

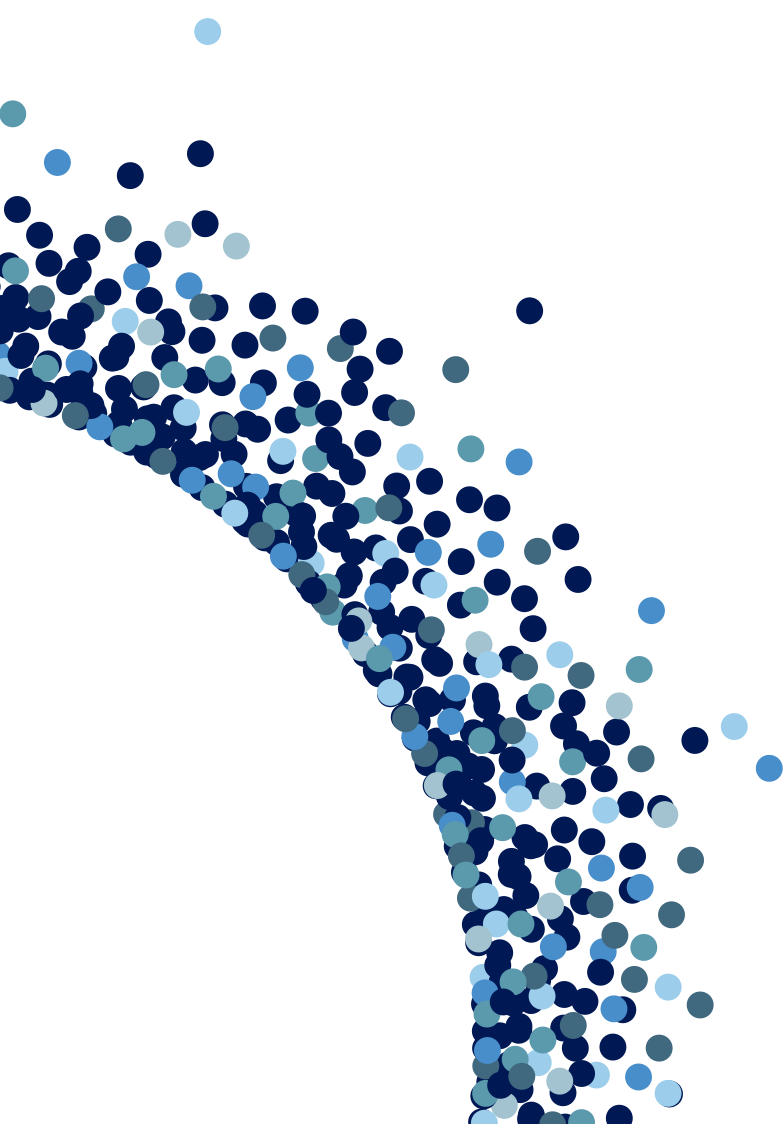


# REPORT

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## Young People and Migration in the UK: An Overview

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

One of the main ways in which newly arriving migrants differ from the UK population as a whole is their age: migrants are more likely to be young. This means that migration is an important consideration in many fields of public policy that focus on young people, particularly education, training and youth employment. Indeed, young people are a group of particular interest from a policy perspective, as the first decades of life are important in shaping people's future outcomes and the ways in which they participate in the economy and society throughout their lives.

Over the past year, the Migration Observatory has produced a series of briefings looking at data and information on young migrants in the UK – defined as people under the age of 30. This short report examines some of the key points from the research and reflects on their significance for those interested in migration and young people.

## Key Points

Migrants tend to be young when they arrive, typically as young adults coming for work or study, or as children accompanying their parents.

Most young people whose first or main language is not English also speak good English. They tend to have lower educational achievement when they start school, but they make faster progress and so the gap is largely eliminated by age 16.

Young migrants are more likely to have degree-level qualifications than the UK born.

Employment outcomes for young migrants vary depending on their country of origin, gender, and age at arrival in the UK. EEA migrants have high employment rates but are overrepresented in low-skilled work; non-EEA migrants are overrepresented in high-skilled jobs but have lower employment rates.

International students who remain in the UK after their studies have more favourable labour market outcomes than the average across the foreign-born population.

It is too early to predict the impact of Brexit on the numbers and outcomes of young migrants living in the UK, although several future scenarios involve a shift in the balance of future migration towards people from non-EU countries.

