Statistical bulletin

Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: August 2019

A summary of the latest official long-term international migration statistics for the UK for the year ending March 2019 published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Data from the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) are also included.

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1 . Other migration outputs in this release

Another international migration output released today (22 August 2019) can be found on the following page:

- Local area migration indicators, UK

2 . Making the best possible assessment of migration using all available sources

We are transforming our migration statistics, making use of all available data to get a richer and deeper understanding of migration. Since July 2018, we have been integrating outcomes from this work into the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (MSQR).

On 21 August 2019, we published the latest findings of our research into the coherence of migration data sources, including the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) alongside other administrative data sources. Based on these findings, we have made preliminary adjustments to the headline measures in this report to provide our best possible assessment of migration trends. The figures and trends in this report are therefore largely based on our adjusted estimates, which have so far been applied until 2016 for EU migration and up to the latest year for non-EU migration. Our best assessment of EU net migration since 2016 remains our IPS-based estimates. As additional data sources become available, we will look to feed these into our adjustments.

As set out in our research report, our assessment is that the preliminary adjustments have a small impact on UK net migration and the trends we see over time are largely unchanged. However, there are some different patterns for EU and non-EU migration:

- our adjusted EU net migration estimates (up to the year ending March 2016) show a very similar trend over time but are higher than the unadjusted estimates; this analysis builds on evidence provided by data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

- our adjusted non-EU net migration estimates (up to the year ending March 2019) also show a very similar trend but are lower than the unadjusted estimates; this analysis builds on evidence provided by Home Office exit checks data

These preliminary adjustments, combined with new data sources being used, are our best assessment of UK migration.

As other new data sources become available, we will continue to refine our adjustments further and reflect this in our migration statistics. While we go through this transformation journey, the MSQR has been reclassified as Experimental Statistics. Reclassifying our international migration statistics to Experimental Statistics supports this period of development and innovation to meet the public good.

The MSQR also includes official and National Statistics published by other organisations, including the Home Office and DWP. These are designated separately by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and are not are affected by the reclassification of the MSQR.

3 . Main points

Long-term international migration continued to add to the UK population, as an estimated 226,000 more people moved to the UK with an intention to stay 12 months or more than left in the year ending March 2019 (net migration).

In the year ending March 2019, 612,000 people moved to the UK (immigration) and 385,000 people left the UK (emigration).

Long-term immigration, emigration and net migration have remained broadly stable since the end of 2016.

Since 2016, there has been a fall in immigration for work; over the same period, immigration for study has been gradually increasing.

There are different patterns for EU and non-EU migration:

- EU immigration has continued to fall since 2016 and is at its lowest level since 2013. This is mainly because of a fall in immigration for work, which is now less than half the level it was at its peak in the year ending June 2016.

- Although EU immigration has fallen, there are still more EU citizens moving to the UK than leaving. However, EU8 citizens, those from the Central and Eastern European countries, do not follow this general pattern. For the past year, net migration estimates have shown more EU8 citizens leaving than arriving.

- Non-EU immigration has stabilised over the last year, after a gradual increase since 2013. However, there has been an increase in immigration for study over the last year, seen in all available data sources.

- Work remains the main reason for EU citizens moving to the UK, while study remains the main reason for non-EU citizens moving to the UK.

In the year ending June 2019, Home Office statistics also published today show that the UK offered protection – in the form of grants of asylum, humanitarian protection, alternative forms of leave and resettlement – to 18,519 people (up 29% compared with the previous year).

Where possible, to assess migration trends we use all available data sources and review the longer time series.

4 . Statistician's comment

"Our best assessment using all data sources is that long-term international migration continues to add to the UK population. The level has been broadly stable since 2016, but there are different patterns for EU and non-EU citizens.

"Using the data sources available to us, we can see that EU immigration is falling. There are, however, still more EU citizens moving to the UK than leaving, mainly for work, although the picture is different for EU8 citizens, with more leaving the country than arriving.

"In contrast, non-EU immigration has stabilised over the last year, after gradual increases since 2013."

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

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

The findings in this section are based on the preliminary adjusted estimates for the years in which they are available. Otherwise, the Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates remain our best available estimates. We will continue to develop our adjustment approach in our future reports.

