



# BRIEFING

## Immigration by Category: Workers, Students, Family Members, Asylum Applicants

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This briefing examines immigration by category. The analysis distinguishes between European and non-European migrants and among four basic types: work, study, family, and asylum.

## Key Points

An estimated 55.5% of immigrants to the UK in 2011 were non-EU nationals.

Students make up the largest and fastest-growing category of immigrants.

Work and family migration from outside the EU have both declined since 2005.

Asylum applicants represent a declining share of migration to the UK in the last decade, down to about 3.6% of migration to the UK in 2011.

Administrative data sources and ONS estimates mostly agree on the share of migrants in each category, though administrative sources give higher raw figures than ONS estimates.

## Understanding the evidence

This briefing discusses data on migration to the UK in terms of the categories of work, study, family, or asylum. The primary sources are the International Passenger Survey (IPS) conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates derived from IPS, and administrative data on entry clearance visas issued and passenger entries recorded from landing cards at ports of entry. Asylum-related entries are handled by the Home Office and tracked in administrative data. Asylum applicants are also incorporated into LTIM, which includes other adjustments and is preferable to pure IPS data when available.

Crucially for this briefing, IPS/LTIM categorizes migrants differently from administrative sources. IPS asks respondents to name their primary “reason for migrating”, and classifies migrants accordingly.

IPS/LTIM also differ from administrative data in terms of who is counted. IPS covers only migrants intending to change their usual place of residence for one year or more. Visa and entry data include short-term arrivals, who cannot always be distinguished from long-term migrants based on available data.

IPS/LTIM data, unlike most administrative data, include migration of EU and British nationals. If work, study, family and asylum are considered “reasons for migration”, it makes little sense to consider EU migrants as a distinct category. If the four basic categories are thought of as different legal grounds for entry, however, then EU nationality (or more precisely EEA/Swiss nationality) can be sensibly considered a fifth category.

This briefing focuses on arrivals to Britain, and considers neither departures nor net-migration, the difference between arrivals and departures.

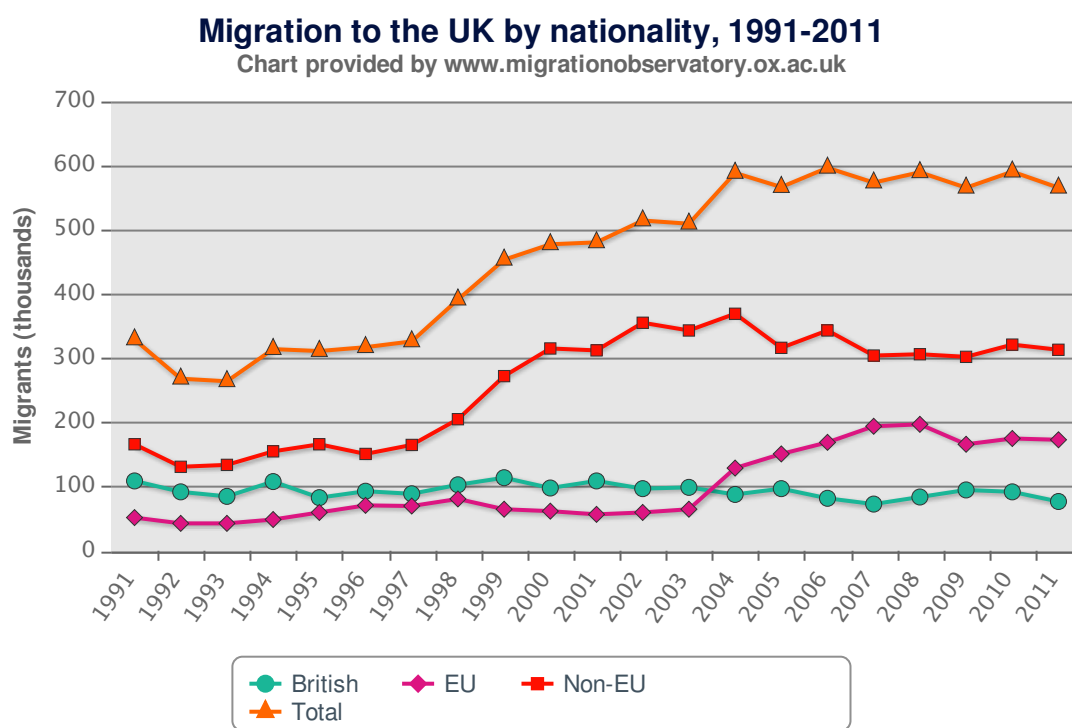
### More than half of all migrants to the UK are non-European nationals