## Understanding the evidence

There is no clear convention on how to define 'young.' The age groups it makes sense to consider will depend on the context, with young people typically categorised in groups up to 34 years of age. The United Nations defines 'children' as those under the age of 18, and for statistical purposes defines 'youth' as people aged 15 to 24. The UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS) uses different definitions in different contexts – for example, when examining housing choices it examines 'young adults' age 20–34, while its analysis of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) focuses on those aged 16–24.

When examining educational activity and outcomes, young people are often grouped by phase of schooling (e.g. primary, secondary, tertiary; or before/after compulsory school age). Analysis of the highest level of education completed tends to examine people age 25 or over, since most people in this age group have finished all of their full-time education. This report defines young people as those under 30 unless otherwise specified, although it examines older or younger age groups in several cases where more suitable for the analysis in question or where age ranges that can be examined are constrained by the data sources. This age definition will include people at different stages of life, including single people and those who start families in their twenties.

Data in the report are drawn from several sources, particularly the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is a regular household survey conducted by ONS, and is one of the main sources of information about migrants living in the UK. The survey undercounts certain groups in the UK population, such as migrants who only arrived recently; it also does not sample people living in communal accommodation such as hostels. Students living in halls of residence are only sampled if they have parents living in a private household in the country; the LFS will therefore exclude many international students. As a result, the total number of migrants counted in the LFS is expected to be an underestimate.

Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates of the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) provide data on immigration, emigration and net migration of based on a standard definition of a long-term migrant as a person who moves to or from a country for at least a year. The International Passenger Survey is the main source of information for these estimates, in addition to adjustments for asylum seekers and other groups.

'Migrants' in this report are defined as those born outside the UK, regardless of whether or not they have become UK citizens. This 'foreign-born' category will include a small share of people who were born abroad to UK citizen parents and subsequently moved back to the UK. Some data sources do not include breakdowns by country of birth. For example, the School Census collects data on pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), who may be UK- or foreign-born (though country of birth and nationality data will be collected from 2016 onwards). The IPS estimates are for nationality rather than country of birth.

## Migrants tend to be young when they arrive, typically as young adults coming for work or study or as children accompanying their parents

Of the estimated 8.6 million foreign-born people living in the UK in 2015 according to the LFS, approximately 2.5 million were under the age of 30. The countries of origin of young migrants broadly mirror those of the total migrant population, with Poland, India, Pakistan, Germany and Romania making up 5 of the top 6 countries of origin for both under 30's and the foreign-born population as a whole (an exception is Ireland, which has declined in prominence as a country of origin and has a lower share of foreign-born people in the under-30s age bracket).

Migrants typically arrive in the UK when they are young. At the time of the 2011 Census, 83% of foreign-born people who had arrived in the previous year were under the age of 35 (ONS 2016). About half of recently arriving migrants in recent years have been under the age of 25, according to Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey (Markaki, 2015).

Beyond this broad observation, however, it is difficult to generalise about young migrants. This population is extremely diverse, encompassing children accompanying family members, international students in further or higher education, and young people coming to work for varying durations. Because of the diversity of young migrants as a group, the issues they face and the policy questions they raise will vary widely and take many different forms.

### Reasons for migration and migration status

It is often helpful to examine data on reasons for moving to the UK, since the outcomes, circumstances and rights of different migrant groups—most notably people coming for work, family unification, study or as refugees—vary widely (Cooper et al, 2014). Among migrants as a whole, family was the most common reason for migration according to a major Home Office analysis using 2012–2013 data. Family migrants (a group made up of both the 'family' and the 'dependant' group in table 1 below) comprised 41% of the foreign-born; this was followed by work (26%), and study (14%). Refugees made up a smaller share at about 5% of the total.

