

Statistical bulletin

Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: February 2019

A summary of the latest official long-term international migration statistics for the UK for the year ending September 2018 published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Data from the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are also included.



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1 . Main points

Net migration continues to add to the population of the UK as an estimated 283,000 more people moved to the UK with an intention to stay 12 months or more than left in the year ending September 2018. Over the year, 627,000 people moved to the UK (immigration) and 345,000 people left the UK (emigration).

Our analysis of the available data suggests that net migration, immigration and emigration figures have remained broadly stable overall since the end of 2016. However, there are different patterns for EU and non-EU migration:

- non-EU net migration was the highest since 2004; this follows a gradual increase in immigration of non-EU citizens over the past five years for both work and study
- the number of EU citizens coming to the UK continues to add to the population; however, EU net migration has fallen to a level last seen in 2009 due mainly to a decrease in EU immigration
- more EU8 citizens, those from the Central and Eastern European countries, left the UK than arrived, as the numbers arriving fell and the numbers leaving increased; this recent pattern for EU8 citizens differs to those from all other EU countries, where we have continued to see more people arriving than leaving

We also see different patterns when exploring reasons for migration:

- immigration to the UK for work has fallen to its lowest level since 2014; this follows a fall in the number of EU citizens arriving to work
- the overall number of people arriving in the UK to study has increased, with non-EU student immigration at its highest level since 2011

Long-term international migration data from the ONS are largely based on a survey. It is not possible to survey all people coming to and leaving the UK, so these statistics are estimates based on a sample, not precise figures. It is best to use all available data sources and review longer time series to assess migration trends.

2 . Statistician's comment

“Decisions to migrate are complex and a person's decision to move to or from the UK will always be influenced by a range of factors, including work, study and family reasons.

“Different patterns for EU and non-EU migration have emerged since mid-2016, when the EU referendum vote took place. Due to increasing numbers arriving for work and study, non-EU net migration is now at the highest level since 2004.

“In contrast, EU net migration, while still adding to the population as a whole, has fallen to a level last seen in 2009. We are also now seeing more EU8 citizens – those from Central and Eastern European countries, for example Poland – leaving the UK than arriving.”

Jay Lindop, Director of the Centre for International Migration, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Migration continues to add to the population of the UK

An estimated 283,000 more people came to the UK with an intention to stay 12 months or more than left in the year ending September 2018 (net migration). Over the year, 627,000 people arrived in the UK (immigration) and 345,000 people left the UK (emigration).

To fully understand migration we consider all available data sources, including data from the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions, and make our best assessment of the overall international migration trends.

Figure 1: Net migration, immigration and emigration overall have remained broadly stable since the end of 2016

Long-Term International Migration, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

We present all long-term international migration estimates with shading around the line on the charts to represent uncertainty in the estimates due to the number of people surveyed. The line is the most likely value and the values towards the upper and lower band of the shading are possible but less likely. [Other sources of uncertainty are not represented.](#)

We have made a revision to the ONS estimate for non-EU student immigration for the year ending September 2016 and published a [guidance note](#).

4 . Non-EU net migration has increased, while EU net migration has decreased

While the overall trend in net migration remains broadly stable, net migration patterns for EU and non-EU citizens have diverged over the last two years (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Non-EU net migration has increased, while EU net migration has decreased

Net migration by citizenship, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

Figure 3: Non-EU net migration was at its highest level since 2004

Non-EU Long-Term International Migration, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

Net migration estimates show that 261,000 more non-EU citizens came to the UK than left in the year ending September 2018. This was the highest estimate since 2004.

Non-EU immigration gradually increased over the last five years, to an estimated 340,000 in the year ending September 2018. This increase was driven by increases in migration for both work and study. Non-EU immigration is now similar to levels last seen in 2011. Non-EU emigration has remained stable over the last two years.

Figure 4: EU net migration continues to fall but we still saw more people arrive in the UK than leave

EU Long-Term International Migration, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

EU net migration has fallen to a level last seen in 2009. Despite this, EU citizens continue to add to the UK population, with an estimated 57,000 more EU citizens coming to the UK than leaving in the year ending September 2018 (Figure 4).

