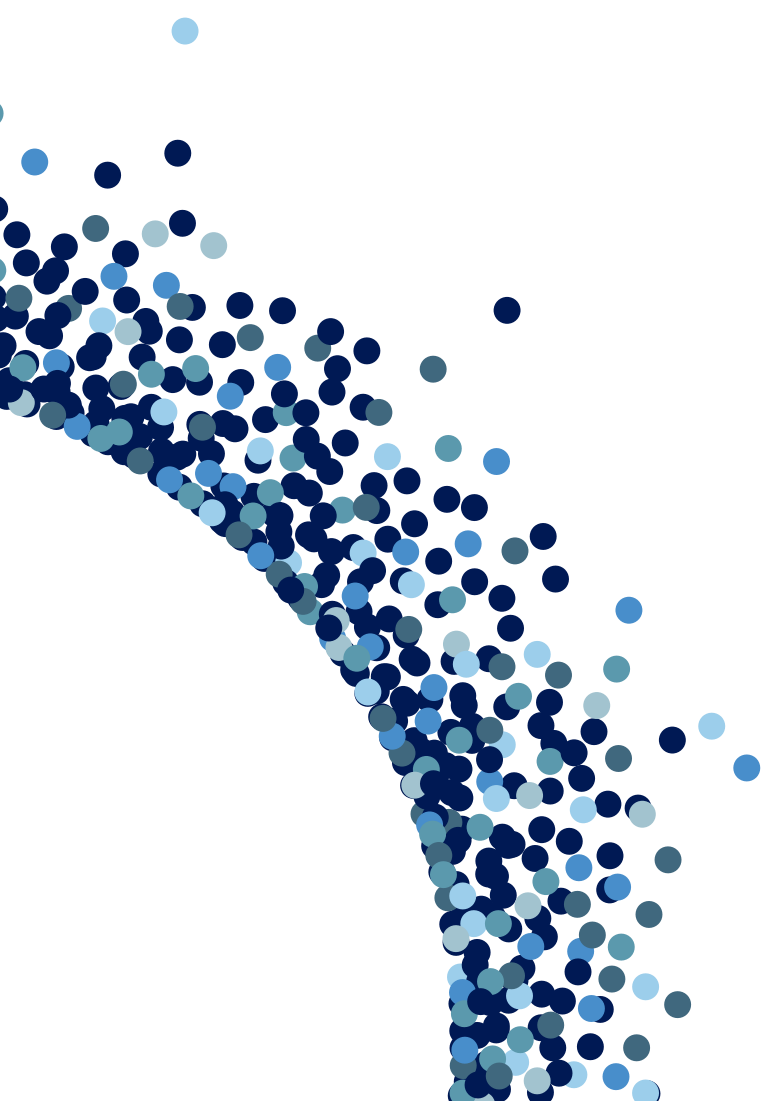




BRIEFING

Citizenship and naturalisation for migrants in the UK



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This briefing looks at citizenship and naturalisation among migrants in the UK. It provides data on how many migrants become UK citizens and how this varies for different migrant groups, as well as the factors that affect naturalisation.

Key Points

In 2018, 39% of people born abroad reported that they were UK citizens, but this share was higher for non-EU born (54%) than for EU-born (16%) migrants.

Migrants from EU countries have generally been less likely to apply for UK citizenship than those from outside the EU, even though applications of EU citizens increased after the 2016 referendum.

More than 60% of non-EU migrants who are still in the UK 10 years after getting their initial visa become British citizens.

Migrants who come to the UK with a family entry visa become citizens faster than those entering with a work or a study visa.

Evidence suggests that naturalisation can improve migrants' economic and social integration, especially among those from disadvantaged groups.

Non-EU citizens from high-income countries (e.g. US, Canada or Australia) are less likely to become UK citizens than those from lower-income countries.

People who moved to the UK as children are more likely to be British citizens, and this trend is particularly clear among the EU born.

In 2018, there were an estimated 1 million non-UK citizen children living in the UK, of whom approximately 400,000 were born in the UK.

The cost of applying for citizenship has increased substantially since 2005, reaching £1,330 in government fees for adult applicants in 2020.

Non-EU migrants are less likely to become citizens of the country where they live in EU-14 countries than in the UK.

Understanding the policy

What is citizenship?

Citizenship has been defined in different ways, including as a legal status, a source of rights and an indicator of identity (Joppke, 2007). From a legal perspective, citizenship is a status that identifies a person's formal membership of a state, entitling them to hold a country's passport. Citizenship gives people certain rights, such as the right to vote in general elections (although Commonwealth citizens in the UK can vote without being UK citizens). Citizenship and naturalisation are also sometimes seen as an indicator of identity and belonging, or of social integration (Joppke, 2010; Ndofor-Tah et al, 2019).