**Table 1 – Total foreign-born population by reason for migration and place of birth, 2012-2013 (thousands)**

	Country of birth group					
	EEA		Non-EEA		Total	
Economic	1,163	44%	873	17%	2,036	26%
Study	275	10%	772	15%	1,047	14%
Family	401	15%	1,195	23%	1,596	21%
Dependant	466	18%	1,076	21%	1,542	20%
Refugee	13	0%	368	7%	380	5%
Other	315	12%	782	15%	1,097	14%
No answer	10	0%	22	0%	32	0%
Total	2,643	100%	5,087	100%	7,730	100%

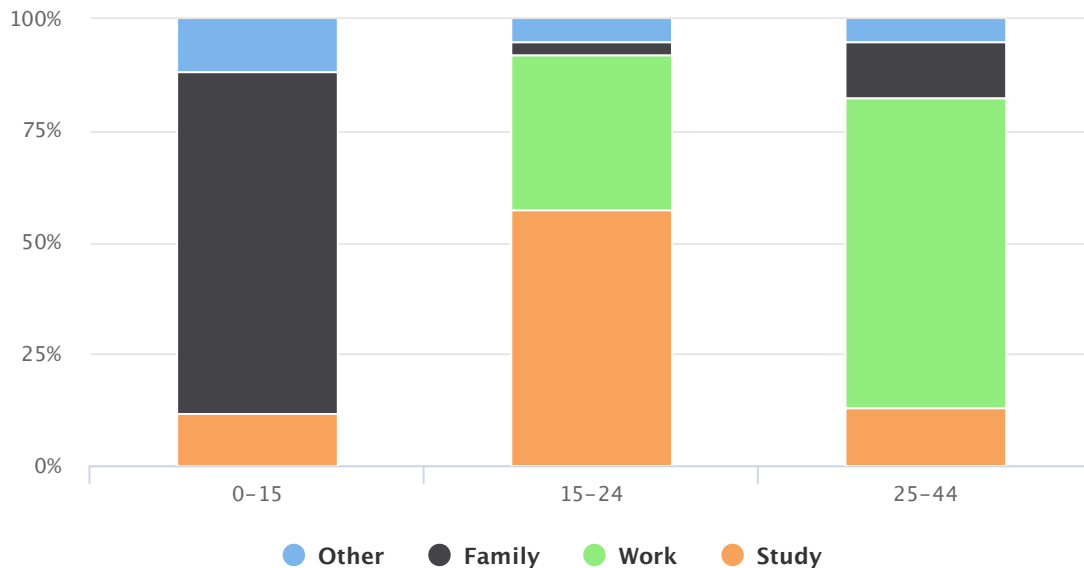
Source: Cooper et al (2014).

People who come to the UK as children under the age of 16 are generally accompanying their parents (Figure 1). For young adults age 15 to 24, study and work are more important motivations. Figure 1 shows that more than half (58%) of people in this age group moving for at least one year reported study as their main reason for migration in 2015. Work is the major motivation for those arriving age 25–44, at 70% in 2015. ONS estimates suggest that the total number of non-UK citizens under the age of 25 moving to the UK for at least one year fluctuated between 200,000 and 270,000 per year from 2010–2015, equivalent to about half of all long-term arrivals.

Figure 1

### Long-term international migrants to the UK, by age & reason for migration, 2015

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



Source: Office for National Statistics, Long-Term International Migration table 3.11b

Note: includes people of any citizenship moving for at least one year (including British citizens).

Smaller numbers of unaccompanied children also appear in the statistics if they claim asylum (3,253 in 2015) (Home Office, 2016).

Data on the visa status of young people living in the UK—for example, whether people are authorised to be in the country temporarily or indefinitely—are not available. It is particularly difficult to estimate how many are resident without authorisation, for example because they are the children of refused asylum seekers, people who have overstayed their visas, or entered the country illegally (Sigona and Hughes, 2012).

### Most young people with English as an additional language (EAL) also speak good English. They tend to have lower educational achievement when they start school, but they make faster progress and so the gap is largely eliminated by age 16

#### Proficiency in English

The main sources of data on educational attainment in schools do not define migrants by country of birth or nationality, but by whether their schools record them as having English as an additional language (EAL). As a result, many of the children recorded as EAL—a group that made up 19% of primary school students and 15% of secondary school students in 2015—are not in fact migrants themselves but were born in the UK in a family where another language is spoken.

One of the few sources of detailed data on children’s country of birth and languages spoken—a statistical survey conducted in 2004—suggested that a majority of those speaking other languages were in fact bilingual (Strand, 2016). This is consistent with Census data from 2011 showing that 87% of 3-15 year olds with a first language other than English were reported as speaking English well or very well, and that more than half of children in this age group who did not speak English well were only 3-4 years old and had thus not yet entered the school system.

