Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality: 2020

Latest population estimates for the UK by country of birth and nationality, covering the period from 2004 to the year ending December 2020

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Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- In 2020, the non-UK-born population was 9.5 million and the non-British population was 6.1 million; both the non-UK-born population and non-British population remained broadly stable since 2019.

- Both the EU-born and non-EU-born populations remained similar to previous years; however, while the number of people with non-EU nationality also remained broadly stable, the number of people with EU nationality fell.

- India continued to be the most common non-UK country of birth and Polish remained the most common non-British nationality.

- London continued to be the region with the largest proportion of non-UK-born (37%) and non-British (22%) population.

- The survey these estimates are based on, the Labour Force Survey, has used a new weighting methodology to reflect the change in survey operations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, so data below UK, EU and non-EU level should not be compared with previous years.

- The population estimates by country of birth and nationality in this release cannot be directly compared with the figures from the European Union Settlement Scheme because of differences in what the statistics measure and how they are compiled.

A new weighting methodology has been introduced, which calibrates to UK, EU and non-EU-born weighting populations for periods from January 2020.

Statistician's comment

"Our best estimates show that while non-UK born and non-British populations remained broadly stable in 2020, the number of people living in the UK with EU nationality fell.

"However, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on how our survey data were collected and the statistics produced means there is a high level of uncertainty around numbers below EU and non-EU level, which should not be compared against previous years.

"We will be updating our estimates to provide the best picture of the population as more information becomes available, in particular the results from Census 2021, which will give further insight when published next year."

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

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2 . Impact of coronavirus on these estimates

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic introduced new challenges in how we produce our population and migration statistics. The methods used in previous versions of this publication relied on population projections to account for the size and distribution of the population. These population projections predated the pandemic and are not able to reflect the demographic and structural impact the UK has faced.

The estimates in this release are based on data from the Annual Population Survey (APS) which comprises the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and sample boosts in England, Wales and Scotland. The coronavirus pandemic meant that all face-to-face interviewing for the LFS was suspended on 17 March 2020 and replaced with telephone interviewing. This change resulted in higher non-response from those who rent their accommodation and those with a non-UK country of birth or nationality, leaving them less well-represented in the achieved sample. Therefore, changes were made to the LFS including a new weighting methodology.

The new weighting methodology calibrates to UK, EU and non-EU-born weighting populations for periods from January 2020. However, it does not adjust for potential non-response bias for detailed breakdowns, so there remains greater uncertainty in population estimates below this level, which should not be compared with previous years.

All estimates in this release use the new LFS weighting methodology. We have also updated the July 2019 to June 2020 edition of this dataset with this new methodology.
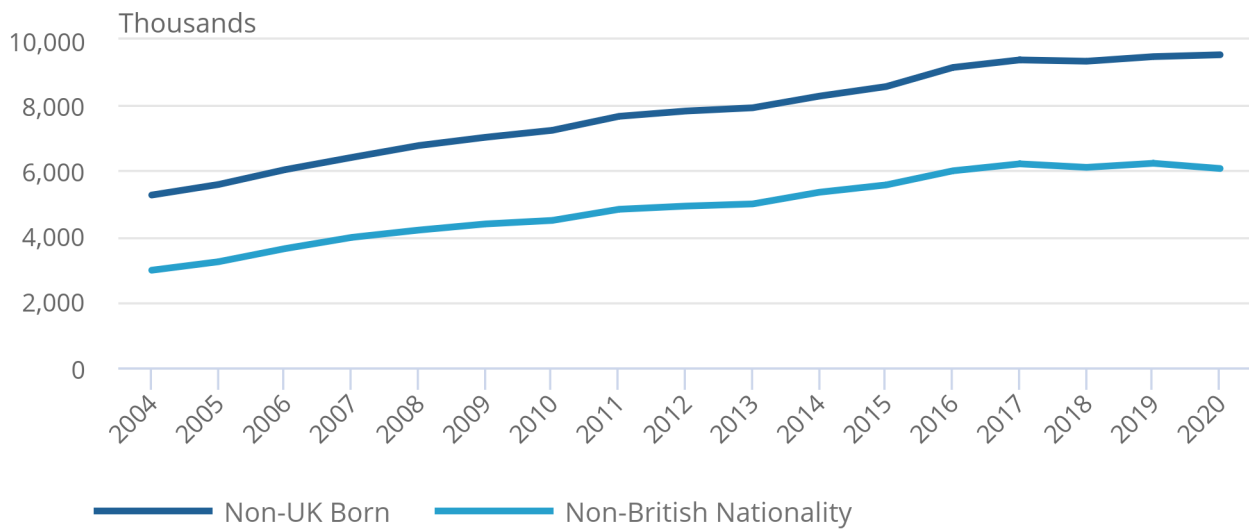
3 . Non-UK populations analysis

