

Migrant workers from the EU

Free movement, a founding principle of the EU

There are 28 member States in the EU. The free movement of people is one of the fundamental rights of citizens of the EU. They have the right to study, work and retire in any member state.

In the UK the same rights apply to citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. The EEA equals the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

All workers need a NI number, obtainable from the Department of Works and Pensions.

Workers must contact HM Revenue and Customs for tax purposes.

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/eucitizens

Impact of EU enlargements

In 2004, 10 countries joined the EU: Republic of Cyprus, Malta and eight countries from Eastern Europe, known as the A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia).

In 2004 only UK, Ireland and Sweden opened the labour market to A8 nationals.

Other member states restricted access for a period of seven years.

In the UK A8 nationals had to register under the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) unless they were self-employed. The scheme closed 30 April 2011 and workers do not now need permission to work.

In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU. Nationals from these countries must obtain permission to work if they are not self-employed. They can obtain an Accession Worker card or work under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) or Sectors Based Scheme. SAWS covers short-term agricultural work and the Sectors Based Scheme, low-skilled work in the food manufacturing sector.

In 2013 one more country joined the EU – Croatia.

Where do they come from?

The highest proportion of approved applicants from A8 countries came from Poland (66%), followed by Slovakia (10%) and Lithuania (9%).

Note: There are many thousands of young French citizens working in London, sometimes called the sixth largest French town!

What numbers are we talking about?

In the period May 2004 – Sept 2008, 932,000 EU citizens applied to work in the UK and 895,000 were approved. This was the largest and fastest migration ever into this country. This inflow was far higher than expected. The previous enlargement admitting Spain and Portugal in 1986 had not led to any significant migration.

By 2011 this number had exceeded one million but approximately half of these are thought to have returned home, particularly to Poland.

Entry figures were recorded from 2004–2009 in quarterly [Accession Monitoring Reports](#).

Where do they go?

The greatest numbers of migrant workers are to be found in East Anglia, the Midlands and London. There are fewer in the South-East.

What jobs do they do?

EU citizens are to be found in a very wide range of employment in the UK, from low-paid, unskilled and seasonal workers in agriculture and food manufacturing, in hospitality and catering, to public services from bus drivers to doctors and dentists, to highly paid and highly skilled finance and management posts. The vast majority (78%) of A8 workers are young – aged 18 – 34.

Impact on the economy

The number applying for tax-funded income-related benefits and housing support is increasing but is low in relation to total UK claimants.

A recent study (23/07/09) by economists at University College, London shows that A8 immigrants have made a positive contribution to the UK economy. In the fiscal year 08/09 they paid 37% more in direct or indirect taxes than was spent on public goods and services they received. [See a report on this](#)

Studies at the end of 2011 show conflicting results. For discussion of results of three contradictory reports published in the same week and how they are reflected in the press see [January 2012 Briefings](#) from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University.

UK emigrants to other EU countries?

Possibly one and a half million though numbers are difficult to track. Many UK citizens have chosen to retire in other member states, notably France, Spain and Republic of Cyprus.