An estimated 226,000 more people came to the UK with an intention to stay 12 months or more than left in the year ending March 2019 (net migration). This is lower than the recent peak of 343,000 in the year ending June 2015, but levels have remained broadly stable since the end of 2016.

Over the last year, 612,000 people moved to the UK (immigration) and 385,000 people left the UK (emigration).

LTIM data from the Office for National Statistics (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.

Figure 1: Long-term immigration, emigration and net migration have remained broadly stable since the end of 2016

Long-term international migration, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

6 . There are different patterns for EU and non-EU migration over time

The findings in this section are based on the preliminary adjusted estimates for the years in which they are available. Otherwise, the Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates remain our best available estimates. We will continue to develop our adjustment approach in our future reports.

Although overall migration levels have remained broadly stable since 2016, there are different patterns for EU and non-EU citizens. EU net migration has decreased since 2015, following a three-year period of increase. Non-EU net migration has remained broadly stable over the last year, following a gradual increase since 2013 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Non-EU net migration has increased since 2013, while EU net migration has decreased since 2015

Net migration by citizenship, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

The international migration of EU and non-EU citizens continues to add to the UK population. The long-term trend for British citizens is that more leave than return (Table 1).

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 social and economic factors.

Table 1: Immigration, emigration and net migration to and from the UK by citizenship, UK, year ending March 2019

Total and non-EU estimates of emigration and net migration are based on our preliminary adjusted estimates. Preliminary adjusted estimates are not available for the other figures in this table

	Immigration		Emigration		Net migration	
	YE March 2019	95% CI (+/-)	YE March 2019	95% CI (+/-)	YE March 2019	95% CI (+/-)
Total	612	42	385	:	226	:
British	79	20	130	16	-52	25
EU	200	27	141	27	59	38
(of which) EU15	106	21	74	21	32	30
(of which) EU8	36	11	43	14	-7	17
(of which) EU2	52	12	20	9	32	15
Non-EU	333	25	113	:	219	:

Source: Office for National Statistics – Long-Term International Migration (LTIM), LTIM with preliminary adjustments based on DWP and Home Office data

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 are provisional. Back to table

3. YE equals year ending, CI equals confidence interval, colon (:) equals not available. Back to table

4. Confidence intervals represent known uncertainty in the survey estimates. Other sources of uncertainty are not represented. Back to table

5. Total and non-EU estimates of emigration and net migration have been adjusted for uncertain intentions for non-EU former students emigrating. Back to table

6. Confidence intervals for the preliminary adjusted estimates are not yet available. This does not mean that the estimates are more certain. As we refine our methods, we will develop our approach for displaying uncertainty around estimates based on multiple data sources. 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.

EU net migration has continued to decrease

At 59,000, EU net migration is less than a third of its peak level of 219,000 in the year ending March 2015. This is mainly because of a fall in EU immigration, which is now at its lowest level since 2013 (Figure 3). Despite the fall in EU immigration, there are still more EU citizens moving to the UK than leaving.

EU emigration has remained stable since June 2017, following increases from June 2016.

Figure 3: EU immigration is at its lowest level since 2013 but more EU citizens move to the UK than leave

EU Long-term international migration, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

More EU8 citizens are leaving than arriving

Although more EU citizens moved to the UK than left overall, this did not apply to all EU groups. Over the last year, 7,000 more EU8 citizens – those from the Central and Eastern European countries who joined the EU in 2004 – left the UK than arrived (Figure 4).

Figure 4: EU15 and EU2 migration continued to add to the population, while more EU8 citizens left than arrived

Net migration by EU group, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Non-EU net migration remained broadly stable over the last year

An estimated 219,000 more non-EU citizens moved to the UK than left in the year ending March 2019. Non-EU immigration has stabilised over the last year, after a gradual increase since 2013, while emigration remained stable (Figure 5).

Despite the overall stability over the last year, there have been different patterns for different citizenship groups. Net migration of Asian citizens increased over the last year whereas net migration of Oceanian citizens decreased.