Non-UK populations (non-UK-born and non-British nationals) remained broadly stable in 2020. From 2004 to 2016, a general upward trend in population size is seen; since then the populations have stabilised.

Figure 1: Non-UK-born and non-British populations remain broadly stable

Estimates of the non-UK-born and non-British resident population of the UK, 2004 to 2020

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Estimates of the non-UK-born and non-British resident population of the UK, 2004 to 2020

Thousands

Non-UK Born — Non-British Nationality

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Estimates are in thousands.

The non-UK-born population in 2020 was 9.5 million; of these, 3.5 million (37%) were born in the EU. The non-British population was 6.1 million; of these, 3.5 million (58%) held EU nationality (Table 1).

Table 1: Estimates of the resident population of the UK by country of birth and nationality, 2020

	Country of Birth		Nationality	
	Estimate	Percentage	Estimate	Percentage
All residents	66,282	100	66,282	100
UK born/British National	56,710	86	60,180	91
Non-UK born/Non-British National	9,539	14	6,068	9
EU	3,537	5	3,498	5
Non-EU	6,002	9	2,570	4

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes

1. Estimates are in thousands.

2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

In 2020, 3.9 million British nationals were born outside of the UK. Non-EU-born were more likely to hold British nationality (54%) compared with those who were EU-born (19%). The latter increased by 4 percentage points compared with the previous year, despite the total EU-born population remaining broadly stable (Table 2).

Table 2: Country of birth of the resident population of the UK by nationality, 2020

	Nationality		
Country of Birth	**All**	**British**	**Non-British**
All	66,282	60,180	6,068
UK	56,710	56,250	455
Non-UK	9,539	3,923	5,613
EU	3,537	677	2,859
Non-EU	6,002	3,246	2,754

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes

1. Estimates are in thousands.

2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

4. Non-UK country of birth estimates are the total of EU and non-EU estimates.

The EU-born population in 2020 was 3.5 million, which is similar to levels seen in the previous year. The non-EU-born population (6.0 million) also remained broadly stable (Figure 2).