## Outcomes of people with English as an Additional Language

Young people with English as an additional language (EAL) tend to have lower educational achievement when they start school, as measured by standardised test scores; but they make faster progress and so the gap is largely eliminated by age 16 (Strand, 2016). However, there is large variation within the group of people who are classified as EAL.

Many of the factors that appear to affect the educational outcomes of EAL children are the same as the ones that affect those with first language English, such as living in a deprived neighbourhood, having special educational needs and having moved between schools (Strand, 2016). However, there were some specific ‘risk’ factors for migrant children, including late arrival into the school system: by age 14, people who arrived after the age of 11 fared worse than those who arrived earlier. There were also differences depending on ethnicity and language spoken, with—for example—white Spanish, Russian and French speakers performing better in assessments than Polish or Lithuanian speakers. The data also suggest that the outcomes of EAL children varied between schools, suggesting that some schools may be facilitating their progress more effectively than others (ibid.).

Relatively few of those young adults who report speaking a language other than English as their main language at home report problems in education or work as a result. In the third quarter of 2015, 90% of 16 to 30 year olds with a different first language at home reported that language difficulties had not caused problems in keeping or finding a job, and 93% reported no problems in their education, according to Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey.

## Young foreign-born people are more likely to have degree-level qualifications than the UK born

Another key measure of educational attainment is the level of the highest educational qualification a person receives. Within the 25–35 year old population—a point at which most people have finished their education—people born abroad are more likely to hold degree-level qualifications (Table 2). This finding is driven primarily by higher educational attainment among the non-EEA born.

**Table 2 – Highest qualification received, by place of birth, 25-35 year olds, 2015**

Highest qualification	UK born	Non-EEA	EEA
Degree or equivalent	37%	53%	40%
Higher education	7%	7%	8%
A-level or equivalent	24%	9%	11%
GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent	20%	6%	6%
Other qualifications	5%	17%	27%
No qualification	5%	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%
<b>Arrived before age 16</b>		<b>Non-EEA</b>	<b>EEA</b>
Degree or equivalent		51%	41%
Higher education		7%	12%
A-level or equivalent		19%	13%
GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent		11%	21%
Other qualifications		5%	6%
No qualification		6%	6%
Total		100%	100%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Labour Force Survey, 2015, weighted average of four quarters. Note: trade apprenticeships excluded due to small sample size among foreign born; as a result, percentages do not sum to total.

This finding is not driven by people arriving as international students: in fact, young migrants born in non-EEA countries are more likely to complete a degree even if they arrived in the UK under the age of 16.

The share of people reporting holding ‘other qualifications’ is higher among the foreign born as a result of difficulties classifying certain foreign qualifications into to the standard UK categories. This trend is not seen among people who arrived in the UK before age 16, who are much more likely to have UK qualifications.

## Employment outcomes for young migrants vary depending on their country of origin, gender, and age at arrival in the UK

Despite having higher levels of qualifications, young migrants who are not in full-time education are more likely to be employed in low-skilled jobs: 20% of employed foreign-born 20–29 year olds were in the lowest-skilled occupations in 2015, compared to 12% of their UK born peers.

These trends varied significantly by group, however (Table 3). Among 20–29 year olds:

- Country of origin: Patterns of work and types of work were quite different for EEA vs. non-EEA migrants. The EEA-born had high employment rates (86%) but a relatively small share were in high-skilled work (26%). By contrast, young adults born non-EEA countries were less likely to be working than average (69%), but were more likely to be in high-skilled jobs if they did work (43%).
- Gender: Gender played a strong role in the likelihood of working (particularly for non-EEA born), but not in access to high-skilled work. The lower employment rates among non-EEA young people were primarily driven by women, among whom 59% of non-students were working, compared to 81% of young non-EEA men. Within both EEA and non-EEA groups, job skill levels varied little by gender.
- Age at arrival: People who arrived before age 18 had similar employment outcomes to the UK born. Differences between migrants and UK-born people in their twenties were therefore driven by people arriving from age 18 onwards. This finding for childhood arrivals is likely to be driven by a combination of factors, such as better language proficiency, UK qualifications, different expectations compared to recent arrivals, and local knowledge or networks.