Total migration to the UK among all nationalities numbered 566,000 in 2011 according to LTIM estimates, as shown in Figure 1. This is below a peak in calendar-year figures of 597,000 in 2006. Non-European migration made up 55.5% of the 2011 total, or an estimated 314,000 migrants arriving. EU nationals were an estimated 31% of arriving migrants. The remaining 14% were British nationals, who might have been born abroad or who might be returning to the UK after a prolonged absence.

Immigration patterns of non-EU, EU, and British nationals have followed different trends since 1991, as shown in Figure 1. Non-EU inflows increased from 1997 (166,000) until 2004 (370,000) before declining to 303,000 in 2009 and 314,000 in 2011. Estimated EU (non-British) migration to the UK increased at a slower rate from 1991 (53,000) until 2003 (66,000). It then more than doubled between 2003 and 2004 with the addition of the A8 Eastern European countries to the EU and rose to a peak of 198,000 in 2008 before falling to 174,000 in 2011.

Among British nationals, migration to the UK has fluctuated over the last two decades. The total in 1991 (110,000) was actually larger than in 2011 (78,000). Because of this, and because non-British migration has increased, British nationals comprise a decreasing share of total inward migration, falling from 33% of inward migration in 1991 to 14% in 2011. Note that Figure 1 presents immigration, or “inflows”. For net migration by nationality, see the Migration Observatory briefing on ‘Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences’.

Figure 1



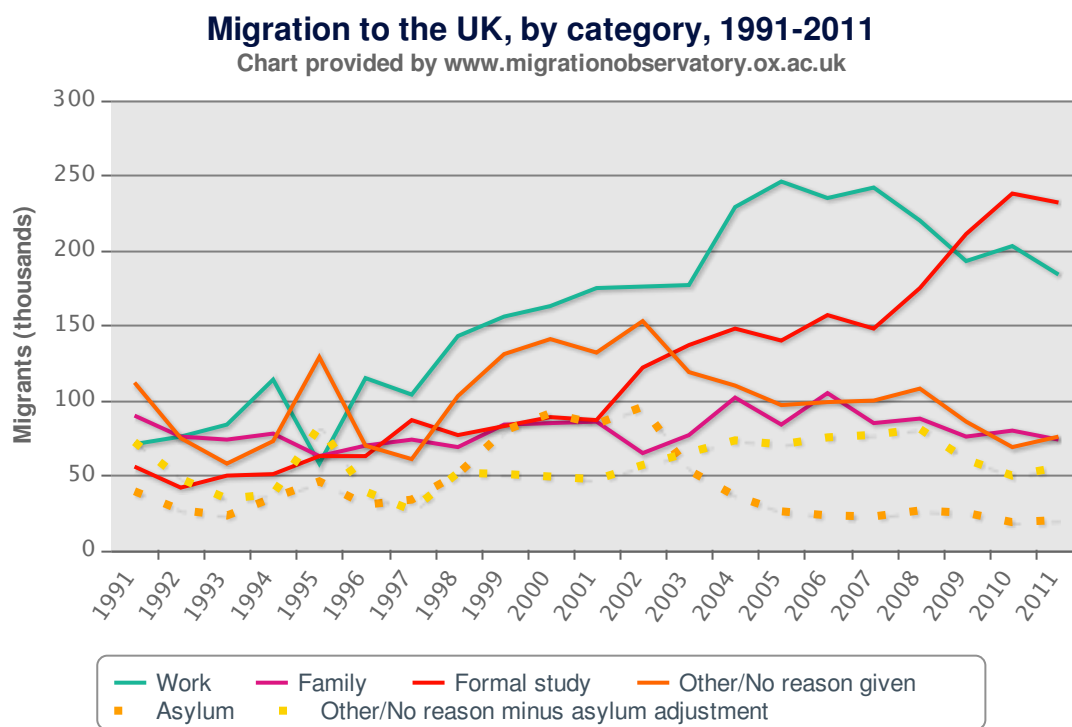
Source : ONS, Long-Term International Migration, Table 2.01a