The number of EU citizens who came to the UK was an estimated 202,000. This was higher than in the years up to 2012 but lower than levels seen in recent years.

Figure 5: More EU8 citizens are leaving the UK than arriving

EU8 Long-Term International Migration, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

For EU8 citizens – from the Central and Eastern European countries who joined the EU in 2004 – the pattern is different as we see more people are leaving the UK than arriving (Figure 5). This has been driven by a decrease in EU8 immigration, particularly for work, and an increase in EU8 emigration over the last two years.

In contrast, other EU citizens continued to add to the population for the year ending September 2018 (Table 1).

Table 1: Immigration, emigration and net migration to and from the UK by citizenship, UK, year ending September 2018

	Immigration		Emigration		Net Migration	
	YE September 2018	95% CI	YE September 2018	95% CI	YE September 2018	95% CI
Total	627	+/-42	345	+/-31	283	+/-52
British	85	+/-19	121	+/-15	-35	+/-24
EU	202	+/-26	145	+/-25	57	+/-36
(of which) EU15	107	+/-21	73	+/-19	34	+/-28
(of which) EU8	38	+/-10	53	+/-14	-15	+/-18
(of which) EU2	53	+/-11	15	+/-6	38	+/-13
Non-EU	340	+/-27	79	+/-12	261	+/-29

Source: Office for National Statistics - Long-Term International Migration

Notes

1. EU other and Other Europe citizenship groupings are not included as separate groups in the table but are included under the EU and non-EU totals. [Back to table](#)
2. Figures for 2018 are provisional. [Back to table](#)
3. YE equals year ending, CI equals confidence interval. [Back to table](#)

We do not recommend users make comparisons year-on-year and instead look at the broader evidence and longer time series, which allows a better assessment of trends. See [Chart 1 TS](#) for trends.

5 . Long-term immigration to the UK for work has fallen to its lowest level since 2014

Immigration to the UK for work-related reasons was an estimated 231,000 in the year ending September 2018. This follows a fall in the number of EU citizens arriving to work.

In contrast, the overall number of people arriving in the UK to study has increased to 217,000, with non-EU student immigration at its highest level since 2011.

The decrease in work-related immigration over the last two years can be largely accounted for by the recent fall in the number of EU citizens arriving with a definite job and the previous fall in the number of EU citizens looking for work (Figure 6). This contrasts with the rise in non-EU citizens arriving with a definite job.

Figure 6: EU citizens coming to the UK for work continue to decrease

EU and non-EU long-term immigration trends for work-related reasons, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

In the year ending September 2018, an estimated 70,000 EU citizens arrived in the UK with a definite job. This was down from peak levels seen in 2016 and 2017, bringing the number back to a level that was last seen in 2013.

The number of EU citizens coming to the UK looking for work has stabilised over the last year, with an estimated 34,000 arriving in the year ending September 2018. This follows a fall from a peak in 2016.

Foreign citizens require a National Insurance number (NINo) to work in the UK and NINo registration data can be used to provide another view of work-related immigration. For EU citizens, International Passenger Survey (IPS) and NINo data continue to follow a similar trend with both sources showing a decrease since the year ending December 2016.

The number of EU nationals working in the UK has fallen

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also produces [estimates of the labour market activity of the resident population in the UK by nationality and country of birth](#).

The most recent labour market statistics show that there was a fall in the number of EU citizens working in the UK, with a rise in non-EU citizens working in the UK.

For the period October to December 2018, the latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show that:

- there were an estimated 2.27 million EU nationals working in the UK, 61,000 fewer than for a year earlier
- there were an estimated 1.29 million non-EU nationals working in the UK, 130,000 more than for a year earlier

While an increase can be seen for non-EU nationals in employment over the latest year, the longer time series from the LFS shows that the number of non-EU nationals working in the UK has remained broadly stable over the last few years.

The number of migrants working in the UK is not a measure of how many people migrate to work. The best measure of total migration flows into and out of the UK is the Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates.