Figure 5: Non-EU net migration has remained stable in the last year, following a gradual increase since 2013

Non-EU long-term international migration, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

7 . Work and study remain the most common reasons to move to the UK

Preliminary adjustments are not available for estimates of migration by reason for visit. The Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) and International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimates therefore remain our best available estimates. We will continue to develop our adjustment approach in our future reports.

While work remains one of the most common reasons to move to the UK, immigration for work-related reasons has continued to fall since June 2016. It is now at its lowest level since 2013, at 214,000. This fall is mainly because of a decline in the number of people arriving to look for work. However, since 2017, there has also been a fall in people moving to the UK for a definite job. Overall, immigration to the UK for formal study has remained at the highest levels seen since 2011, at 218,000 in the year ending March 2019.

Following a five-year period when work was the main reason that people moved to the UK, immigration for work and study are now at similar levels. Although not significantly higher, study has narrowly overtaken work as the main reason for immigration (Figure 6). However, it is too early to tell whether this is an emerging pattern and we will continue to monitor the long-term trend.

Figure 6: Total immigration for work continued to decrease whereas immigration for study remained high

Long-term immigration trends by reason for migration, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Figure 6: Total immigration for work continued to decrease whereas immigration for study remained high

Long-term immigration trends by reason for migration, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

EU referendum
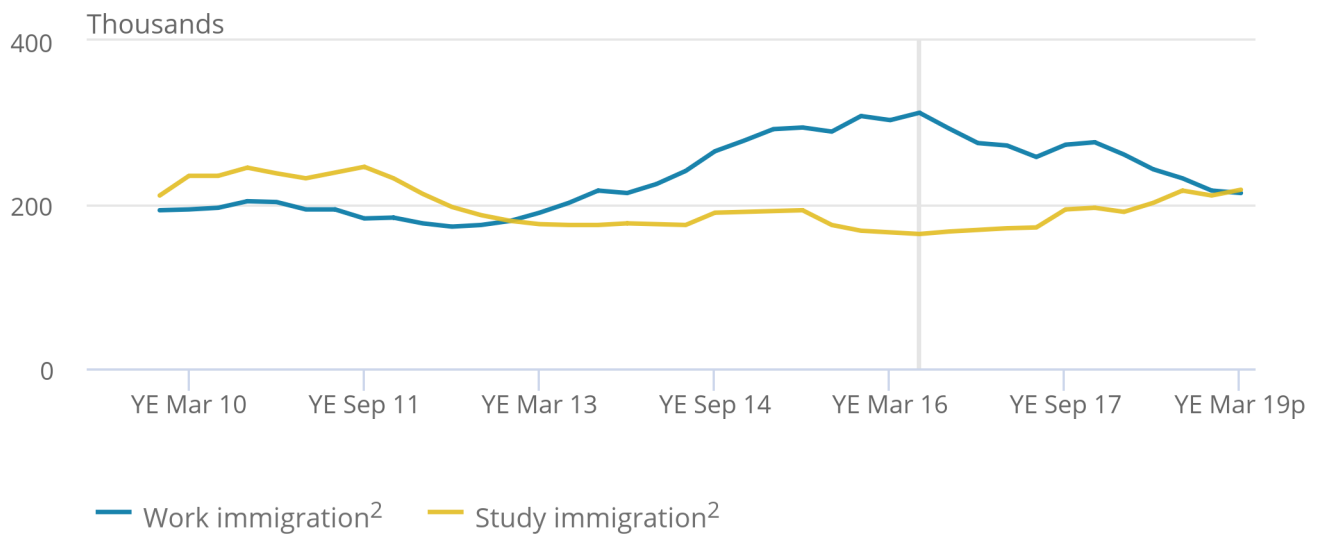
Source: Office for National Statistics – Long-Term International Migration

Notes:

1. "Accompany/join", "Other" and "No Reason Stated" are not included in this chart.

2. Confidence intervals are not shown in the chart, but they are available in the accompanying dataset.

3. YE equals year ending.

Immigration for work has fallen but remains the main reason for EU citizens moving to the UK

The overall fall in work-related immigration can largely be accounted for by a decrease in EU citizens moving to the UK for work since the year ending June 2016. This fall in work-related immigration was seen among all EU groups (EU2, EU8, EU15).

