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**NOTE**

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Research numbers - overall numbers of EU citizens living in the UK, their population flows and composition

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*This technical note provides a deeper insight into the overall numbers of EU citizens living in the UK, their population flows and composition (Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries vs EU citizens who are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement).*

*The note, based on research funded by the EU Delegation in London (research is ongoing), has been prepared by the SG, in cooperation with EU Delegation.*

## Excerpts from research note, prepared for the EU Delegation in February 2026

The research note has been prepared by researchers commissioned by the EU Delegation to allow a deeper insight into the overall numbers of EU citizens living in the UK, their population flows and composition (*Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries vs EU citizens who are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement*).

The note works on basis of existing data and looks as well into the difference between the overall number of EU citizens who received a new residence status under the Withdrawal Agreement and the actual number of Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries still living in the UK (*the difference is important to understand how many individual decisions withdrawing the residence status the UK may be able to take*).

### Net flows

**Net migration of EU citizens into the UK was positive from 2000 until 2022**, with more EU citizens immigrating to the UK than emigration. Following the end of free movement and the introduction of the post-Brexit immigration system, net migration **turned negative from 2022 to 2025**.

Migration increased sharply after the EU enlargement of 2004, when the UK was one of the few countries to allow nationals of new member states access to the labour market (*though access was restricted for Romanian and Bulgarian nationals after their countries' accession in 2007*).

Net migration fell temporarily during the global financial crisis, then increased once again in the first half of the 2010s, reaching levels of 200 000-300 000 a year.

The trend reversed immediately after the Brexit referendum in June 2016. Immigration fell quickly despite the lack of any new immediate restrictions on free movement.

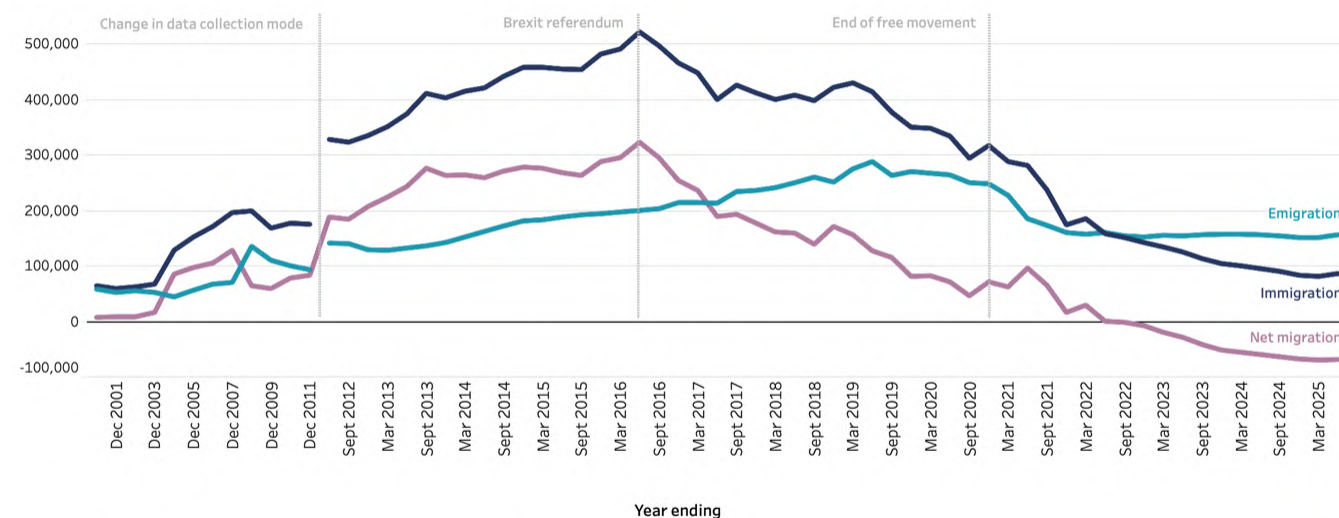
Arrivals of EU citizens further declined after the post-Brexit immigration system was introduced in 2021, with **relatively few visas going to EU citizens**.

### **Net migration of EU nationals turned negative after 2022**

Estimates of **net migration**, immigration, and **emigration**, by year and nationality

Select nationality:

EU



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS long-term international migration data.

Notes: Data for 2000 to 2011 are based on estimates from the International Passenger Survey. From 2012 onwards, estimates are created using administrative records.



### Composition of flows

Because of the low take-up of the new immigration system among EU citizens, **trends in net migration have been primarily driven by the arrivals and departure of EUSS status holders** (*ie, people who first arrived under free movement and already held status under the EUSS (next figure)*).

**Among visa holders** (*ie, EU citizens arriving after Brexit and outside the Withdrawal Agreement*), net migration has stood at around 20 000 to 30 000 in recent years.