Figure 7: Non-EU citizens coming to the UK to work remains stable in recent years

Non-EU work-related long-term immigration trends by data source, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

Looking at all available sources (Figure 7), by comparing the IPS with work visas and NINos we can see that immigration of non-EU citizens for work has remained broadly stable since 2015 following a small increase. This follows a steady fall from the early to mid-2000s.

Although non-EU immigration for work has remained fairly stable since 2015, available sources show that there has been an increase in Asian citizens arriving for work over the last year. IPS estimates show an increase in Asian citizens arriving with a definite job, while the most comparable Home Office visa data also show an increase in work visa grants. There was a particular increase in work visas granted to Indian nationals.

There was also an increase in the number of Certificates of Sponsorship used in applications for Tier 2 (Skilled) work in the human health and social work sector (up 54% in 2018), resulting from the removal of highly-skilled doctors and nurses from the Tier 2 visa cap.

[Not all data sources are directly comparable](#). Users should be aware of these differences before drawing conclusions.

6 . Long-term student immigration is at its highest level since 2011 with most students arriving from outside of the EU

The overall number of people arriving in the UK to study has increased to an estimated 217,000 in the year ending September 2018, with non-EU student immigration at its highest level since 2011.

Our assessment based on reviewing data from all sources is that non-EU student immigration has risen in the last year after remaining broadly stable from 2013 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Non-EU student immigration has risen in the last year after remaining broadly stable from 2013 to 2017

Non-EU long-term student immigration trends by data source, UK, year ending December 2008 to year ending September 2018

The most comparable Home Office visa data for the year ending September 2018 show there was a 10% increase in the number of study visas issued over the year. This increase was driven by visas issued to Chinese and Indian nationals. The latest Home Office data for 2018 suggest this trend has continued and numbers are now to the highest level since 2011. The university sector accounts for the majority of all sponsored visa applications.

[Not all data sources are directly comparable](#). Users should be aware of these differences before drawing conclusions.

The UK granted asylum, alternative forms of protection, or resettlement to 15,891 people in the year ending December 2018

Home Office data show that the total number of people granted protection comprised:

- 7,636 grants of asylum (up 160 or 2%); there were notable changes in grants to Turkish (up 332), Iranian (down 381), Eritrean (down 358) and Sudanese (down 315) nationals
- 2,449 grants of an alternative form of protection (more than doubled), driven predominantly by an increase of 1,042 grants of humanitarian protection, particularly to Libyan nationals (up 907)
- 5,806 people provided protection under resettlement schemes (7% fewer than the previous year)

7 . Migration data

The Office for National Statistics long-term international migration statistics are estimated based on two main sources:

- the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which captures migration intentions
- Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates, which are based on IPS data, but with adjustments made for migrants not included in the survey, such as asylum seekers

[Provisional Long-Term International Migration estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 28 February 2019

Estimates with confidence intervals for the year ending September 2018 are available. These include data on:

- immigration, emigration and net migration by citizenship over time in Table 1 and Chart 1TS
- immigration and emigration by reason for migration in Table 2 and Charts 2a and 2b
- immigration and emigration by reason for migration and citizenship in Table 3 and Chart 3a and 3b

[Home Office Immigration Statistics release](#)

Release | Released 28 February 2019

Includes both short-term and long-term visas (including dependants) for non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and is available for year ending December 2018. The release includes more detailed statistics by visa category, citizenship and industry sector. The release also includes data on citizenship, asylum and resettlement, detention and returns.

[National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals](#)

Release | Released 28 February 2019

Includes both short-term and long-term migrants for year ending December 2018. The summary tables provide more detail by nationality and location of registrations in the UK.

[International Passenger Survey, estimates by individual quarter](#)

Dataset | Released 28 February 2019

Estimates of international migration, by individual quarter, can be derived from the IPS. However, these quarterly estimates are not fully processed survey data and as such are not official statistics – for more information regarding this decision see [International Migration – terms, definitions and frequently asked questions \(section 10\)](#).