In the year ending March 2019, the number of EU citizens arriving for work fell to 92,000, which is less than half the level it was at its peak (190,000) in the year ending June 2016. The latest levels are similar to those seen in 2012.

Not all data sources are directly comparable. Users should be aware of this before drawing conclusions.

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. Following a recent peak in 2015, the total number of EU NINo registrations have been falling, in line with the fall seen in the International Passenger Survey (IPS) data. For EU citizens, there were 448,000 NINo registrations in the year ending June 2019 (Figure 7). It is important to remember that NINo registrations data are for all NINo registrations regardless of length of stay or date of arrival. They will therefore include a large number of short-term migrants and people who may have been in the country for a while before registering.

Figure 7: EU immigration to the UK for work continued to fall

EU work-related long-term immigration trends by data source, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019
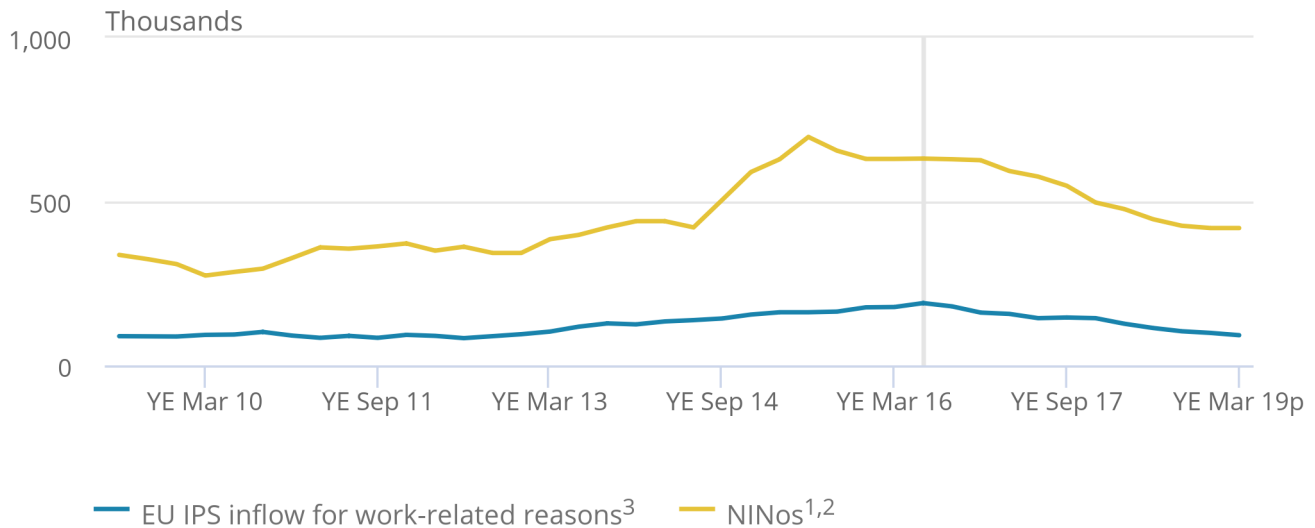
Figure 7: EU immigration to the UK for work continued to fall

EU work-related long-term immigration trends by data source, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey, Department for Work and Pensions – National Insurance number registrations to adult overseas nationals

Notes:

1. NINo registrations are for all NINo registrations regardless of length of stay or date of arrival, so they will include short-term migrants and people who may have been in the country for a while before registering.

2. There was a change to the process of recording NINos during Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2014 that meant that the volume of NINo registrations recorded was lower in that quarter and then higher in Quarter 3 (July to Sep) 2014 than would otherwise be the case. Comparisons of NINo registrations over time between these periods should be viewed with caution.

3. Confidence intervals for the IPS-based estimates are not shown in the chart, but they are available in the accompanying dataset.

4. YE equals year ending.

Non-EU immigration for work has remained stable

Overall, non-EU immigration for work has remained stable since late 2017, but there have been different patterns for those arriving with a definite job than those coming to the UK looking for work.

The number of non-EU citizens arriving to look for a job has fallen to 9,000 in the year ending March 2019, compared with 23,000 in the previous year. This was driven mainly by a decline in Oceanian immigration to look for work. We will continue to monitor this trend in Oceanian immigration, using Home Office data when they become available.

