



# BRIEFING

## Migrants in the UK: An Overview

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This briefing provides an overview of the number, population share, geographic distribution and nationalities of migrants in the UK.

## Key Points

Between 1993 and 2015 the foreign-born population in the UK more than doubled from 3.8 million to around 8.7 million. During the same period, the number of foreign citizens increased from nearly 2 million to more than 5 million.

London has the greatest number of migrants (3.2 million foreign-born people in 2015) among all regions with comparable data in the UK.

In 2015, the UK population was 13.5% foreign-born (up from 7% in 1993) and 8.9% foreign citizens (up from 4% in 1993).

Foreign-born people constituted 41% of Inner London's population in 2015 (the highest share among all regions with comparable data).

Poland is the most common country of birth and the most common country of nationality.

## Understanding the evidence

This briefing defines the migrant population as the foreign-born population in the UK. Wherever relevant and indicated, the briefing also provides figures for foreign citizens residing in the UK, as well as for recent migrants – defined as foreign-born people who have been living in the UK for five years or less. Definitions have a significant impact on the analysis of the number of migrants in the UK and there is significant overlap between those who belong to the foreign-born group and those who belong to the foreign-citizen group. However having a foreign country of birth does not necessarily imply foreign citizenship and vice versa.

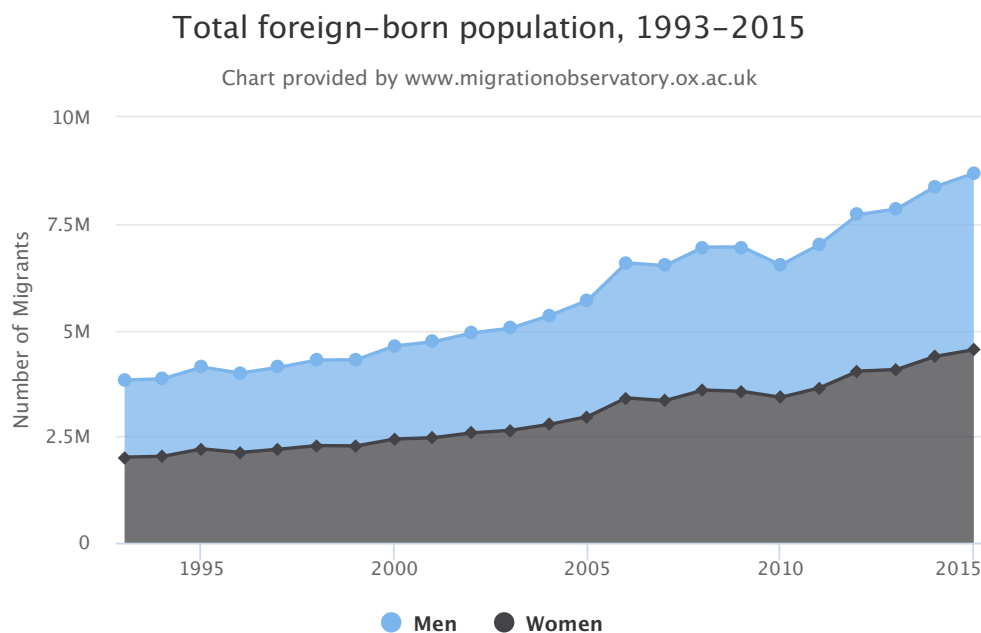
The briefing includes all migrants, irrespective of their age and employment status. All data in this briefing are taken from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) using the fourth quarter of each year. For information about the limitations of the LFS, see the 'evidence gaps and limitations' section at the end of this briefing.

### The stock of the migrant population more than doubled from 1993 to 2015

The size of the foreign-born population in the UK increased from about 3.8 million in 1993 to over 8.7 million in 2015 (see Figure 1). During the same period the number of foreign citizens increased from nearly 2 million to more than 5.7 million.

The number of foreign-born people in the UK increased in almost every year, although there were some slight decreases in 1996, 2007, 2010 and 2013. Over the whole time period analysed (1993 to 2015) the highest growth in the foreign-born population occurred between 2005 and 2008. This period coincides with the significant inflow of East European migrants following EU enlargement in 2004.

Figure 1



Source: Labour Force Survey Q4

Although the numbers of both female and male migrants have increased over time, women have constituted a small majority of the UK’s migrant population since at least 1993. In 2015, 52% of the foreign-born population were women.