It is important to note that estimates by quarter are not as robust as our estimates for rolling years and are not official statistics. This is due to the small sample sizes involved and because the complete methodology applied to our estimates for full years cannot be applied to our estimates for individual quarters.

Due to the seasonal nature of international migration and the small sample sizes involved for individual quarter data, users should be cautious with any interpretation of individual quarter estimates, especially where the corresponding confidence interval is large in comparison with the estimate.

Where these data are used we advise users to only compare the individual quarter data with the same quarter in the previous years. However, given the limitations with quality, methodology and coverage we recommend using the estimates for [rolling years](#) over the individual quarter data.

Differences between the data sources are described in [Comparing sources of international migration statistics](#).

8 . Glossary

Long-term international migrant

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) migration statistics use the [UN recommended definition of a long-term international migrant](#): “A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.”

EU citizenship groups

EU estimates exclude British citizens. Citizens of countries who were EU members prior to 2004, for example, France, Germany and Spain, are termed the EU15; Central and Eastern European countries who joined the EU in 2004, for example, Poland, are the EU8; EU2 comprises Bulgaria and Romania, who became EU members in 2007.

Work-related migration

In the International Passenger Survey “Work-related” migration includes those people who migrate with a “Definite job” to go to already and those who migrate “Looking for work”.

Full details of ONS terms and definitions can be found in the [International Migration – terms, definitions and frequently asked questions](#).

9 . Measuring these data

The sources of data included in this release are not directly comparable but taken together provide a better indication of trends than any single source alone. This approach is explained in the [Report on international migration data sources: July 2018](#), which sets out our latest understanding of the quality of International Passenger Survey (IPS) migration estimates.

The Government Statistical Service Migration Statistics Transformation Programme is working [towards putting administrative data at the core of international migration statistics](#). In January 2019, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a [research engagement report](#) summarising their findings from the feasibility research on using linked administrative data to provide international migration flows and seeking feedback on user needs across the international migration evidence base.

Office for National Statistics data

The ONS publish International Passenger Survey (IPS) and Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates.

The [Migration statistics first time user guide](#) describe these data and the [Long-Term International Migration \(LTIM\) estimates methodology](#) details the method used to calculate LTIM.

All of the LTIM and IPS estimate changes discussed in the release are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level unless specifically stated otherwise.

For more detailed information on our migration statistics methodology please see [International migration methodology](#).

The ONS produce estimates of the [labour market activity of the resident population in the UK by nationality and country of birth](#) from the Labour Force Survey. Statistical significance testing is not available for the labour market EU and non-EU breakdowns.

A number of differences have been identified when making comparisons between migration data from the Annual Population Survey (APS), Labour Force Survey (LFS) and International Passenger Survey (IPS). We have recently published a [workplan](#) to better understand the reasons for those differences in the survey sources in the wider context of our migration statistics transformation work.

Home Office data

Home Office immigration statistics provide the numbers of people who are covered by the UK's immigration control and related processes, based on a range of administrative and other data sources. Where direct comparisons are made to the IPS data, Home Office visa data are for main applicants only and for long-term visas (one year or more). The [User Guide to Home Office Immigration Statistics](#) provides more details.

Department for Work and Pensions data

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) National Insurance number (NINo) statistics count the volume of NINos registered to adult non-UK nationals. Further information including detail on data sources, uses and limitations of the series is provided in the [background information](#).

Differences between the data sources are described in [Comparing sources of international migration statistics](#).

10 . Strengths and limitations of the ONS international migration data

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) and the Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates are currently the only sources of data to provide both long-term immigration and emigration and so net migration estimates for the UK.

The IPS is a sample survey and as such provides estimates. When the estimates are broken down beyond the headline figures they are subject to greater levels of uncertainty.

To ensure confidence in our estimates we review all available data sources to make the best assessment of migration in the UK. For example, Home Office administrative data on non-EU citizens travelling is more detailed and do not have the known possible variability present in estimates made from sample surveys.