Meanwhile, the number of non-EU citizens arriving for a definite job has increased since 2013 to its highest level since 2006, at 73,000 in year ending March 2019. This has been driven by an increase in Asian citizens arriving for a definite job – the number has more than doubled since the year ending March 2017, to 53,000.

This increase has been seen in all of the available sources (Figure 8). Home Office data for all work-related visas (including short-term or temporary work) shows that the number of non-EEA nationals coming to the UK for work has continued to increase, with the number of work visas granted in the year ending June 2019 at its highest level since the year ending March 2009. There were particular increases in those granted Skilled (Tier 2) work visas (accounting for 59% of total work visas), which increased by 13% to 108,890 in the latest year, following relatively stable levels between 2015 and 2018.
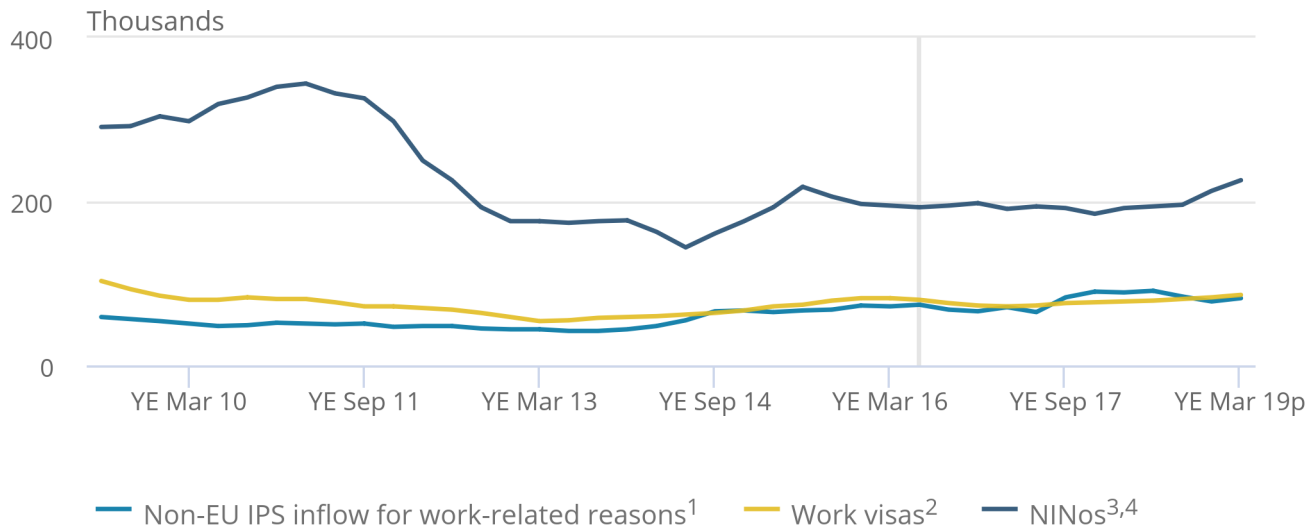
In the year ending June 2019, there were 256,000 National Insurance number (NINo) registrations from non-EU nationals, an increase of 32% on the previous year.

Figure 8: Non-EU citizens moving to the UK to work remained stable in recent years

Non-EU work-related immigration trends by data source, UK, year ending June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey, Home Office – long-term work visas, Department for Work and Pensions – National Insurance number registrations to adult overseas

Notes:

1. Confidence intervals for the IPS-based estimates are not shown in the chart, but are available in the accompanying dataset.

2. Visa data are Home Office entry clearance work visas granted for 12 months or more for main applicants only.

3. NINo registrations are for all NINo registrations regardless of length of stay or date of arrival, so they will include short-term migrants and people who may have been in the country for a while before registering.

4. There was a change to the process of recording NINos during Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2014 that meant that the volume of NINo registrations recorded was lower in that quarter and then higher in Quarter 3 (July to Sep) 2014 than would otherwise be the case. Comparisons of NINo registrations over time between these periods should be viewed with caution.

5. YE equals year ending.

EU and non-EU nationals working in the UK labour market

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

The number of migrants working in the UK is not a measure of how many people migrate to work. Our latest report into the coherence of migration data sources discusses the differences in what survey sources tell us about migration flows. The Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) and International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimates are our best available estimates of migration flows for work-related reasons. We will continue to develop our adjustment approach in our future reports.