This meant that the shift towards negative net migration since 2022 has been driven by people covered under the EUSS. Among EUSS status holders, immigration<sup>1</sup> has fallen significantly since 2021-22, while emigration has remained relatively steady. Fewer arrivals of EUSS status holders means that visa holders make up a growing share of EU immigration to the UK – 38% of EU immigrants in the year ending 30 September 2025 were visa holders, up from 14% in 2021. **The share of EUSS status holders among immigrants fell from 80% to 53% during the same period.**

**Since end of the application deadline in June 2021, net migration of EUSS status holders was negative 271 000 (33+59+84+95 from next figure).** The actual net loss is higher, given that many EU citizens might have made speculative applications from abroad ‘just in case’ after spending a short period of time in the UK under free movement and never set foot in the UK since.

### Net migration trends among EU nationals have been mainly driven by movements of people with EUSS status

Net migration of EU nationals, by year and group



Source: ONS long-term international migration estimates, year ending June 2025.  
Notes: More recent figures are subject to future revision.



### Census data

Overall numbers show there were **5,3 million EU citizens living in the UK at the time of the 2021/2022 Census, including 634 000 UK-EU dual nationals.** Total numbers also include **684 000 Irish passport holders living in Northern Ireland** (people born there are entitled to choose between a British or an Irish passport, or hold both). Aside for Ireland, the top countries of origin by nationality were Poland, Romania, Italy, and Portugal.

Data on country of birth revealed there were roughly 4 million EU-born residents living in the UK (*numbers don't include EU citizens born in other countries, including the UK*).

Census data do not include data on immigration status, so it is not possible to determine how many of the EU citizens captured in the Census were covered by the EUSS. On the other hand, the Census was conducted in March 2021, right after free movement ended, which means that in practice basically all the EU nationals captured in the Census will be Withdrawal Agreement beneficiaries.

More details about 2021/22 Census data are available at [EU citizens living in the UK after Brexit](#).

<sup>1</sup> (Long-term) immigrant is defined as someone who moves to the UK from abroad for a period of at least 12 months after living abroad, irrespective of their nationality or previous periods of time spent in the UK. This means that joining family members and EUSS status holders returning back to the UK after a longer absence are included in this number.

## EU migrant population in UK countries

By country of birth and passport held, Census 2021/22

EU (incl. dual UK/EU nationals)

	Country of birth	Passport held
England & Wales (Census 2021)	3,643,000	4,372,634
Northern Ireland (Census 2021)	107,809	683,512
Scotland (Census 2022)	234,363	273,336
UK (Census 2021/22)	3,985,172	5,329,482

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of England & Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, and Scotland Census 2022.  
 Notes: (1) Irish citizens continue to have the right to live and work in the UK through Common Travel Area arrangements; Irish citizens thus do not need to apply to EUSS (though they can if they want to). (2) In the NI Census, 505k people reported holding only an Irish passport (not a UK one) and more than 90% of this group (459k people) were born in NI. (3) Scottish data is for 2022, not 2021. (4) Dual UK/EU nationals were only included in the total category EU (incl. dual nationals), and are excluded when selecting any of the nationality subgroups.

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## EUSS data

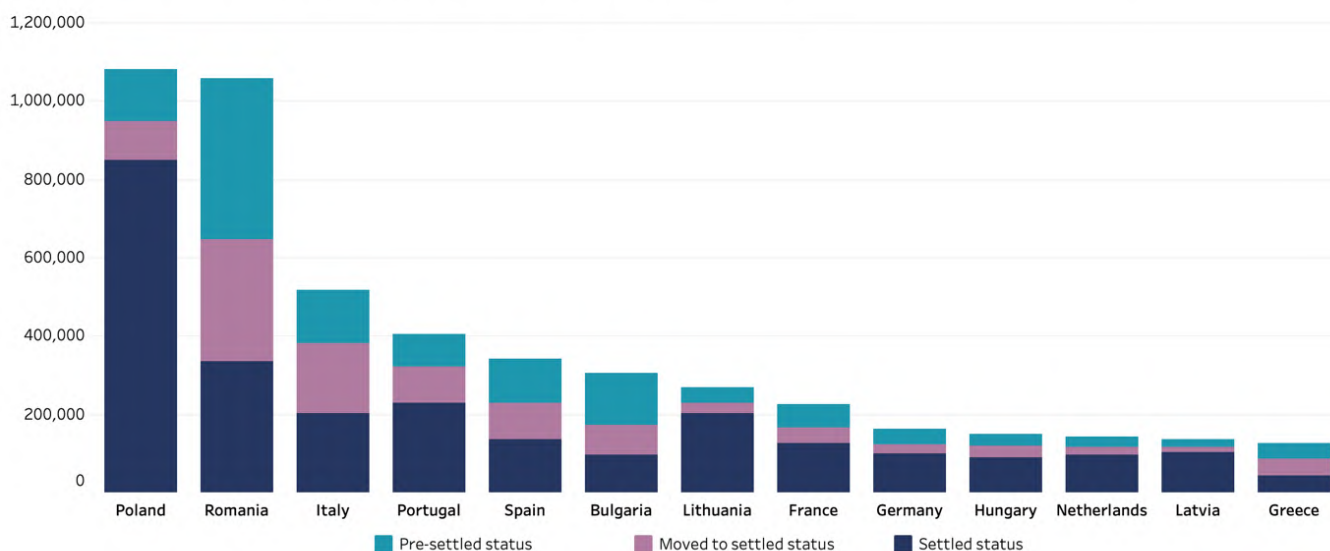
Data show that **5.8 million people had been granted status under the EUSS by 30 September 2025**.

