



BRIEFING

Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview

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This briefing provides an overview of the employment levels and employment shares of migrants in the UK economy as a whole, and in specific sectors and occupations.

Key Points

The number of foreign-born people of working age in the UK increased from 2.9 million in 1993 to nearly 6 million in 2011.

The share of foreign-born people in total employment increased from 7.2% in 1993 to 14.4% in 2011. The share of foreign-citizens in total employment increased from 3.5% in 1993 to 9.2% in 2011.

Compared to the early 2000s, the presence of foreign-born workers has grown fastest in relatively low-skilled sectors and occupations. The increase in the share of foreign-born workers was fastest among process operatives (e.g. transport drivers, food, drink and tobacco process operators), up from 8.5% in 2002 to 28.2% in 2011.

In 2011, 37% of all foreign-born workers working as employees, and 46% of self-employed foreign-born workers lived in London.

Understanding the evidence

Migrants can be defined in at least three different ways: by place of birth (i.e. foreign-born), nationality (i.e. foreign citizens), and length of stay in the UK. As the foreign-born definition is most commonly used in UK debates and analyses, it is the default definition used in this briefing. Wherever relevant and indicated, this briefing also provides figures for foreign citizens residing in the UK, as well as for recent migrants – defined as foreign-born people who have been living in the UK for 5 years or less. The focus is on those migrants of working age defined as 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women. The briefing draws on data from the UK's Labour Force Survey (LFS) conducted by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The number of foreign-born people of working age in the UK increased from 2.9 million in 1993 to nearly 6 million in 2011

The number of working-age foreign-born people in the UK increased from 2.9 million in 1993 to nearly 6 million in 2011 (see Figure 1). The annual increases have been mostly positive, but there are a few cases of slight decreases (e.g. 2007, 2009 and 2010). There was a significant jump in the number of foreign-born workers in the UK during 2006, which coincides with the opening of UK labour markets to workers from the A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) in mid-2004. For most years since 1993 foreign-born women workers have outnumbered foreign-born men workers.

Figure 1

Total number of foreign-born working-age people in the UK

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

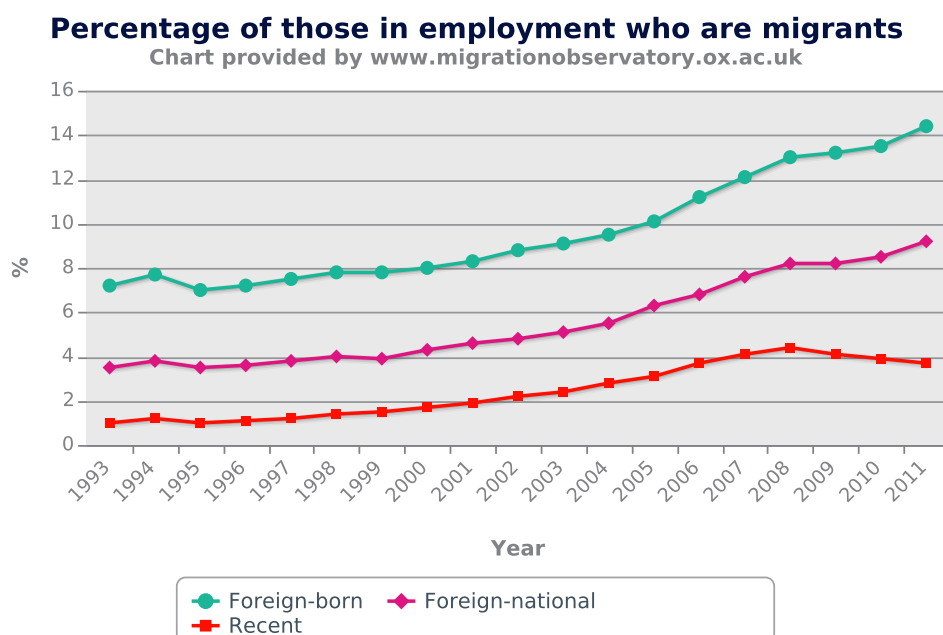


Source: Labour Force Survey, Q4

The share of foreign-born persons in total employment increased from 7.2% in 1993 to 14.4% in 2011

Figure 2 shows the share of migrants in total employment. The term “employment” is based on the ILO/OECD definition and refers to all workers aged 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women who are “at work” both part time and full time as employees, self-employed, under a government scheme or working for a family. The share of foreign-born persons in total employment doubled from 7.2 % in 1993 to 14.4% in 2011. In 2011, foreign-citizens made up 9.2% of total employment, up from 3.5% in 1993. The share of recent migrants in total employment increased significantly in recent years although it declined slightly since 2008, possibly due to the global economic recession.

Figure 2



Source: Labour Force Survey, Q1-Q4

Elementary process plant occupations and food preparation trades have the highest shares of foreign-born workers

The increase in the share of foreign-born workers in employment in the UK has been highly differentiated across occupations and sectors. Although foreign-born workers have been and remain employed in a wide range of jobs, the growth in employment shares of foreign-born workers in recent years has been fastest among lower-skilled occupations and sectors. In 2002, there was only one low-skilled occupation (food preparation trades) in the list of top ten occupations with the highest shares of foreign-born workers. As shown in Table 1, there are now at least five low-skilled occupations on this list (i.e. elementary process plant, food preparation trade, elementary cleaning, process operatives and elementary goods storage).