The accuracy of long-term migration estimates

Surveys gather information from a sample of people from a population. It is not possible to ask every person travelling in and out of the country to fill out a survey. This means we have to estimate total changes, which can be affected by the group of people we sample. We use confidence intervals to measure uncertainty around the estimate. Users are advised to be cautious when making inferences from estimates with relatively large confidence intervals.

The [Migration statistics first time user guide](#) summarises the reliability of the long-term international migration estimates. For further information on confidence intervals, the accuracy of these statistics, comparing different data sources and the difference between provisional and final figures, please see [International migration methodology](#).

Uncertainty in ONS migration statistics

In this release we present the LTIM and IPS data with shading around the line on the charts to represent the uncertainty of the estimates due to the number of people surveyed, based on 30%, 60% and 95% confidence intervals. The line on the chart is the most likely value and the values towards the upper and lower band of the shading are possible but less likely.

Other sources of uncertainty are not represented, a few examples of this include: limitations of the survey methodology, potential misunderstandings of the questions, accuracy of interviewees' answers and uncertainties caused by combining data from different sources.

Revisions to the ONS migration estimates

Revisions to net migration estimates in light of the 2011 Census were made in April 2014. The report, a [summary](#) and [guidance \(PDF, 56KB\)](#) on how to use these revised figures are available.

Revisions to LTIM and IPS estimates were made in February 2019. Because of the [unusual pattern in student migration](#) seen between the year ending September 2016 and the year ending September 2017 we produced an illustrative revised trend for the IPS non-EU student immigration estimate in July 2018.

We have now made a revision to the IPS and LTIM estimate for non-EU formal study immigration for the year ending September 2016, which forms part of the subsequent estimates for three rolling years. A [guidance note](#) has been published to explain the revision. The revision affects estimates for the years ending September 2016, December 2016, March 2017 and June 2017. As non-EU student immigration feeds into overall immigration and net migration estimates, we have also produced revised estimates for these figures.

Revised estimates are highlighted in the [accompanying dataset](#) and presented without confidence intervals as it is not possible to quantify the uncertainty associated with them. The original estimates are available in earlier publications of the accompanying dataset.

Quality and methodology

The [Long-Term International Migration Quality and Methodology Information report](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

For more detailed information on our migration statistics methodology please see [International migration methodology](#).

11 . More about migration

[Update on our population and migration statistics transformation journey: a research engagement report](#)

Article | Released on 30 January 2019

An update on our population and migration statistics transformation using administrative data.

[Building our understanding of the migration evidence](#)

Bulletin section 9 | Released on 23 August 2018

An update of the Migration Statistics Transformation Programme for August 2018.

[Report on international migration data sources: July 2018](#)

Article | Released on 16 July 2018

An update on our migration statistics transformation plans, our recent analysis of Home Office administrative data, in collaboration with Home Office experts and our International Passenger Survey (IPS) data assurance review.

[Migration statistics transformation update: May 2018](#)

Article | Released on 24 May 2018

An update of the Migration Statistics Transformation Programme for May 2018.

[What's happening with international student migration?](#)

Article | Released on 24 August 2017

An update on our progress towards developing a better understanding on student migration to and from the UK since the April 2017 update.

12 . You may also be interested in

[Office for National Statistics international migration articles](#)

All ONS articles relating to international migration.

[International migration – table of contents](#)

Dataset | Released on 29 November 2018

Tool to locate the datasets for all ONS international migration outputs.

[Nationality at point of National Insurance number registration of DWP working age benefit recipients: data to November 2017](#)

Release | Released 28 February 2019

These statistics provide the number of claimants receiving one or more DWP Working Age (WA) benefits broken down by nationality.

[Home Office migration research and analysis](#)

Research and statistics on migration to support Home Office policy development and operational activity.

[Home Office developments in migration statistics](#)

Article | Released on 28 February 2019

Recent changes introduced by Home Office statisticians to a wide range of UK migration statistics.

[Migration Advisory Committee \(MAC\)](#)

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) is an independent, non-statutory, non-time limited, non-departmental public body that advises the government on migration issues.