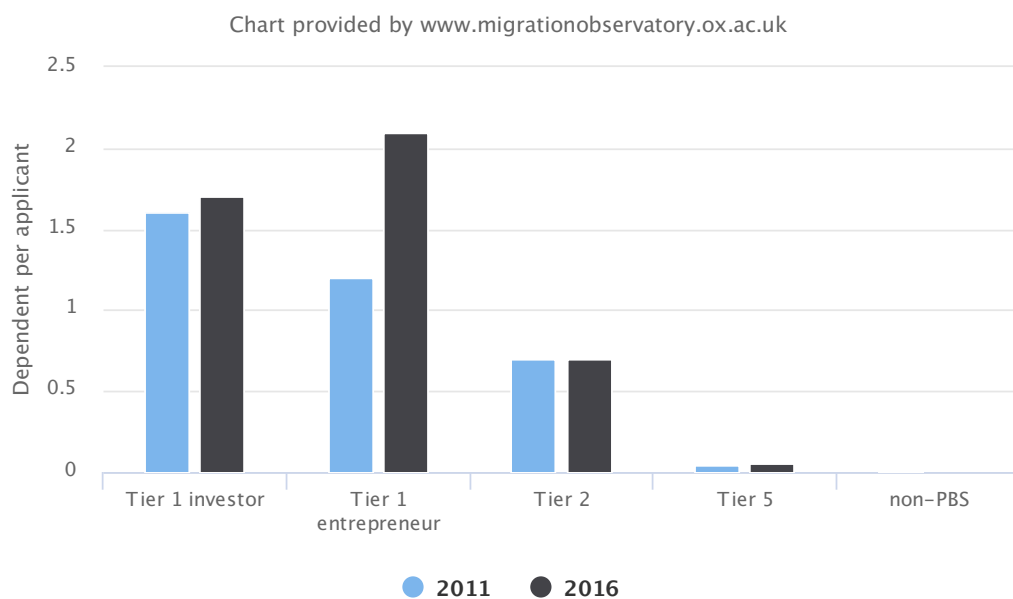
Tier 1 and Tier 2 (with dependents) are main contributors to settled population

Dependents of migrants under the PBS system may also come to the UK (if they can demonstrate sufficient financial support). In 2016 visas were issued to 43,200 dependents of people issued work-related entry visas (including non-PBS and other work categories). Of these, and 89% in Tier 2 (38,400). Just 6% were in Tier 1 (2,500) and 5% (2,300) were dependents of Tier 5 migrants.

The ratio of dependants to main applicants varies by category. For every Tier 1 investor and Tier 1 entrepreneur issued a visa in the 2011–2016 period, an average of 1.9 and 1.7 visas were issued for dependants, respectively. The equivalent ratios were 0.7 dependents per main applicant in Tier 2, 0.04 in Tier 5, and 0.01 in non-PBS categories (again, mainly domestic workers and people admitted on the basis of UK ancestry).

Figure 6

Dependent to main applicant ratio, entry visas, 2011–2016

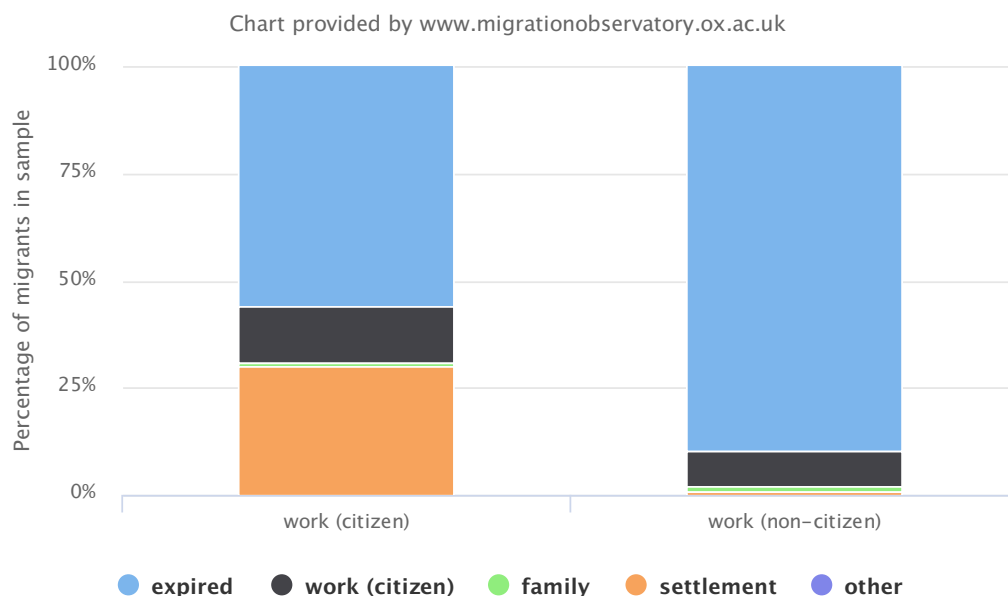


Note: dependents may arrive in a later year(s) compared to the arrival of the main visa applicant.