In 2011, 39.4% of workers in elementary process plant occupations (e.g. industry cleaning process occupation and packers, bottlers, canners and fillers), 30.1% of health professionals (e.g. medical practitioners and dental practitioners) and 28.8% of workers in food preparation trades were foreign-born. The increase in the share of migrant labour has been greatest among process operatives (e.g. food, drink and tobacco process operatives, plastics process operatives, chemical and related process operatives) up from 8.5% in 2002 to 28.2% in 2011. As discussed by Aldin et al. (2010) a significant share of relatively skilled recent migrants have taken up employment in less-skilled occupations in the UK.

Table 1 - Top-10 occupations of foreign-born workers, 2011

Top 10 by workforce share, all migrants		%	Occupation share	Top 10 by workforce share, recent migrants		%	Occupation share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
1	Elementary process plant	39.4	0.90	Elementary process plant	23.6	0.90	
2	Health professionals	30.1	1.33	Process operatives	13	0.93	
3	Food prep trades	28.8	1.17	Elementary cleaning	9.8	2.48	
4	Process operatives	28.2	0.93	Elementary goods storage	9.3	1.45	
5	Elementary cleaning	25.2	2.48	Elementary personal services	9.1	3.33	
6	Managers in hospitality	22.8	1.16	Assemblers & routine operatives	8.2	0.87	
7	Assemblers & routine operatives	21.8	0.87	Info & comms technology	8.1	1.82	
8	Info & comms technology	21.7	1.82	Elementary construction	7.7	0.75	
9	Research professionals	21.41	0.32	Food prep trades	6.45	1.17	
10	Elementary goods storage	20.22	1.76	Research professionals	6.25	0.32	

Note: occupation share indicates the share of total employment represented by the occupation. Source: Labour Force Survey 2011, Q1-4.

Manufacture of food products was the sector with the highest share of foreign-born labour in 2011

In 2011 the industry with the highest share of foreign-born workers in its workforce was food manufacturing, where about 34.9% of the workforce was foreign-born (see Table 2). The sector with the second highest share of foreign-born workers was domestic personnel (29.9%) followed by food and beverage service activities (27.5%).

Table 2 shows that recent migrants concentrate in low-skilled sectors. These include food product manufacturing (18.0% of total employment in the sector) and domestic personnel (13.5%).

In 2011, 37% of total foreign-born workers working as employees, and 46% of self-employed foreign-born workers lived in London

The foreign-born population in the UK is particularly concentrated in London (see the Migration Observatory briefing on 'Migrants in the UK: An Overview'). This is also the case

for those migrants who are in employment. As Figure 3 shows, in 2011 about one-third of total migrants working as employees, and 46% of self-employed migrants lived in London. A lower share of recent migrants working as employees lived in London (34%). Meanwhile, about 56% of self-employed recent migrants lived in London.

Table 2 – Top-10 sectors of foreign-born workers, 2011

Top 10 by workforce share, all migrants			Top 10 by workforce share, recent migrants		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	Manufacture of food products	34.9	1.21	Manufacture of food products	18.0
2	Domestic personnel	29.9	0.18	Domestic personnel	13.5
3	Food and beverage service activities	27.5	3.80	Programming and broadcasting	9.9
4	Manufacture of wearing apparel	24.6	0.12	Food and beverage service activities	9.0
5	Air transport	24.4	0.22	Accommodation	9.0
6	Accommodation	22.9	1.07	Manufacture paper & paper products	8.9
7	Security and investigation activities	21.0	0.57	Residential care activities	7.2
8	Residential care activities	20.9	2.80	Manufacture of wearing apparel	7.1
9	Financial (excluding insurance and pension)	20.7	1.96	Services to buildings and landscape	7.1
10	Computer programming and consultancy	20.6	1.63	Waste collection, treatment, disposal	6.9

Note: sector share indicates the share of total employment represented by the occupation. Source: Labour Force Survey 2011, Q1-Q4.

Figure 3

Residence of employed & self-employed foreign-born worker

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Labour Force Survey 2011, Q1-Q4

Evidence gaps and limitations

The LFS does not contain information on short-term migrants because the survey excludes individuals who have been resident in their households for less than 6 months (Dustmann et al. 2010). Also, the LFS excludes those who do not live in households, such as those in hotels, caravan parks, and other communal establishments; it also excludes halls of residence, thus missing many overseas students (many of whom are known to be legally working in the UK). Furthermore, the LFS does not include asylum seekers. Finally, the LFS is unlikely to capture migrants working without the legal right to live and/or work in the UK. See the Data sources and limitations section of the Migration Observatory website for further discussion.

References

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Further Readings

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Related material

- Migration Observatory briefing – Migrants in the UK: An Overview

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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 ESRC 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.

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