

# UK Migration: a historical perspective

## Emigration from the UK

As a nation of seafarers and adventurers the UK has a history of emigration from the time of the Tudors and Stuarts. Emigrating to the new colonies in the Americas and elsewhere became part of British life. People left seeking new opportunities, hoping to make a fortune, fleeing religious persecution. Even today more British people live abroad than other nationalities.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were child emigration schemes, sending thousands of children to British colonies. This movement was particularly strong in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the large numbers of pauper children put a strain on the Poor Law.

In 1940, under the threat of bombardment in WW2, about 14,000 children were evacuated, privately or via the Children's Overseas Reception Board, to Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. Evacuation stopped in September 1940 when a ship carrying children was torpedoed.

See *On their own - Britain's Child Migrants* (Australia)  
at [www.anmm.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1893](http://www.anmm.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1893)

In the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the start of WW1 millions of British citizens left, mainly to North America, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

In the 1950s and 1960s people left in great numbers for Australia – the '£10 Poms' – attracted by subsidised travel and settlement to leave austerity Britain.

From the 1960s to 1980s the UK lost more people to emigration than it gained from immigration. A strong pound and rising house prices encouraged people to buy property abroad. Favoured destinations were Australia, New Zealand, USA, Spain, France. Through the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century British people continued to move to work or retire in the EU, though the economic crisis since 2008 has seen fewer people retire there.

Freedom to study, work, reside in other member states is one of the key tenets of the EU. Relatively few UK citizens study in other EU countries but many work and live there. Precise figures are difficult to obtain due to constant movement in and out of countries, poor census criteria in some EU countries etc. The UK's Institute of Public Policy Research in a report in 2006 put the figure at 1,010, 646. The government of the day put the figure at 1.4 million against 1.8 million EU citizens living in the UK.

Calculating such figures is difficult ...

- check out *Does number of Europeans here equal Brits abroad?*  
<http://blogs.channel4.com/factcheck/does-number-of-europeans-here-equal-brits-abroad/2322>

## Immigration to the UK

Because we are an island nation there was relatively little immigration into Britain from the period of the Norman Conquest (1066) until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Flemings came in small numbers to work in the textile industry in the Middle Ages.

Huguenots emigrated from France in two waves; in 1572 following the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris and from 1685 following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. By 1700 around 50, 000 had settled in England, about 1% of a population of five to six million.

Around 50 000 European Jews arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, joining a population of about 30 million.

In the 1930s about 70,000 refugees from Nazi Germany were admitted.

Many East Europeans settled in the UK after WW2 rather than live under Russian occupation, notably Poles, and thousands of displaced people found work here. Until the 1950s the most substantial immigration came from Ireland.

In 1956, the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution saw nearly 21, 000 Hungarians arrive.

## Migration from the Commonwealth

Immigration from the Commonwealth effectively began in the 1950s. There were no immigration controls for Commonwealth citizens and they arrived as economic migrants, filling gaps in the UK labour market for largely unskilled labour. The majority came from the Indian sub-continent, following Partition in 1947, and from the Caribbean.

Flows increased:

3,000 p.a. in 1953
46,800 p.a. in 1956
136,400 p.a. in 1961

Since 1963 the settlement of Commonwealth immigrants is estimated at 2.5 million

Until the 1980s the effect on the total population was counterbalanced by the emigration of British citizens.

This increasing flow of immigrants led to some racial tensions and the start of restrictions in a series of Commonwealth Immigration Acts:

1962 – requirement to have a work voucher
1968 – tighter controls and definitions
1971 – work vouchers replaced by work permits

In 1967 Asians from Kenya and Uganda who had retained British citizenship after these former colonies gained independence began to arrive in the UK

In 1972 Asians were expelled from Uganda by President Idi Amin and 27, 000 were permitted to settle in the UK under the terms of the Uganda Resettlement Board.

## Migration from the EU

2004 saw the next significant increase in migration with the accession to the EU of the A8 countries.(Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

Average annual inflow of EU citizens

1997 – 2003: 67,000
2004 – 2010: 170,000 (peak in 2007)

In 2004–2010 the total net migration from A8 citizens was 353,000.

The Annual Population Survey for 2011 gives 2,081,000 EU citizens living in the UK in the year to March with 42%, about 872,000, from A8 countries.

The high numbers from 2004 were unexpected. There was no model to go on and the previous EU enlargement when Spain and Portugal joined in 1986 created no significant migration. Also most existing EU member states, except Ireland and Sweden, restricted access to their labour markets.

See Briefings: *Thinking behind the numbers*

<http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk>

Independent, evidence-based analysis of data on UK migration

You can also explore links on the Migration page in UK National Statistics for quarterly and annual migration statistics

[www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/cross-cutting-topics/migration/index.html](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/cross-cutting-topics/migration/index.html)