For the period April to June 2019, the latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show that there were:

- an estimated 2.37 million EU nationals working in the UK, 99,000 more than a year earlier

- an estimated 1.29 million non-EU nationals working in the UK, 34,000 more than a year earlier

Looking over the longer time series, since 2009, the number of EU nationals working in the UK has generally increased, while the number of non-EU nationals working in the UK has remained broadly stable.

This is broadly comparable with long-term immigration in the IPS where we are continuing to see both EU and non-EU citizens arrive in the UK for work-related reasons.

Immigration for study remains high and is the main reason for non-EU citizens moving to the UK

In the year ending March 2019, the International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimated 218,000 people arrived in the UK intending to stay for a year or more for formal study, remaining among the highest levels recorded since 2011. Over the last year, there has been an increase in non-EU immigration for study, particularly from Asian citizens.

Home Office data for non-EEA nationals show the number of Sponsored Study (Tier 4) visas granted was at its highest level since 2011. The majority (85%) of sponsored study visa applications in the year ending June 2019 were to study at higher education (university) institutions, and the number of non-EEA nationals arriving at universities was the highest level on record. Home Office data shows that the largest number of these students are from China (107,622 or 43% of the total non-EEA sponsored students in the year ending June 2019).

Figure 9: 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 June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Figure 9: 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 June 2009 to year ending March 2019

Thousands

EU referendum

Non-EU IPS inflow for study[1]   Study visas[2]   HESA[3,4]
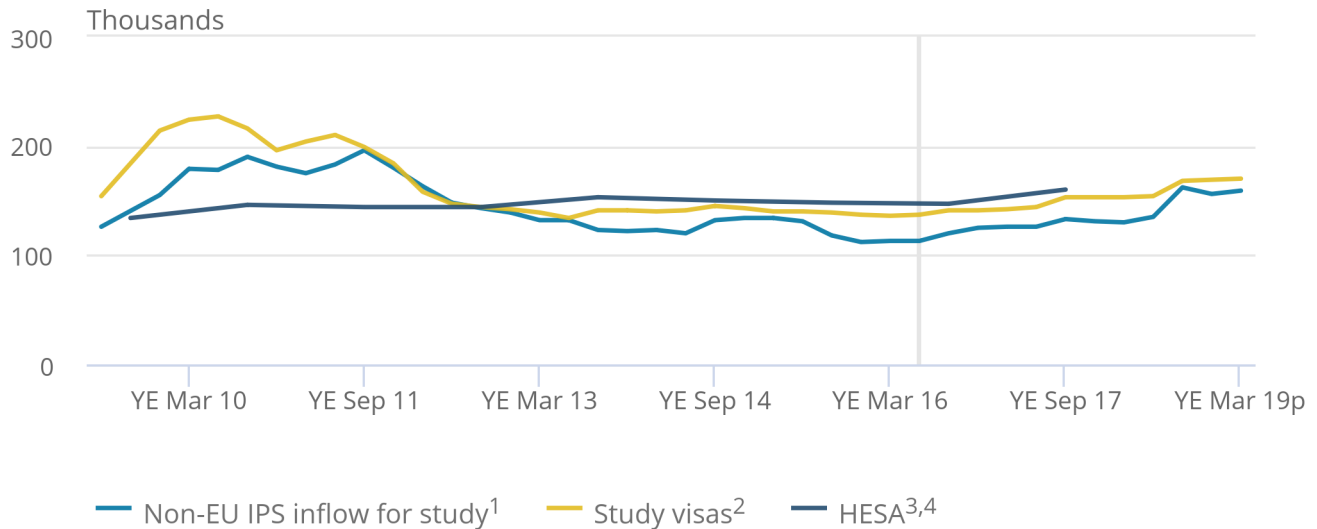
Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey, Home Office - long-term study (Tier 4) visas, Higher Education Statistics Agency - first year student enrolments (England and Wales only)

Notes:

1. Confidence intervals for the IPS-based estimates are not shown in the chart, but they are available in the accompanying dataset.