**Table 3 – Employment rate (non-students) and occupational status by place of birth for 20-29 year olds, 2015**

	Share of non-students working	Share of employed in high-skilled jobs
<b>Total</b>		
UK-born	81%	37%
Non-UK born	78%	33%
EEA born	86%	26%
Non-EEA born	69%	43%
<b>Men only</b>		
UK-born	85%	37%
Non-UK born	87%	34%
EEA born	93%	25%
Non-EEA born	81%	44%
<b>Women only</b>		
UK-born	76%	38%
Non-UK born	70%	33%
EEA born	80%	27%
Non-EEA born	59%	42%
<b>Arrived 0-17 years</b>		
Non-UK born	77%	41%
EEA born	79%	39%
Non-EEA born	76%	42%
<b>Arrived 18+ years</b>		
Non-UK born	78%	30%
EEA born	87%	23%
Non-EEA born	64%	44%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Labour Force Survey, 2015 weighted average of four quarters. Note: employment rates exclude full-time students. ‘High-skilled’ job defined as ISCO codes 1–3, i.e. managerial, professional and associate professional occupations.

## International students who remain in the UK after their studies have more favourable labour market outcomes than the average across the foreign-born population

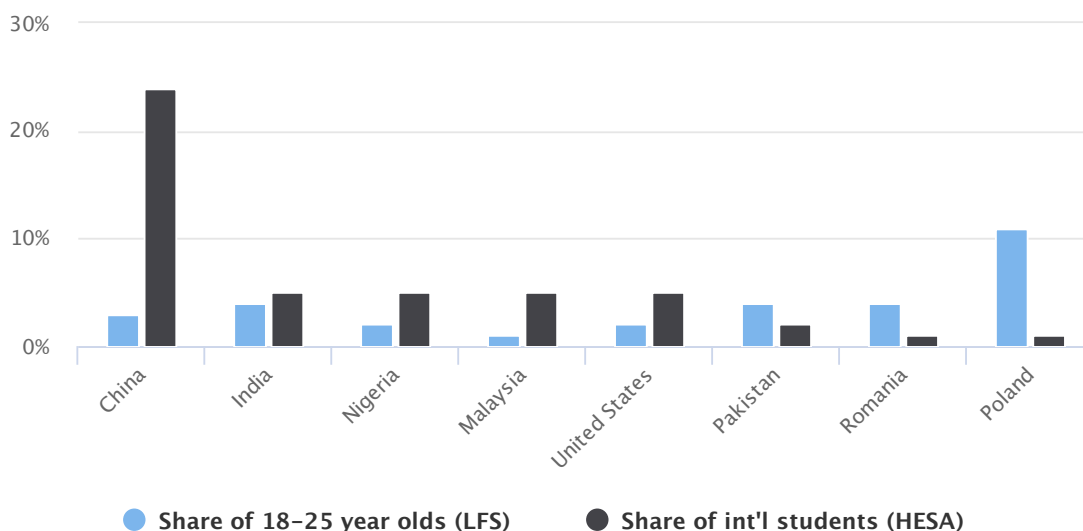
International students made up 19% of higher-education students studying in the UK in the 2014-15 academic year, or about 437,000 people, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This does not include foreign-born or foreign-national students who already had the UK as their permanent home (domicile) before they started studying.

International students have a rather different profile to other young migrants. Most notably, their countries of origin differ. Figure 2 shows the share of 18-25 year olds in the 2015 Labour Force Survey that come from 8 common countries of origin (these LFS figures mostly exclude international students), compared to the share of international students domiciled in these countries (from HESA data). International students are much more likely to be from certain countries—particularly China but also Nigeria, Malaysia or the United States—and less likely to be from others, such as Pakistan, Romania and Poland.

Figure 2

### Country of origin distribution of foreign-born 18-25 year olds vs. overseas-domiciled students at higher education institutions, 2015

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



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of 2015 Labour Force Survey, weighted average of four quarters; and HESA.

Note: the LFS does not sample directly from student halls of residence; it collects data on students living in halls of residence only if they have parents living at a private address elsewhere in the UK.

International students are likely to differ systematically from other young migrants in the UK. Because they are coming to the UK for tertiary education, they will on average have higher levels of education than the rest of the population. Non-EU students must typically pay high tuition fees, which means that they are also likely to come from wealthier backgrounds.