### Work, Family and Asylum rise then fall, while Students continue to increase

LTIM estimates show that formal study was the most common reason given for migration to the UK in 2009, 2010 and 2011, as shown in Figure 2. Migration for the stated purpose of formal study increased from 87,000 (18% of total arrivals) in 2001 to 232,000 (41%) in 2011. The work category decreased from 193,000 in 2009 to 184,000, or 33% of total estimated arrivals, in 2011. This is the lowest total for the work category since 2003. (“Work” combines two IPS reasons for migrating: coming for “a definite job” and coming “to look for work”.) Meanwhile, family migration has fluctuated but changed little overall; indeed there were fewer people coming to

“accompany or join” family members in 2011 (74,000) than in 1991 (90,000). Family migrants fell from 27% of total inward migration in 1991 to 13.1% in 2011, mostly because of increases in other categories.

Figure 2



Source : ONS, Long-Term International Migration, Table 2.04

As Figure 2 shows, a substantial proportion of migrants responding to the IPS do not provide a reason for migrating that can be categorized as work, family, study, or asylum. The “other” and “no reason given” categories, taken together, comprised an estimated 13.4% of total inward migration in 2011. This means that IPS data do not categorize an estimated 76,000 migrants according to one of the main reasons for migration. The dotted lines show the LTIM adjustment for asylum applicants’ arrivals (labelled “asylum”) and, next, the author’s calculation of the remaining other/no reason migrants (labelled “other/no reason”). This calculation was made by assuming that asylum applicants are included in the groups of participants classified having “other” or “no reason” as their reason for migrating. The resulting figures are not endorsed by the ONS, and should be taken not as official data but merely as indicative of the possible composition of “other/no reason” migrants. (For depiction of ONS data without this adjustment, see the Migration Observatory briefing on ‘Long-Term International Migration Flows to and from the UK’.)

**Trends similar among non-EU migrants in all data sources**

Administrative data sources track arrivals only of non-Europeans (or more precisely, non-EEA/Swiss nationals). Comparing across data sources therefore requires a shift to focus exclusively on non-European nationals. This comparison also requires consideration of how to allocate dependents. The next three charts (Figures 3, 4 and 5) treat dependents as part of the family category, to allow for more direct comparison between administrative data and IPS data. In figures 4 and 5, dependents of labour migrants and student migrants are included in the work and study categories, respectively. In Figure 3, this is not possible, as IPS data do not distinguish between family route migrants and dependents.

Turning to focus on non-European migrants only, the main data sets tell a coherent story when taken together. Non EU/EEA migration in each category increased from the 1990s until the mid-2000s, when work and family migration to the UK began to decline but student migration continued to increase. Figures 3, 4 and 5 all show migration the UK by category, with each figure illustrating a different data set. To see the same data but with each figure illustrating

a different category and containing data from multiple data sets, see separate Migration Observatory briefings on 'Non-European Student Migration to the UK', 'Non-European Labour Migration to the UK', 'Non-European Migration to the UK: Family and Dependents' (forthcoming) and 'Migration to the UK: Asylum'.