Labour migrants admitted on a path to citizenship attain settlement (ILR) in the UK at higher rates than those admitted without such a path, such as study or family route. In the 2010 cohort of arrivals, 44% of those entering the UK on work visas potentially leading to citizenship (roughly the pre-PBS equivalent to Tiers 1 and 2) still had leave to remain in the UK five years later (in 2015), including 30% who had been granted settlement. These rates were higher than those for student visa holders but less than for family migrants. By contrast, among those entering in 2010 as temporary work visa holders without a direct path to citizenship, only 12% still had leave to remain in 2015 and only 1% had attained settlement (slightly less than among student visa holders).

Figure 7

2015 visas status, labour migrants entering in 2010



Source: Statistics on changes in migrants' visa and leave status: 2015, Table MJ_02, MJ_03

Note: Data refer to main applicants and dependents together. Other category includes those of other, study, visit and work visa not leading to citizenship. Family includes dependent joining or accompanying, EEA family permit and family route.

Emigration of people who originally arrived as non-EU labour migrants has only recently been introduced in the IPS. In the year ending June 2015, 25,000 non-EU migrants emigrating from the UK reported that work was the previous main reason for immigration (ONS 2015, Emigration from the UK).

Evidence gaps and limitations

As suggested above, the main sources of data on labour migration are not directly comparable as they measure different things. For IPS/LTIM estimates, labour migrants are identified by their self-reported primary reason for migrating. (Alternatively, using IPS data, labour migration can also be estimated by looking at migrants' "usual occupation" prior to migration.) Administrative data classify labour migrants on the basis of legal permission to enter the UK. These groups are probably similar but not identical – some migrants may arrive as a Tier 1 migrant but report their primary reason for migrating as accompanying or joining a family member, for instance.

The Office for National Statistics has collected estimates of emigration by previous main reason for immigration are available from the year ending December 2012 onwards.

Each data source has its own strengths and weaknesses. Although IPS, for example, does not distinguish migrants by PBS Tiers, it collects data on main reason for migration, including work, study or family. On the other hand, IPS/

LTIM estimates do not tell us how many family-related migrants arrive as dependents of work-related migrants, as opposed to other reasons, thus, it cannot provide a full estimate of the labour path, including dependents.

Home Office administrative data count labour migration through both border admissions (measured via a sample of arriving passengers' landing cards) and visas issued for the purpose of work. Since 2008, both visa data and passenger entry data have classified people according to their status in the Points-Based system. It is not possible to precisely determine length of stay from entry data, which means that some portion of visas and entries go to people who do not qualify as migrants because they will not stay for the requisite twelve months. Administrative data also count visas and border entries for family members coming to the UK as dependents of labour migrants. In contrast to the IPS/LTIM estimates, this allows for more complete counts of the full numerical impact of the labour pathway including the family members that labour migrants bring.

Additional sources of data may be useful as comparisons or supplements. The Home Office's reports "Statistics on changes in migrants' visa and leave status" (Home Office, 2017) (formerly known as "The Migrant Journey") include detailed information about settlement patterns for the cohort of migrants arriving from 2004 to 2010 for work, study or family reasons. Workers on the path to settlement are treated separately from those with only temporary, non-extendable permission to stay.

National Insurance registration numbers (NINOs) are sometimes used to measure labour migration, but these are more useful for EEA/A8 migrants who are not counted in other administrative data and for people not labelled as labour migrants but who are in the labour market, such as working students.

Finally, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is also widely used to examine labour migration, but more commonly to assess the stock of migrants already in the UK as opposed to arrivals and departures. Some analyses have used LFS data to estimate migration flows, by calculating annual changes in the size of the UK's migrant population. However, LFS does not include information on migrants' visa status, and so cannot precisely determine labour migration

References

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- Home Office. "Immigration Statistics, October to December 2016" 23 February 2017
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- ONS. "International passenger survey (IPS) methodology".
- ONS. "Emigration from the UK" - part of Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, November 2015.
- Salt, J. "International Migration and the United Kingdom, 2009." Report of the United Kingdom SOPEMI correspondent to the OECD, Migration Research Unit, University College London, 2010.

Further Resources

- Dustmann, Christian, and Yoram Weiss. "Return Migration: Theory and Empirical Evidence." CReAM Discussion Paper No 02/07, Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration, University College London, 2007.

Related material

- Migration Observatory briefing - Migration Flows of A8 and other EU Migrants to and from the UK www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-flows-a8-and-other-eu-migrants-and-uk



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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About the author

Dr Scott Blinder
Assistant Professor, UMass-Amherst
scottblinder@polsci.umass.edu

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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