While citizenship has a specific legal meaning, the concept is sometimes used much more broadly to refer to people's national identity, civic engagement or social contributions, such as volunteering or participating in political protest. This briefing examines citizenship from a legal perspective. (The Migration Observatory briefing, [The social relationships of migrants in the UK](#) provides information about migrants' civic participation in British society.)

Citizenship vs. permanent status

It is important to distinguish citizenship from permanent residence or settlement (also known as Indefinite Leave to Remain [ILR]), as these different statuses are often conflated in public debate. Migrants in the UK who are foreign nationals can acquire the right to live in the UK permanently without becoming citizens. Non-UK citizens who have permanent residence or settlement have extensive rights similar to those of UK citizens (for example, there are no restrictions on their right to work). Some settled migrants live their whole lives in the UK without becoming citizens. However, becoming a British citizen brings certain additional rights. In addition to voting, it is much harder for the government to deport citizens, and citizenship cannot be lost as a result of long absences from the country. There are also some specific restrictions on the jobs certain non-UK citizens can do in the public sector: most non-EU citizens who are not from the Commonwealth cannot work in the Civil Service or the Armed Forces, for example.

For historical reasons related to the UK's colonial past and the evolution of its citizenship laws over time, the rights and status of citizens of Commonwealth countries is sometimes different. Most notably, Commonwealth citizens can vote in general elections if they live in the UK, and can work in certain public sector jobs that have nationality restrictions. However, they must usually meet the same immigration requirements as other non-EU citizens in order to migrate to the UK, i.e. qualifying for visas for work, study or family.

Becoming a UK citizen: naturalisation, registration and automatic acquisition

There are three main ways of becoming a UK citizen: automatic acquisition at birth, registration (usually for children), and naturalisation (usually for adults).

Almost all migrant adults without a British parent will have to naturalise in order to become UK citizens. Adult migrants who apply for citizenship must usually have lived in the UK for at least five or six years and must already have the permanent right to live in the UK (i.e. ILR for non-EU citizens and permanent residence or settled status for EU citizens). Applicants must meet a language requirement and pass the 'Life in the UK' test, which is designed to evaluate their knowledge of UK institutions, history and culture. The level of English language required for citizenship is 'intermediate', which is considered sufficient to have conversations about a range of familiar topics, but not necessarily enough to function fully in an English-speaking workplace. Applicants must have 'good character,' which includes paying taxes and not having a recent criminal record. They must also have been physically present in the UK for most of the previous three to five years. For a more detailed overview of naturalisation requirements, see [Halliday \(2019\)](#).

Citizenship applicants must pay a fee, which in 2020 was £1,330 per person, or £1,012 per child for children born in the UK to parents who are not UK citizens or settled residents (although the fee for children is currently subject to an ongoing legal challenge). This is in addition to fees already paid for settlement, which are discussed in the Migration Observatory briefing, [Settlement in the UK](#).

Children who are born in the UK are not necessarily British nationals. They will automatically be UK citizens if at least one of their parents is either a UK citizen themselves or a settled or permanent resident here; these children do not need to apply for citizenship but can apply directly for a passport. UK-born children can also register for citizenship if their parents receive either ILR or citizenship or if they have lived in the UK until the age of 10. Unlike for adults, there are some circumstances in which children can become citizens without first applying for ILR; this includes certain children without legal residence status, if they meet the conditions (e.g. if they have lived in the UK for a long time).

In 2018 and 2019, the government proposed some potential changes to citizenship policy, although it is not currently clear how and when they might be implemented. Specifically, it proposed 'strengthening the language requirements' (Home Office, 2018; MHCLG, 2019) and 'revising the content of the Life in the UK test to give greater prominence to British values' (MHCLG, 2019).

Understanding the Evidence

This briefing relies on Migration Observatory analysis of data from the Home Office ([Migrant Journey data](#)), the Annual Population Survey (APS) 2018, collected by the Office of National statistics, and the EU-Labour Force Survey 2018, collected by all EU member states as well as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

Home Office records are used to analyse the numbers of people becoming citizens. For non-EU citizens, they are also used to examine migrants' pathways to citizenship, including the visas people entered the country on before receiving ILR and citizenship. This makes it easier to estimate the share of settled residents who become citizens among non-EU migrants compared to EU migrants.