Figure 3

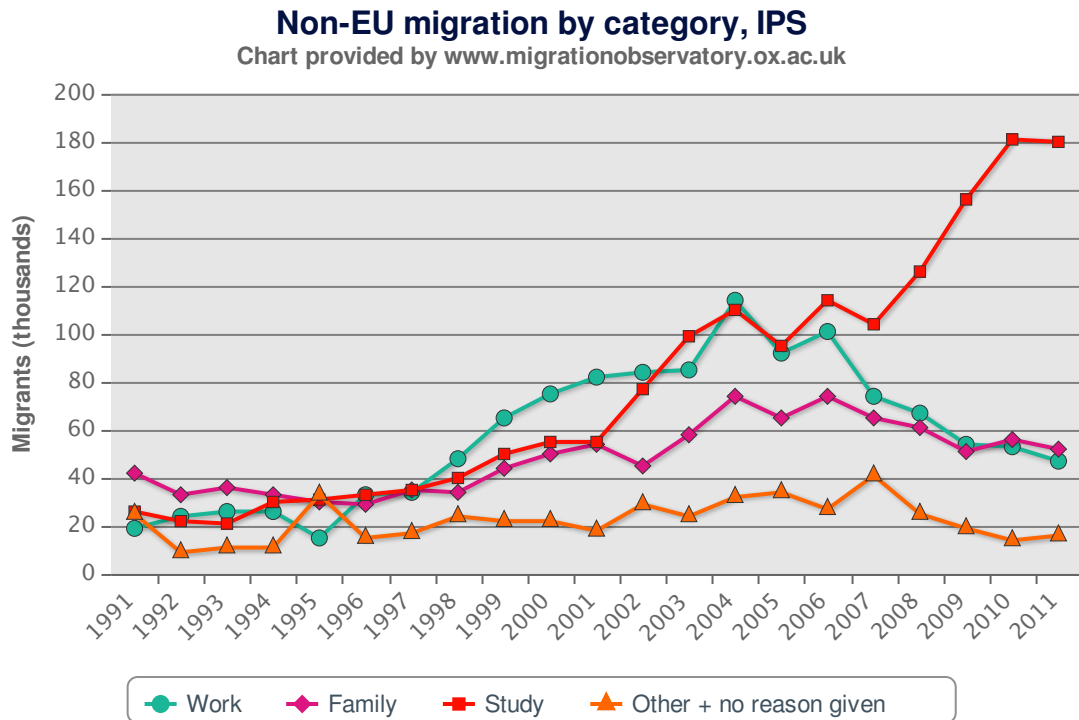