Since the UK government only begun in March 2026 the process of revoking status from people for reasons such as absences from the UK, that meant that all 5.8 million people still held status at the time. Numbers included 4.4 million people with settled status, and another 1.4 million people who still held pre-settled status. Automated upgrades began in 2025, though it remains unclear how many pre-settled status holders may be upgraded to settled status in this way, and how many of those remaining in the UK will still need to apply for an upgrade.

The **high numbers of grants under the EUSS are not an accurate guide** to the number of EU citizens actually living in the UK, as many EUSS applicants or status holders may have left the UK. **Census numbers are a much more accurate reflection of population numbers.**

### The top 5 nationalities made up 59% of the 5.8m people granted status under the EUSS by 30 September 2025

Number of people granted status under the EU Settlement Scheme, top nationalities



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of EUSS statistics, EUSS\_03\_UK and EUSS\_RA\_04.  
 Note: Data excludes applicants who did not receive a grant of status or whose applications are still pending.



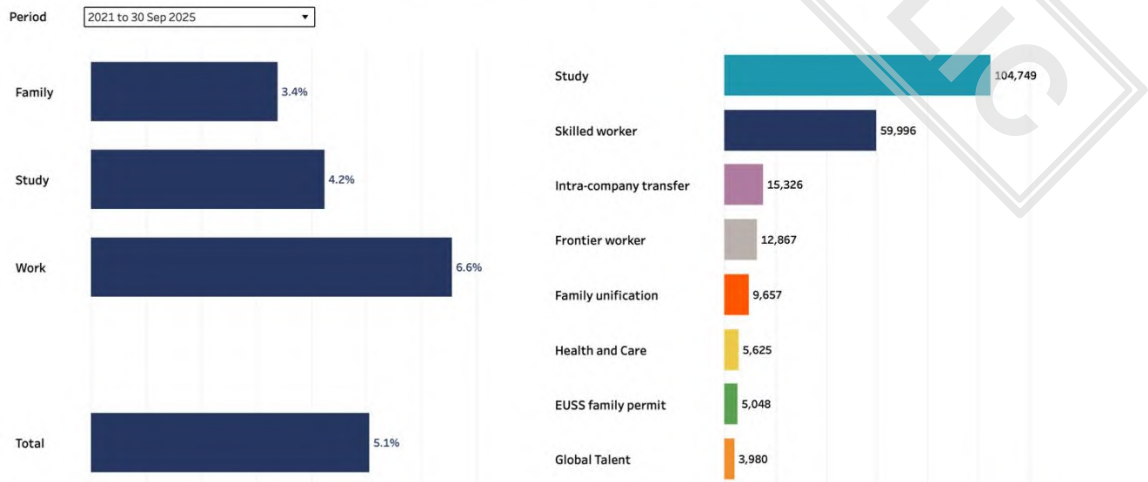
## Visa data

**Relatively few EU citizens have been granted visas under the post-Brexit immigration system.** In total, around **241 000 EU citizens** were granted visas between January 2021 and September 2025. That made up **5% of all non-tourist UK visas** granted under the post-Brexit immigration system. Most of these visas have been for study, followed by skilled worker visas (next figure).

As seen in the first figure, net migration of EU citizens on visas has remained between 20 000 and 30 000 a year, with numbers slightly declining over time as some initial visa arrivals have left the UK. In total, **cumulative net migration of EU citizens of visas in the four years between June 2021 and June 2025 stood at 101 000.**

### EU nationals make up around 5% of all visas granted under the post-Brexit system

Share of visas granted to EU nationals by visa category and number of visas granted to EU nationals by top visa types, by period



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release, Table Vis\_D02.

Notes: 'Family' visas comprises family unifications visas, EEA family permits, and EU Settlement Scheme family permits. 'Work' visas excludes Frontier Worker visas. 'Total' visas excludes BNO visas, visas issued under the Ukraine schemes, and visitor visas since EU citizens do not require a visa to visit the UK.



## Dual nationals and citizenship grants

At the time of the Census, there were 634 000 UK-EU dual nationals living in the UK.

**The number of EU citizens applying for and granted British citizenship increased sharply after the Brexit referendum.** From 2017 onwards, between 10 000 and 20 000 EU citizens were granted British citizenship each quarter, compared to an average of 2 800 a quarter in the five years before the referendum.

There is a **large pool of EU citizens that may become eligible to UK citizenship in the future** – more than 4 million people held settled status at the end of September 2025. People with settled status can apply for citizenship after one year, provided they meet minimum residence requirements, have no criminal record, and pass the Life in the UK test.

### The number of EU nationals granted British citizenship increased sharply after the referendum

Number of EU nationals granted UK citizenship, by quarter



Source: Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Cit\_D02.