2. Visa data are Home Office Sponsored Study (Tier 4) visas granted for 12 months or more for main applicants only.

3. Student enrolment data are for 12 months or more and are ONS analysis of HESA first-year student records. The data are for student enrolments for courses starting in the academic year from August to July, by length of study and domicile. HESA data are from higher education institutions in England and Wales only. We present these data compared with the equivalent year ending September.

4. HESA data are annual point estimates, and the line illustrates the trend between those points.

5. YE equals year ending.

Not all data sources are directly comparable. Users should be aware of this before drawing conclusions.

The UK granted asylum, alternative forms of leave, or resettlement to 18,519 people in the year ending June 2019

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

- 10,555 grants of asylum (up 61%)

- 1,126 grants of Humanitarian Protection (up 31%)

- 1,147 grants of an alternative form of leave (down 3%)

- 5,691 people provided protection under resettlement schemes (similar to the previous year)

Overall, the number of people granted protection in the UK over a one-year period was the highest since the year ending September 2003.

8 . Migration data released today

Publications released on the same day that are related to this report include:

Provisional Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates
Dataset | Released 22 August 2019
Estimates with confidence intervals for the year ending March 2019 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 Charts 3a and 3b

Preliminary adjusted estimates are not available in this dataset for this quarter. We will be working to add the preliminary adjusted estimates in future releases of the dataset.

International Passenger Survey (IPS), estimates by individual quarter
Dataset | Released 22 August 2019
Estimates of international migration, by individual quarter, up to Q1 2019. These quarterly estimates can be derived from the IPS but 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).

Estimates by quarter are not as robust as our estimates for rolling years and are not official statistics. This is because of the 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. Users should be cautious with any interpretation of individual quarter estimates, especially where the corresponding confidence interval is large in comparison with the estimate.

Given the seasonal nature of international migration, 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.

[Home Office Immigration Statistics, year ending June 2019](#)
Release | Released 22 August 2019
Includes both short- and long-term visas (including dependents) for non-EEA nationals and is available for year ending June 2019. 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.

[EU Settlement Scheme, quarterly statistical publication, June 2019](#)
Release | Released on 22 August 2019
This report provides detailed statistics on applications made to the EU Settlement Scheme from 28 August 2018 to 30 June 2019, and applications concluded during the same time period.

[Fourth report on statistics being collected under the exit checks programme](#)
Release | Released on 22 August 2019
The fourth report on the data collected on travellers departing and arriving in the UK.

[National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals: January 2002 to June 2019](#)
Release | Released 22 August 2019
Includes both short- and long-term migrants for the year ending June 2019. The summary tables provide more detail by nationality and location of registrations in the UK.

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

9 . Glossary

Long-term international migrant

The Office for National Statistics's (ONS's) 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. The following EU citizenship groups are used:

- EU15: citizens of countries who were EU members prior to 2004, for example, France, Germany and Spain

- EU8: citizens of Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004, for example, Poland

- EU2: citizens of Bulgaria and Romania, which became EU members in 2007. Between 2007 and 2013, these countries were subject to transitional controls restricting their access to the UK labour market. These restrictions were lifted on 1 January 2014

Home Office visa data are for non-EEA citizens. Non-EEA refers to citizens of countries outside the EU and excludes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Work-related migration

In the International Passenger Survey (IPS), "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 the terms and definitions used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) can be found in the International migration – terms, definitions and frequently asked questions.

10 . Migration data sources

The sources of data included in this release are not directly comparable. Differences between the data sources are described in Comparing sources of international migration statistics.

However, taken together, the different sources of data 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 and the coherence report, which set out our latest understanding of the quality of International Passenger Survey (IPS) migration estimates.

Office for National Statistics long-term international migration estimates

The main data source for estimates of long-term international migration is the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which captures migrant intentions. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes two types of estimates for long-term international migration: the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates.

LTIM estimates are based on IPS data, but with the following adjustments:

- migrants not included in the IPS survey, such as asylum seekers and refugees, and migrants entering or leaving the UK across the un-surveyed land border with the Republic of Ireland

- migrants changing their intentions with regard to length of stay

It is only possible to perform the LTIM adjustments described here for estimates by a single characteristic such as citizenship or reason for migration. Where estimates involve more than one characteristic, such as estimates by citizenship and reason for migration, IPS estimates are published that are based solely on the IPS data.