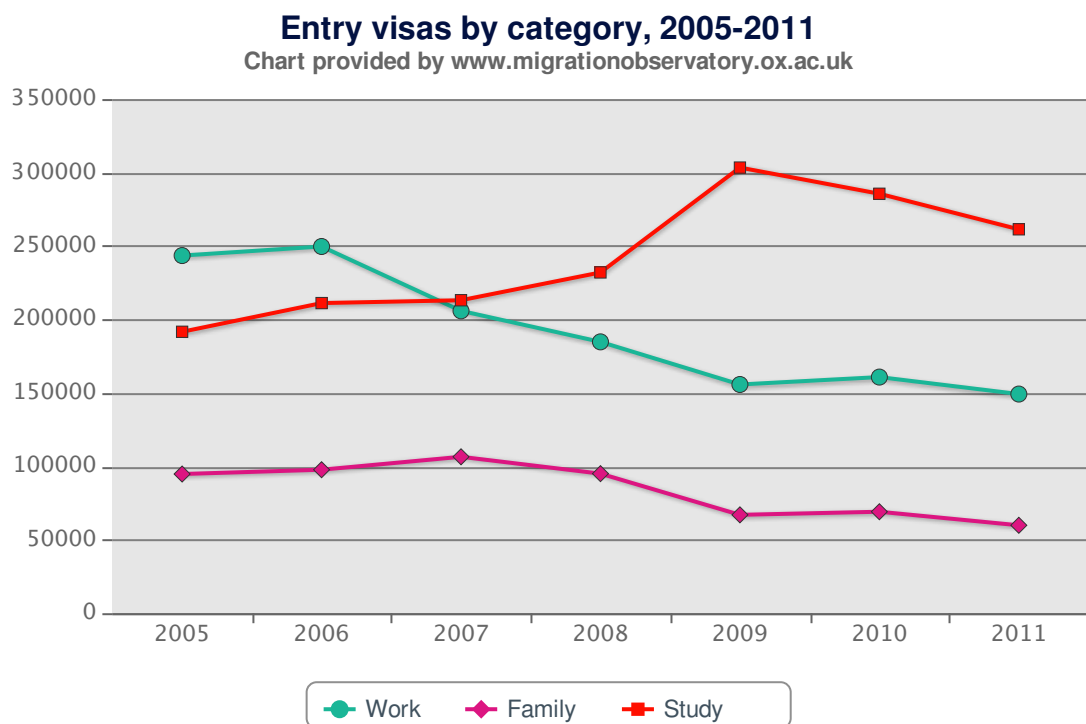
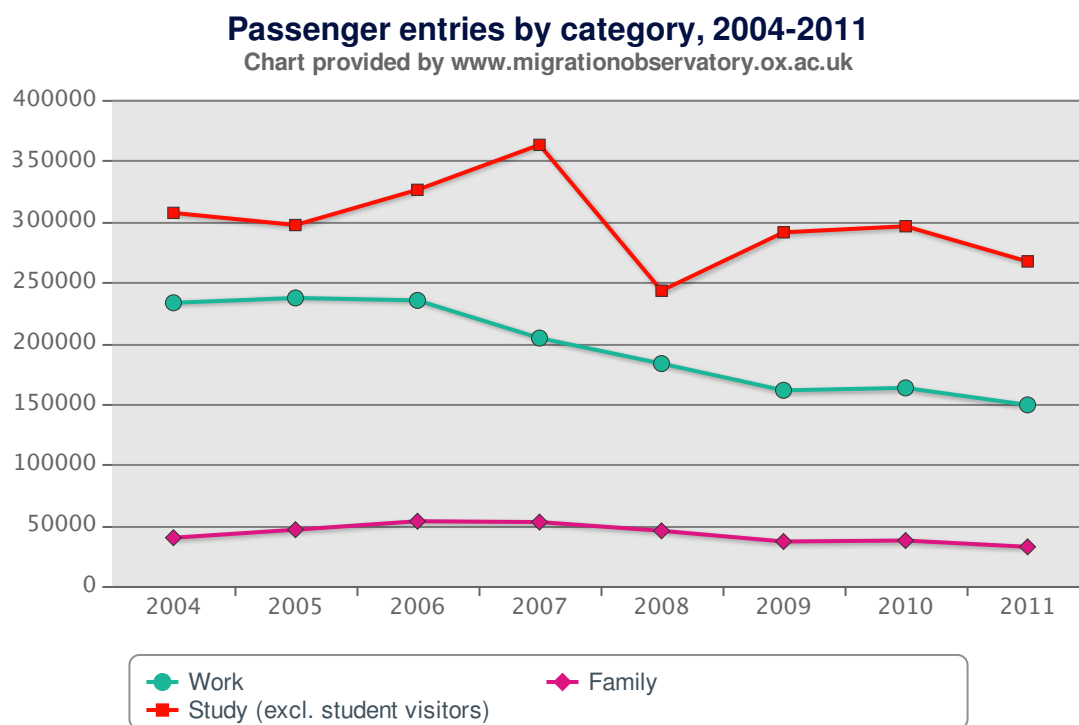