As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that people who come to the UK for study and then stay on and enter the labour force are more likely to be working in high-skilled occupations: 65% of EEA born student arrivals and 62% of Non-EEA born in 2012-13, compared to an average across all foreign born people of 52% (Cooper et al, 2014). Study migrants who had been in the UK for more than 5 years (and thus were likely no longer to be studying) also had higher-than-average employment rates: 81.7% for EEA born and 77.5% for non-EEA born, compared to 77.5% and 66%, respectively, for EEA and non-EEA foreign born as a whole.



## It is too early to predict the impact of Brexit on the numbers and outcomes of young migrants living in the UK

The UK's vote to leave the European Union could lead to a fundamental shift in the nature of migration to the UK, and therefore also to many of the trends described in this analysis. The impacts of British exit from the EU (or 'Brexit') on future migration and on EU citizens already living in the UK are not yet known, in large part because decisions on the policies that will apply to existing and future migrants have not yet been taken.

### The status of young EU citizens already living in the UK

About 40% of all EEA citizens living in the UK in 2015 (Table 4) were children (17%) or young adults below the age of 30 (24%). About one fifth of these under-30s were in fact born in the UK to EEA citizen parents, and do not yet have UK nationality.

**Table 4 – EEA+ citizens in the UK by age, place of birth and years of residence, 2015**

Age group	Number	Share of all EEA nationals
Children 0-15	563,000	17%
Youth 16-29	801,000	24%
Adults 30+	1,960,000	59%
Total	3,324,000	100%
<b>Years of residence</b>		
<i>Under 30s</i>		
Born in the UK	252,000	19%
0-4 years residence	579,000	42%
5+ years residence	526,000	39%
Total	1,357,000	100%
<i>All ages</i>		
Born in the UK	262,000	8%
0-4 years residence	924,000	28%
5+ years residence	2,121,000	64%
Total	3,307,000	100%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of LFS 2015, weighted average of four quarters. Includes citizens of European Economic Area countries, plus Switzerland, who are not also UK citizens.

The government has said that it expects the status of EU citizens already living in the UK to be 'properly protected' after Brexit. However, the details of how this will be implemented have not yet been resolved. Outstanding questions include who will qualify as 'already living in the UK,' what conditions they will have to meet, and what documentation they will have to produce (Migration Observatory 2016b).

If restrictions are introduced for newly arriving EU migrants coming to the UK in the future, those who are already here and whose legal rights are different will need a way of proving this, for example to prospective employers. As the Migration Observatory has described in a more comprehensive analysis of this issue elsewhere (Migration Observatory 2016b), the process could be quite complex. There are different ways to design a registration process, some of which would be more generous than others.

On one hand, the process could simply involve documenting a period of physical presence in the UK before a cut-off date (such as the date of the referendum, the date the UK notifies the EU of its intention to leave, or the actual date of formal exit). On the other hand, if the government were to choose a process that required EU citizens to show

that they had been exercising their EU treaty rights in the UK—along similar lines as the current process for applying for permanent residence after 5 years' continuous residence in the UK—it is likely that significant numbers of people could be excluded.

People who are most likely to face difficulties meeting a permanent-residence-style requirement include the self-employed, who may find it difficult to produce the necessary paperwork; very low earners, whose work in the UK may not be deemed sufficient for them to qualify as 'workers' under EU rules; and students or 'self-sufficient' people, who are expected to have comprehensive sickness insurance in the UK but who may not have been aware of this requirement.

Table 5 shows the activity status of EEA+ citizens under the age of 30. A majority of under-30s are not working, and most of those who are not working are either under the age of 16 or are students. Under 16s will generally be living in the UK with their parents (having either been born here or arrived as a child), and are likely to be included in their parents' applications for residence status rather than be applicants in their own right. Their eligibility to stay is therefore likely to depend on the status of their parents.

Compared to EEA+ citizens of all ages (full data provided in Migration Observatory 2016b), those under age 30 are more likely to be students—one of the groups that could potentially face barriers to registration due to a lack of comprehensive sickness insurance. Young people under age 30 are less likely to be employees, who are expected to have the most straightforward applications.

**Table 5 – EEA+ citizens age 0-29, by reported economic activity, 2015**

Activity status	Number of people	Share of all EEA+ young people
Other	20,000	1%
Looking after family	40,000	3%
Unemployed	52,000	4%
Self-employed	55,000	4%
Student	122,000	9%
Employee (full time or part time)	508,000	37%
Under 16	563,000	41%
Working	566,000	42%
Not working	798,000	58%
Total	1,364,000	100%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of LFS, weighted average of four quarters.