Looking at the distribution of foreign-born by age, including children (those aged 0-15), youth (aged 15-25), adults (aged 26-64), and retired (aged 64+), the vast majority of foreign-born people are adults (70.9%), while 9.4% are children, 9.9% are youth, and 11% are retired. The shares of age-groups are generally the same across foreign born males and females, though there are slightly bigger shares of foreign born males that are children and youth (just under 20% of foreign born males), and a slightly greater share of retirees amongst females (12.1% of foreign born females, as compared with 9.7% for males).

### London has the largest number of migrants among all regions of the UK

Table 1 presents the distribution of the foreign-born population across England’s government office regions (GORs), Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. There is significant variation in the geographic distribution of migrants in the UK. In 2015, about half of the UK’s foreign-born population were in London (36.8%) and the South East (12.8%). Wales, the North East and Northern Ireland have a low share of the UK’s total foreign-born population, 2.2%, 1.6% and 1.4% respectively. By comparison, the UK-born population is more evenly distributed throughout the UK. In 2015, only 9.7% of the UK-born population lived in London.

Table 1 - Distribution of foreign-born population, 2015

Region	2015
London	36.8%
South East	12.8%
East	8.8%
West Midlands	7.9%
North West	7.9%
East Midlands	5.7%
Yorkshire	5.6%
South West	5.1%
Scotland	4.3%
Wales	2.2%
North East	1.6%
Northern Ireland	1.4%

Table 2 shows the number of foreign-born people in different UK regions over time. The LFS provides information at the regional level for 20 regions (see Table 1), as defined by the UK Office for National Statistics.

In 2015 about 1.4 million foreign-born people were living in Inner London and nearly 1.8 million were living in Outer London. The smallest number of foreign-born individuals were in Tyne and Wear and in the “Rest of North East” region of England. However these regions also experienced the largest percentage increases of their migrant populations, between 1995 and 2015. This is not surprising given the small number of migrants these regions had initially. Between 1995 and 2015 Inner London, West Midlands Metropolitan County and the “Rest of North West” region experienced the lowest percentage increases in the number of migrants (up 88, 96 and 93% respectively).

Table 2 - Number of foreign-born by region

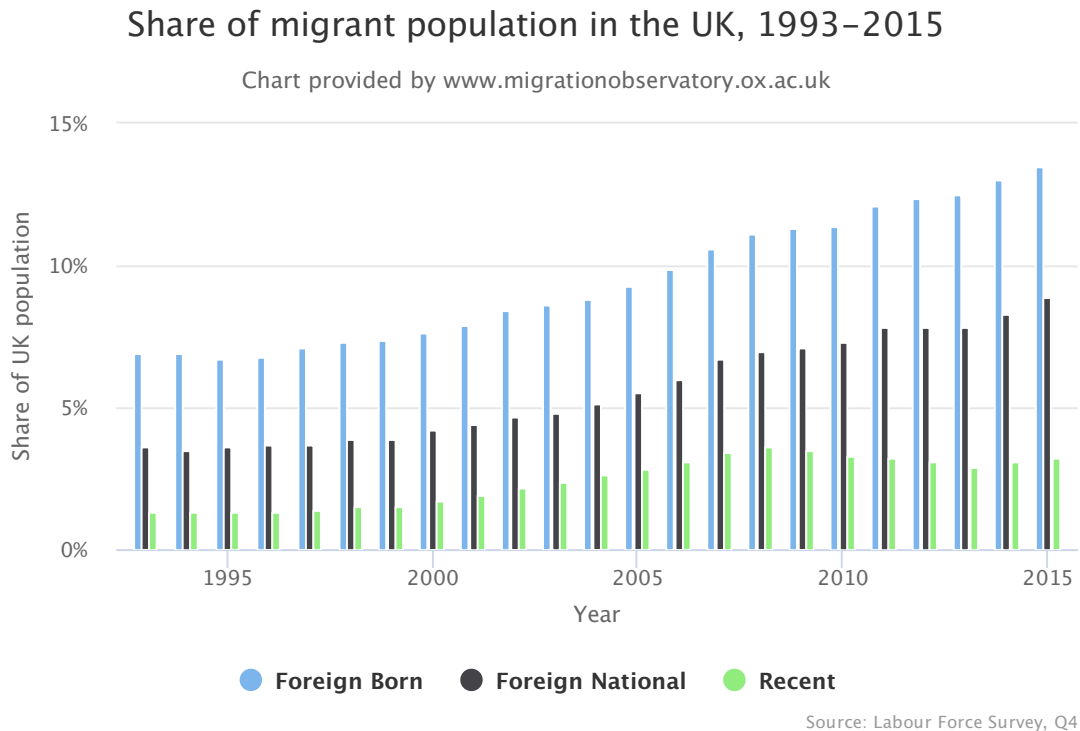
Region	1995	2000	2005	2009	2015	1995-2015 % change
Tyne and Wear	24000	31000	50000	61000	68000	200%
Rest of North East	29000	33000	38000	56000	87000	212%
Greater Manchester	166000	142000	216000	294000	390000	147%
Merseyside	35000	30000	61000	63000	94000	176%
Rest of North West	103000	105000	135000	167000	184000	93%
South Yorkshire	49000	37000	63000	87000	99000	122%
West Yorkshire	140000	154000	197000	216000	263000	102%
Rest of Yorkshire & Humberside	56000	45000	64000	92000	125000	181%
East Midlands	203000	194000	286000	401000	497000	165%
West Midlands Metropolitan County	262000	285000	326000	377000	487000	96%
Rest of West Midlands	94000	86000	94000	158000	200000	118%
East of England	309000	346000	457000	565000	746000	165%
Inner London	816000	964000	1187000	1160000	1410000	88%
Outer London	828000	1022000	1159000	1480000	1787000	131%
South East	514000	597000	721000	932000	1108000	122%
South West	210000	214000	276000	348000	446000	129%
Wales	80000	84000	107000	146000	193000	169%
Strathclyde	60000	65000	87000	107000	132000	162%
Rest of Scotland	97000	110000	141000	207000	237000	163%
Northern Ireland	53000	81000	70000	103000	125000	159%
Total	4129000	4625000	5735000	7026000	8679000	126%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Q4