Figure 4



Note: dependents of migrants included with main applicants.

Figure 5



Source : Home Office, Immigration Statistics, Table ad.03

Immigration of non-EU students (excluding dependents) increased dramatically over time, most clearly in the IPS data in Figure 3, which shows the longest time span. Passenger entry data show a 73% increase in entering students from 2007 to 2011. Visas to students (excluding student visitors of six months or less) increased by 53% in the period 2005–2009, with much of the increase concentrated in the one-year change from 2008 (207,775 visas) to 2009 (273,211). But student visas declined in 2010 and 2011, falling to 236,961. Passenger entry data seem to present a decline, but this is due to significant changes by the Home Office in its collection and calculation of these figures in late 2007, when it began to track short-term student visitors separately and exclude them from the totals.

Non-EU migration for work has also increased over the past two decades, but has declined since the early-to mid-2000s. But all three data sources considered here show declines of between 37% and 49% since 2005.

According to IPS estimates, non-EU family migration increased from 42,000 in 1991 to 52,000 in 2011, peaking in 2004 and 2006. Family visas show a 44% decline from a peak in 2006 (106,477) to 2011 (59,843). Passenger entries show little change since 2004, with a rise until 2006 and then a 40% fall by 2010.

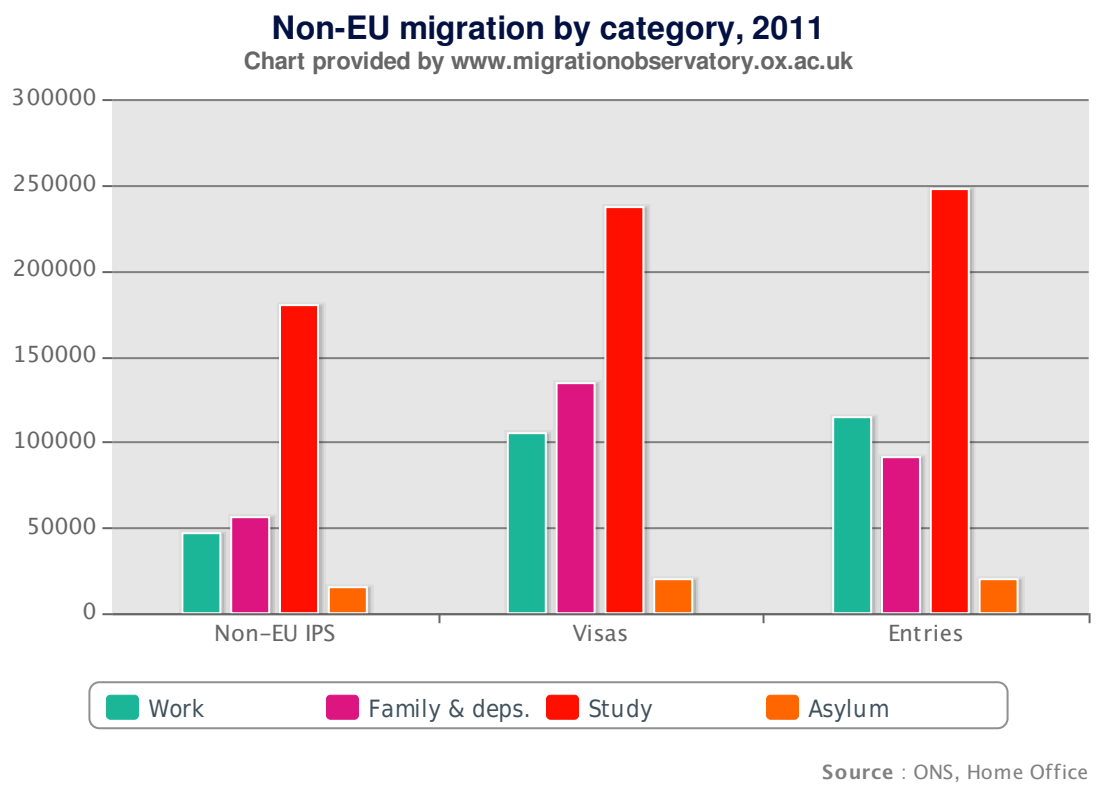
Asylum, meanwhile, increased until about 2002 and then declined. Asylum seekers (main applicants only) made up 3.6% of total annual immigration in 2011, by LTIM estimates. (See the Migration Observatory briefing on ‘Migration to the UK: Asylum’ for more detail, including administrative data.)

### Numbers higher in administrative sources, but percentages by category are similar

As Figure 6 shows, all three data sources paint a similar portrait of the relative share of each category in 2011 inflows. In each source, students were the largest share. Work and family came next. Work migrants outnumber family migrants in passenger entries, but the reverse is true in IPS and visa data. Administrative data shows that asylum applicants are the smallest group, whether compared to IPS, visas or passenger entry data. Note that in Figure 6, all dependent visas and passenger entries are included in the family category. This is for comparability with

IPS figures, where the family category includes both migrants who are coming to join family members (roughly corresponding to family route migrants) and also those who are accompanying a family member migrating for work or study (corresponding to dependents).

Figure 6



But when viewed as raw numbers, the administrative sources count many more migrants in each category than the IPS estimates. This is discussed in more detail below.

**Evidence gaps and limitations**

The existing evidence base on migration by category has several key limitations. Most important, there is a striking discrepancy between administrative sources and IPS estimates.

Several identifiable factors seem to contribute to these differences but may not be sufficient for a full explanation (Migration Advisory Committee 2010). First, the IPS uses the UK/UN definition of a migrant as someone staying in the UK for at least one year, while administrative data sources do not. The IPS includes a question asking arriving migrants and visitors how long they plan to stay in the UK; only those planning to stay for at least a year are counted as migrants. Visas and passenger entry data do not attempt to systematically exclude people arriving for less than twelve months, and surely include an unknown number of arrivals who will not stay long enough to qualify as migrants. ONS publishes data on short-term migration (between one and twelve months stay), but these are not directly comparable to administrative sources.