The Migration statistics first time user guide describes these data and the Long-Term International Migration estimates methodology details the method used to calculate LTIM.

For more detailed information on our migration statistics methodology, please see International migration methodology.

ONS labour market estimates

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces estimates of the labour market activity of the resident population in the UK by nationality and country of birth from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). 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), LFS and International Passenger Survey (IPS). On 21 August 2019, we published a report outlining the findings from research into differences between these survey sources.

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 International Passenger Survey (IPS) data, Home Office visa data are for main applicants only and for long-term visas (one year or more). The Home Office immigration statistics: user guide provides more detail.

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.

Population and migration statistics tranformation

The Government Statistical Service population and migration statistics transformation programme is working towards putting administrative data at the core of international migration statistics. The transformation overview report provides the latest update on the transformation journey.

11 . 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 are 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, as 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.

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

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 and the Understanding different migration data sources: August progress report.

Preliminary adjustments to LTIM estimates based on all available sources

To get the best overview of trends in migration, we need to look at all available data sources. To help us address the impact of uncertain intentions for non-EU students at the end of their studies and for EU8 citizens moving to the UK, we have applied preliminary adjustments to our IPS-based estimates based on administrative data from the Home Office and from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These tell us about people's actual behaviour and help provide a fuller assessment of migration patterns.

For EU migration, our preliminary adjustment applies up to March 2016, drawing on the strengths of what DWP data tell us about National Insurance number (NINo) registrations by people born in EU8 countries. From 2016, we have seen some changes to the trends in net migration for EU countries, and so we are reviewing what further data sources can add evidence on which to base an adjustment after this point.

For non-EU migration, our preliminary adjustment applies from 2012 through to the latest quarter. This draws on the strengths of what Home Office data tell us about emigration of non-EU students.

Fuller details on the methods we have used to apply adjustments to the data can be found in the research report.

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.

Due to an unusual pattern in student migration seen between the year ending September 2016 and the year ending September 2017, revisions were made in February 2019 to LTIM and IPS estimates for non-EU formal study immigration. 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.

Imbalance and discontinuity work

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has recently transferred outputs from data collected on paper forms to an improved method using tablet computers. Tablet data collection was phased in gradually from September 2017 to April 2018. More background information about the rollout is available.

The new tablets enable us to improve the quality of the IPS data collected. However, discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are possible. We have worked with academic experts and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology Team to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Further analysis using a longer series of data is required to determine whether there are any discontinuities, so some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Methodological changes are planned to the estimates of international visitors in the IPS. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance (that is, large differences in numbers) in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing, for some nationalities. The new method has been developed in consultation with users and methodological experts. We plan to implement the new method to the overseas travel and tourism statistics next year. A revised back series will also be published at this time. More information about the planned changes will be published as soon as possible.

Please note that while the imbalance work is unlikely to affect long-term migrants in the IPS, we have committed to exploring whether the survey processes that cause the imbalance in international visitor estimates also impact on long-term migration further, as part of ONS Migration Statistics' workplan to understand different migration data sources.

The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in the Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes article, in July 2018.

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.

12 . More about migration

Understanding different migration data sources: August progress report
Article | Released 21 August 2019
Examining the issues with comparing the UK's various migration data sources, our follow-up report to explain the differences between these sources.

Transformation of the population and migration statistics system: overview
Article | Updated 22 August 2019
Latest update on our population and migration statistics transformation journey.

International migration and the health sector
Article | Released 15 August 2019
Our analysis plans on the contribution and impact of international migration on the health sector, where we will look at migrants both as a workforce and users of public services. In this release we set out our analysis plans to fill some of the remaining evidence gaps and explore the data available on the health care workforce.

Migrant labour force within the tourism industry: August 2019
Article | Released 15 August 2019
This article presents the current demographic composition of those working in UK's tourism industry and considers movements into and out of the industry.

International migration and the education sector – what does the current evidence show?
Article | Released 8 May 2019
An exploration of what the current evidence can tell us about the impact and contribution of international migration on the education sector.

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.

13 . 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.