### The UK population was 13.5% foreign-born and 8.9% non-British citizens in 2015

The share of foreign-born people in the UK's total population increased by more than half between 1993 and 2015, i.e. from 7% to nearly 13.5% (see Figure 2). During the same period, the share of foreign citizens in the UK's population rose from 3.6% to 8.9%, while that of recent migrants increased from 1.3% to 3.2%. There was a significant percentage increase in the share of foreign-born people in the UK's total population between 2004-2008.

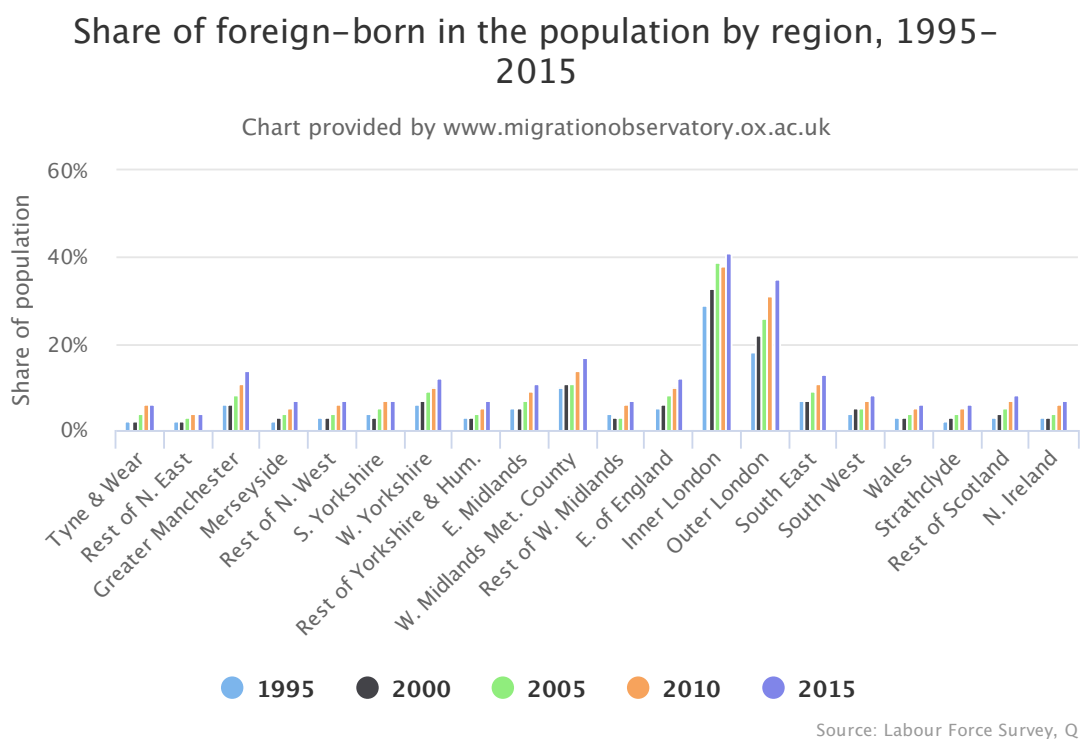
Figure 2



**The share of migrants in the population varies significantly across regions but has been increasing in all regions over time**