Second, visa data include people who never come to the UK, despite having legal permission. There are no reliable data on this number. A recent report on international students (Home Office 2010b) found that 20% of prospective foreign students issued Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies had no record of ever coming to the UK. But this figure was drawn from a non-representative sample of educational institutions, so one cannot be confident in generalising it to all students.

Passenger entry data include other anomalies. For example, 2010 entries of work migrants exceed the number of visas issued, which is difficult to explain. Clandestine entries of workers without visas cannot explain the discrepancy, as both visas and passenger entries are administrative data that include legal, detected entries only.

The IPS and LTIM also have the inherent limitations of a sample survey. IPS estimates are not exact counts of migrants but rather are associated with margins of error. For overall 2011 immigration figures, the estimated margin of error was +/- 28,000 migrants, or +/- 5.3%. Rather than quoting a precise figure of 553,500 (prior to adjusting for asylum and other factors), it is more accurate to say that IPS estimates allow for 95% confidence that immigration fell between 503,300 and 559,300.

Immigration of non-EU students (excluding dependents) increased dramatically over time, most clearly in the IPS data in Figure 3, which shows the longest time span. Passenger entry data show a 73% increase in entering students from 2007 to 2011. Visas to students (excluding student visitors of six months or less) increased by 58% in the period 2005–2009, with much of the increase concentrated in the one-year change from 2008 (231,975 visas) to 2009 (303,361). But student visas declined in 2010 and 2011, falling to 261,870. Passenger entry data seem to present a decline, but this is due to significant changes by the Home Office in its collection and calculation of these figures in late 2007, when it began to track short-term student visitors separately and exclude them from the totals.

Administrative data sources have weaknesses as well. They exclude EEA/A8 and British nationals, which make up a portion of official net migration estimates from ONS—close to half in 2010, as shown above.

Administrative data also do not match up well with the official definition of a migrant, especially in terms of length of stay.

And, while visa data reflects actual counts of visas issued, passenger entry data provide only estimates based on a selected sample of landing cards rather than a complete count. Because sampling techniques changed in 2003, trends dating back past this change are not reliable (Home Office 2010a: 105, n1.3).

In addition, no data set perfectly categorizes all migrants by category. IPS, relying on self-report, is left with some percentage (12% overall, 5% for non-EU migrants) who do not give a reason that can be coded into the standard categories. IPS also does not capture many asylum seekers with its interviews (leaving ONS to use administrative data on asylum applications for its LTIM series estimates). Meanwhile, passenger entry data includes a large number of arriving passenger (274,000) in a residual category of “others given leave to enter,” which include asylum-related cases; people “of independent means, and their dependents”; and dependents of NATO forces (Home Office 2010a: Table 1.3, n10). In some publications, the “other” category also includes additional categories such as children and dependents (Home Office 2007: Table 2.2, n5). Visas match categories more completely, but are vulnerable to the problems mentioned above.



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- ONS, "Long-Term International Migration Estimates Methodology Document, 1991 onwards." Office for National Statistics, Newport, May 2012.

## Further Readings

- Salt J. "International migration and the United Kingdom." Report of the UK SOPEMI correspondent to the OECD, Migration Research Unit, UCL London, 2011.

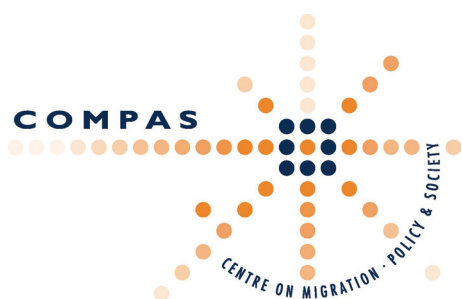
## Related Material

- Migration Observatory briefing: Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences
- Migration Observatory briefing: Long-Term International Migration Flows to and from the UK
- Migration Observatory briefing: Non-European Student Migration to the UK
- Migration Observatory briefing: Non-European Labour Migration to the UK
- Migration Observatory briefing: Migration to the UK: Asylum



### 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

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