The number of EU nationals currently resident in the UK decreased from 3.7 million to 3.5 million. The non-EU-national population (2.6 million) has remained broadly stable since 2008 (Figure 3).
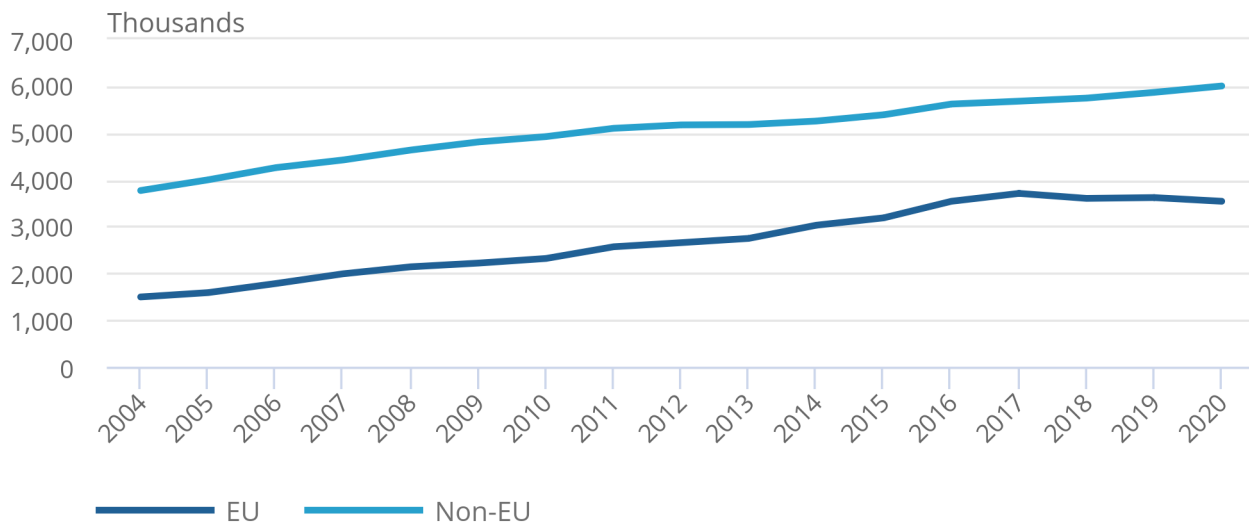
Caution should be taken when comparing year-on-year change with international migration flows data.

Figure 2: Both EU-born and non-EU-born populations remained broadly stable

Estimates of the non-UK-born resident population of the UK by country of birth, 2004 to 2020

Figure 2: Both EU-born and non-EU-born populations remained broadly stable

Estimates of the non-UK-born resident population of the UK by country of birth, 2004 to 2020

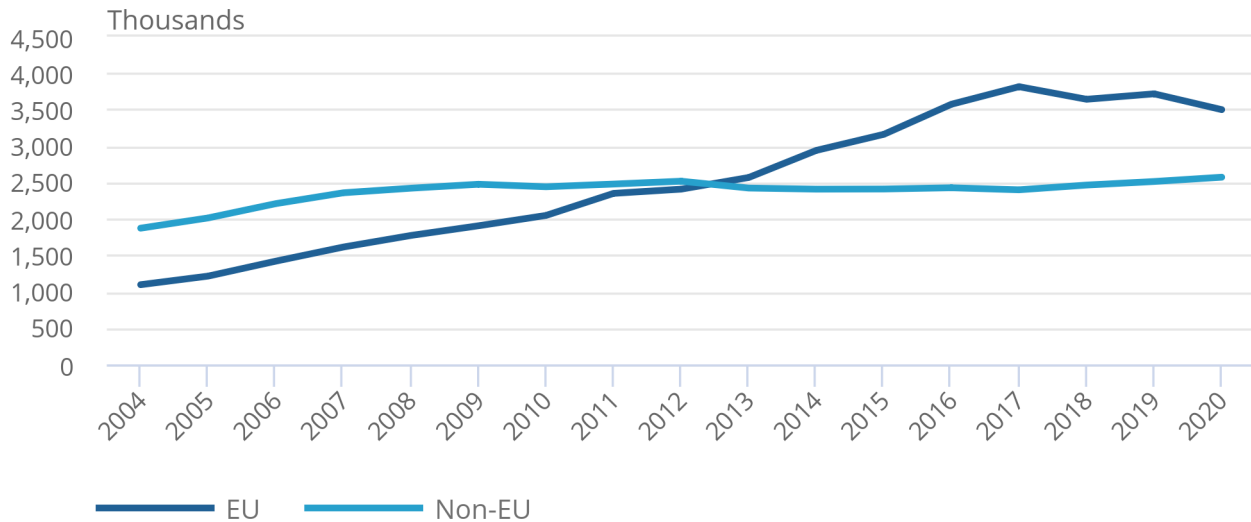**Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey**

Notes:

1. Estimates are in thousands.

2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

Figure 3: The EU-national population slightly decreased while the non-EU-national population remained broadly stable

Estimates of the non-British resident population of the UK by nationality, 2004 to 2020

Figure 3: The EU-national population slightly decreased while the non-EU-national population remained broadly stable

Estimates of the non-British resident population of the UK by nationality, 2004 to 2020

Thousands

EU ——— Non-EU ———

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Estimates are in thousands.