The share of migrants in the population varies significantly across regions (see Figure 3). In 2015 the number of foreign-born people relative to total population was greatest in Inner London (41%) and Outer London (35%). The region with the third highest proportion of migrants was West Midlands Met. County, where 17% of the population was foreign-born. The “Rest of North East” region was home to the population with the smallest proportion of foreign-born people. Although the concentration of foreign-born individuals varies across UK regions, since 1995 the share of foreign-born people in has increased in every region’s population.

Figure 3



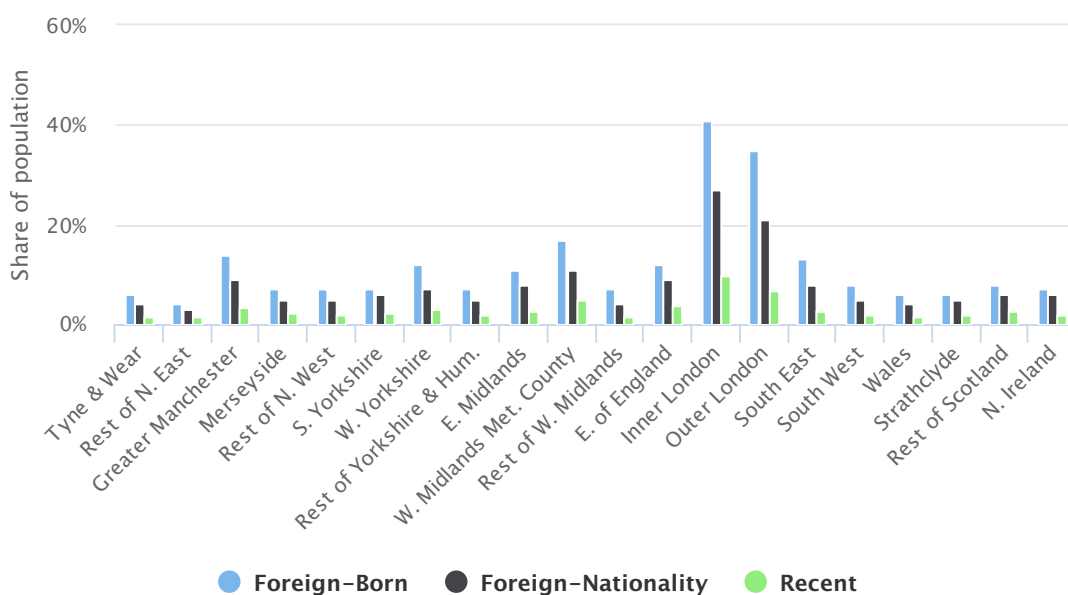
Inner and Outer London also remain the areas with the highest shares of migrants in the total population when focusing on foreign citizens (see Figure 4). Making up 27% (in Inner London) and 21% (in Outer London) of their respective populations.

London is the most important destination for most recent migrations, where they make up 9.9% and 6.8% of Inner and Outer London’s population respectively. By contrast other regions attract fewer, such as the “Rest of the West Midlands” where recent migrants only make up 1.4% of the regional population.

Figure 4

### Share of migrants in the total population by region, 2015

Chart provided by [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)



Source: Labour Force Survey, Q4

### Poland is the most common country of birth and country of nationality

Poland, India and Pakistan are the main three foreign countries of birth (Table 3) accounting respectively for 9.5%, 9.0% and 5.9% of the UK’s foreign born population , followed by Ireland(4.5%) and Germany(3.3%). Polish and Indian citizenship are also the main foreign nationalities in the UK, with Poles being the largest group, accounting for 15.7% of foreign citizens.