The Annual Population Survey (APS) data is used to look in more detail at the characteristics of people who do and do not hold UK citizenship. However, there are some very important limitations in this data:

- Citizenship is self-reported (or reported by parents/guardians for respondents under age 16), and it is possible that some people do not know their own citizenship status or the status of their children.
- The APS only captures one citizenship, but many people are dual citizens. The citizenship that is recorded in the APS is the *first citizenship mentioned* by respondents, which means that the APS is likely to underestimate the number of migrants who have naturalised (i.e. some people recorded as non-UK citizens will in fact hold dual citizenship).
- The APS does not tell us how respondents became UK nationals (e.g. via naturalisation, registration, or automatically). Most UK citizens who were born abroad will be people who migrated to the UK and later naturalised, but this category will also include people who were automatically UK citizens at birth because their parents were UK citizens.

The APS data are nonetheless useful for several purposes, such as comparing approximate shares of UK citizenship holders across groups; this comparison relies on the assumption that the order in which respondents specify their nationalities does not substantially depend on their other characteristics.

The APS also has some other important limitations. Some people are excluded, such as residents of communal establishments like hostels, and other groups may be under-counted due to survey non-response. The APS' response rate has declined over time, and is now below 50% (ONS, 2016); this means that people who are more likely not to respond to the survey may be under-counted. ONS analysis based on the Census suggests that non-response is a greater problem among people born outside of the UK (Weeks et al, n.d.).

Margins of error in the estimates

Because the APS and the EU-LFS are surveys and rely on samples, the estimates come with margins of error. This means that small differences between numbers or percentages may not be statistically significant. However, all the differences between groups that are described in the text of the briefing are all statistically significant. A difference between two groups is considered statistically significant when the probability that this difference is caused by chance is very small. In that case, we assume that the differences we observe in the data are likely to exist in the population. Note that small differences between estimates for different groups may not be statistically significant, if they are not described in the narrative of the briefing.

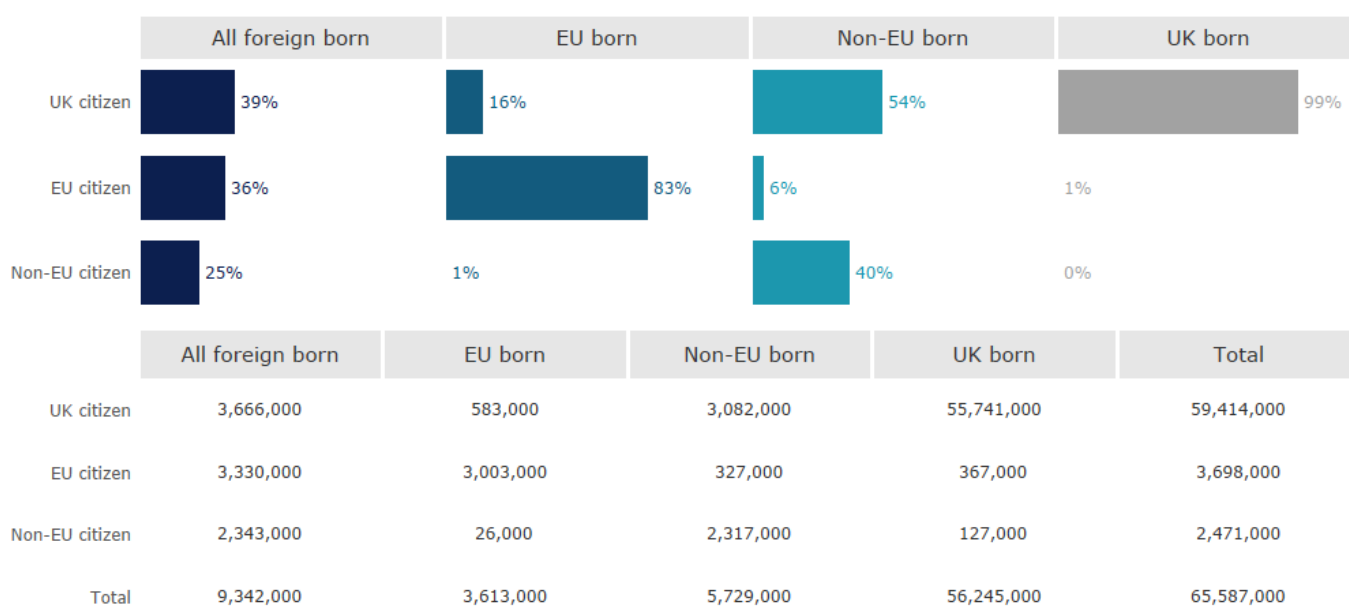
In 2018, 39% of people born abroad said that they were UK citizens, but this share was higher for non-EU born (54%) than for EU-born (16%) migrants

In 2018, 39% of people born abroad said that they were UK citizens (Figure 1), according to self-reported official survey data (see ‘Understanding the Evidence’ section above for important limitations of this information, which is likely to understate rates of citizenship acquisition). This share was higher (50%) for those who had been in the country for at least 6 years (since 2012, using 2018 data) and thus were more likely to be eligible to naturalise.