2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

Reweighting of the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey has made the estimates for UK, EU and non-EU more robust, but there remains a high level of uncertainty for data below this level. Changes in those more detailed estimates are likely to reflect the fact that the methodological changes were not targeted at the detailed level, and therefore numbers should not be compared against previous years.

Table 3: Population of the UK for the five most common non-UK countries of birth and nationalities, 2020

	Country of Birth			Nationality		
	Country	Estimate	Confidence Interval (±)	Country	Estimate	Confidence Interval (±)
1	India	880	52	Poland	738	47
2	Poland	691	46	Romania	384	34
3	Pakistan	479	38	Republic of Ireland	368	33
4	Republic of Ireland	415	35	India	359	33
5	Romania	345	32	Italy	317	31

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes

1. Estimates are in thousands.

2. Estimates use Labour Force Survey responses that have been reweighted to new population counts.

India has continued to be the most common non-UK country of birth (880,000), followed by Poland (691,000). Polish remains the most common non-British nationality (738,000); Romanian is the next most common at 384,000 (Table 3).

Annual Population Survey data from the ONS are based on a survey. It is not possible to survey all people resident in the UK, so these statistics are estimates based on a sample, not precise figures.

4 . Non-UK populations regional comparisons

The proportion of the population in local authorities who were born outside the UK, or who held non-British nationality, varied across the country. The interactive map (Figure 4) allows you to explore these patterns in more detail.

Figure 4: Population of non-UK-born and non-British nationals varies across the country

Percentage of non-UK-born and non-British national populations in Great Britain, by local authority, 2020

Notes:

1. Data are unavailable for the districts of Northern Ireland.

Download the data

.xlsx

London has the highest proportion of non-UK populations

London remained the area with the largest proportion of non-UK-born residents in 2020; 37% were non-UK-born, whilst 22% were non-British nationals (Figure 4).

The local authority with the highest percentage of non-UK-born residents was Kensington and Chelsea (53%); this is a change from 2018 and 2019 where Brent was the highest.

5 . Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality data

[Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality](#)
Dataset | Released 17 September 2021
UK residents by broad country of birth and citizenship groups, broken down by UK country, local authority, unitary authority, metropolitan and London boroughs, and counties. Estimates from the Annual Population Survey.

[Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality: individual country data](#)
Dataset | Released 17 September 2021
UK residents by individual countries of birth and citizenship, broken down by UK country, local authority, unitary authority, metropolitan and London boroughs, and counties. Estimates from the Annual Population Survey.

6 . Glossary

EU27

EU27 is referred to as EU throughout this bulletin. EU27 is the sum of EU14, EU8 and EU2, plus Malta, Cyprus and Croatia (from 1 July 2013).

EU14

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Spain and Sweden.

EU8

Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

EU2

Bulgaria and Romania.

EU Other

The two Mediterranean countries, Malta and Cyprus, that joined the EU in 2004 and Croatia, which joined the EU in mid-2013.

Non-EU

Non-EU is the sum of Asia, the Rest of the World and the rest of Europe.

Rest of the World

Rest of the World is the sum of North America, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South America, and Oceania.

Rest of Europe

Rest of Europe are the countries remaining once EU27 and the UK have been excluded from Europe. A list of which countries are in each country group is available in the international migration table of contents.

7 . Measuring the data

Estimates of the population of the UK by country of birth and nationality are based upon data from the Annual Population Survey (APS).

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the Population by country of birth and nationality QMI.

We are transforming our migration statistics, making use of all available data to provide a richer and deeper understanding of migration. More information is available in our latest update report on population and migration statistics transformation.