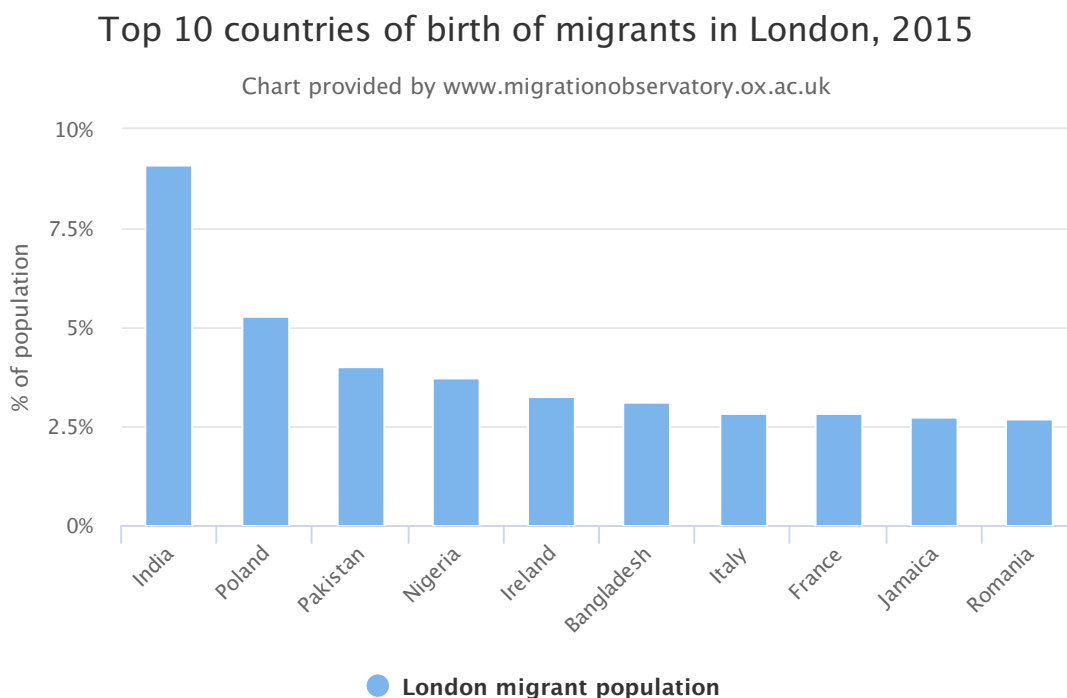
Table 3 - Top ten sender countries of migrants by country of birth and nationality, UK 2015

Country of birth	Percentage share	Nationality	Percentage share
Poland	9.5	Poland	15.7
India	9.0	India	6.4
Pakistan	5.9	Ireland	6.0
Ireland	4.5	Portugal	4.1
Germany	3.3	Romania	4.0
Romania	2.6	Italy	3.7
Nigeria	2.3	Lithuania	3.3
Bangladesh	2.3	Pakistan	3.2
South Africa	2.2	France	3.1
Italy	2.1	Spain	2.8

## Those born in India constitute the biggest group among the foreign-born population in London

India is the country of birth for 9.1% of all foreign-born persons living in London (Figure 5). Other South Asian countries; Pakistan (4.0%) and Bangladesh (3.1%) are also amongst the top-ten countries of birth of migrants in London. Europeans also represent a large proportion of foreign-born people in London, with Poland, Ireland, Italy, France and Romania, all amongst the top-ten countries of birth in London. London's ten main foreign countries of birth are the roughly same as those for the UK at large, with the exception of the greater proportion the Jamaican and French-born population make up in London.

Figure 5



Source: Labour Force Survey, Q4

### Evidence gaps and limitations

The LFS is a continuous survey of around 60,000 households each quarter. Although the LFS contains spatial information at a regional level, the standard release of LFS data set does not contain local authority identifiers. It is therefore not possible to use the standard LFS to analyse trends and characteristics of migration across local areas. The Annual Population Survey (APS) available since 2004 is more suitable for this purpose.

The LFS has some limitations for estimating the dynamics of migrants in the UK. First, it does not measure the scale of irregular migration. Second, it does not provide information on asylum seekers. Third, the LFS excludes those who do not live in households, such as those in hotels, caravan parks and other communal establishments. The LFS is therefore likely to underestimate the UK population of recent migrants.

### Further reading

- Salt, J. "International Migration and the United Kingdom, 2010." Report of the United Kingdom SOPEMI correspondent to the OECD, Migration Research Unit, University College London, 2011.

With thanks to Martin Ruhs and George Leeson for comments and suggestions in an earlier version of this briefing.