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding; breakdown of working category does not include government employment/training schemes and unpaid family workers. Students who are working part time will be included in the 'working' categories and not the student category. Note that international students are undercounted in the Labour Force Survey because people living in halls of residence whose parents are not at a private address in the UK will not be sampled.

### Future migration from EU countries

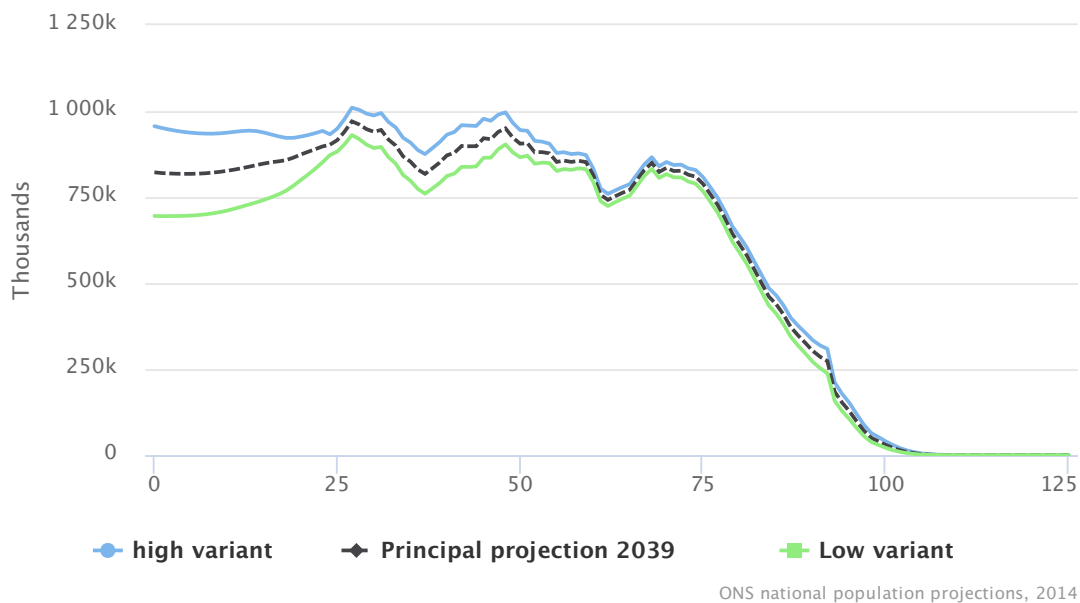
Different scenarios for migration policy have been described in detail elsewhere (Migration Observatory 2016b; Vargas-Silva, 2016). Possible outcomes range from relatively little change (for example, if free movement were to remain in place as part of an agreement for a continued relationship with the EU) or—perhaps more likely—significant new restrictions on EU citizens' eligibility to live and work in the UK. If these restrictions are brought in after the Brexit process is finalised, some of the trends described above, such as the significant number of young EU migrants with high employment rates and strong overrepresentation in low-wage work, would be expected to become less prominent in future years.

Similarly, there would be an expected reduction in the number of children of EU citizens living in the UK, with a potentially meaningful impact on the structure of the youth population. The level of migration has a particularly significant effect on the size of the youth population, because migrants are most likely to be young and/or of childbearing age. The shaded area in Figure 3 shows that the variation in the projected size of the population in 2039 at different levels of net migration is greatest for younger age groups (including both foreign- and UK-born), particularly those under the age of 20.

**Figure 3**

### ONS projections of population in 2039 by age, including variant range under high vs. low net migration scenarios

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



Even without changes to policy, the coming years could see significant shifts in UK migration trends. For example, some analysts have predicted a decline in the number of people coming to the UK for work, in part due to the decline in the value of the pound relative to currencies in countries of origin (Portes, 2016). Home Office analysis of emigration trends (Murray et al, 2012) suggests that EU citizens may be particularly sensitive to such economic factors. On the other hand, the lower exchange rate could increase the attractiveness of the UK to non-EU international students by making the cost of tuition and living expenses lower in their home currency. These factors – particularly combined with any post-Brexit restrictions on EU migration—may shift the balance of newly arriving young migrants back towards non-EU countries of origin.

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### The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory’s analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



### COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

[www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)

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