8 . Strengths and limitations

The Annual Population Survey (APS) is a household survey and so does not cover most people living in communal establishments, some NHS accommodation, or students living in halls of residence who have non-UK-resident parents. As a result, the population totals used in APS estimates are not directly comparable with mid-year population estimates, which refer to the entire UK population. The APS is weighted to be representative by age, sex and region, plus additional weighting for housing tenure and modelled population totals for UK, EU and non-EU country of birth was introduced following the reweighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in July 2021.

All estimates produced are subject to sampling variability – confidence intervals are used as a measure of the precision of the estimate.

Coronavirus and Labour Force Survey estimates

Coronavirus led to changes being made to the LFS, including introducing housing tenure and country of birth (UK, EU and non-EU) controls into the LFS weighting methodology from January 2020 onwards, as detailed in Coronavirus and its impact on the Labour Force Survey. These changes aimed to mitigate the impact to non-response bias from those with non-UK country of birth or nationality. However, it does not adjust for potential non-response bias for breakdowns below UK, EU and non-EU level, so these more detailed estimates should not be compared with previous years. This new weighting methodology uses Real Time Information employee data from HM Revenue and Customs to improve the population weights. An additional non-response adjustment was also applied using factors based on local area level information from the 2011 Census. Further information on the methods used to reweight the LFS is available in the Labour Force Survey weighting methodology.

A further impact has been that the sample size of the APS has become smaller, which leads to more variability in the estimates. Estimates for small groups, which are based on smaller subsets of the APS sample, are less reliable, subject to larger potential sample bias and tend to be more volatile than for larger aggregated groups. Therefore, users are advised to be cautious when drawing conclusions from estimates that are broken down to smaller groups, for example, by country, nationality, age or local authority.

Caution comparing migration estimates from different survey sources

The APS is not designed to measure Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) flows but does give insights into changes in our population. The population estimates in this bulletin are what we refer to as stocks. It is not possible to directly compare stocks from the APS and flows from the IPS, as outlined in our explainer blog on how we count migrants. The report on coherence of migration data sources discusses the differences in what each survey tells us about migration flows and provides a better understanding of the reasons for these in the wider context of our transformation work.

Caution comparing population by country of birth and nationality estimates with administrative data sources

When comparing data sources, users must be aware of the differences in coverage, accuracy, timing, and quality of these sources and why this can mean that they cannot be compared on a truly "like-for-like" basis. No conclusions should be drawn before each of these aspects has been carefully considered.

In particular, the population estimates by country of birth and nationality cannot be directly compared with the figures from the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). While these two data sources provide valuable insights on a particular aspect of migration, they cannot be directly compared because of differences in what the statistics measure and how they are compiled. These differences have been explained in more detail in this blog.

9 . Related links

Measuring migration: the story behind the headlines
Article | Released 17 September 2021
In this interactive article we take you behind the headlines and use the latest data to answer questions about international migration. We also explain why measuring migration is harder than you might think.

Local area migration indicators, UK
Dataset | Released 17 September 2021
Different migration-related data sources at local authority level including migration flows, non-UK-born and non-British populations, National Insurance number registrations, GP registrations, and births to non-UK-born mothers.

Coronavirus and its impact on the Labour Force Survey
Article | Released 13 October 2020
The impact of changes made to the Labour Force Survey in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the methods used to adjust the data.

Labour Force Survey weighting methodology
Article | Released 17 May 2021
New population weights using Pay As You Earn Real Time Information data to allow for changes to Labour Force Survey (LFS) collection methods, and changes to population movements in 2020.

Are there really 6 million EU citizens living in the UK?
Blog | Released 2 July 2021
Media reports have suggested there are many more EU nationals in the UK than previously thought. This is because of the numbers applying for the EU Settlement Scheme compared with the ONS's estimates of EU nationals in the UK.Jay Lindop explains why EUSS data should not be used as an indicator for how many EU nationals are living here.

Population and migration statistics system transformation – overview
Article | Released 25 June 2021
Latest update on our population and migration statistics transformation journey.

Population and migration statistics system transformation – recent updates
Article | Released 25 June 2021
Updates on our latest progress and links to our related statistics and research reports.