EU-born migrants (16%) are less likely to say that they have British citizenship than those born in a non-EU country (54%). A consequence of this is that non-EU born migrants make up the majority of people born abroad in the UK (61% in 2018), but non-EU citizens only represent an estimated 40% of all foreign citizens living in the UK.

Figure 1

UK population by place of birth and nationality, 2018
All population



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2018
 Note: nationality data is self-reported and only captures one citizenship (first citizenship mentioned by respondents). Respondents who do not provide information about their country of birth (0.04% or 24,000) or nationality (0.04% or 28,000) are excluded. Year of arrival to the UK based on most recent arrival



Migrants from EU countries have generally been less likely to apply for UK citizenship than those from outside the EU

Different factors affect migrants’ desire and ability to become citizens of the country they have moved to, ranging from the desire for recognition as a full member of society and the right to vote, to legal certainty about their residence rights and pragmatic advantages, such as easier travel overseas (see e.g. Aptekar, 2016; Birkvad 2019; Rutter et al, 2008). Reasons for seeking citizenship are not necessarily ‘positive’ and can include migrants’ fears of poor treatment or discrimination (Sigona and Godin, 2019; Aptekar, 2016).

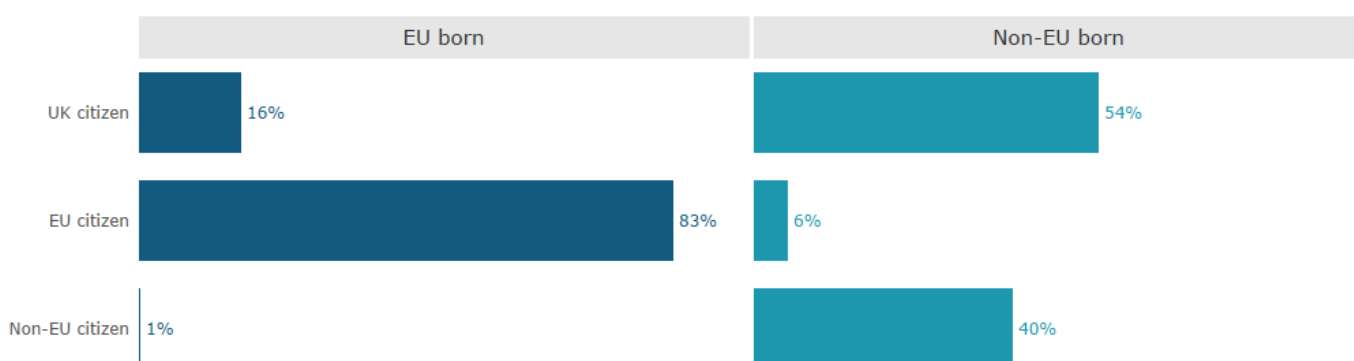
Some groups of migrants are more likely to apply for the citizenship than others. For example, migrants from developing or politically unstable non-EU countries are more likely to naturalise than other foreign nationals, as well as those who are long-term residents or who speak the destination-country language (Dronkers and Vink, 2012). Migrating at a younger age or having a partner who is a citizen of the destination country has also been linked to a higher likelihood of naturalisation (Peters et al., 2016). Policies are also thought to play a role, and countries with more liberal citizenship policies tend to have a higher share of naturalised migrants (Dronkers and Vink, 2012), as discussed further below. See the [Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015](#) for a discussion of the main dimensions of citizenship policies.

In the UK, EU citizens are less likely to become UK citizens than people from non-EU countries (Figure 2). There are various possible reasons for this. EU citizens may have felt more secure in their immigration status because of the protections offered by EU law, and thus felt that becoming a citizen was not necessary (Moreh et al, 2018). Barriers in the process may have played a role: all people applying for citizenship must already have proof of their permanent status, but until recently the process for most EU citizens to get such a document was quite complex ([Migration Observatory, 2016](#)). Most EU citizens will also not have had any contact with the immigration system, whereas non-EU citizens will generally have already had to submit multiple applications (for entry visas, renewals and indefinite leave to remain), making them more familiar with the process.

Figure 2

Citizenship of the EU and non-EU born population in the UK, 2018

All ages



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2018

Note: nationality data is self-reported and only captures one citizenship (first citizenship mentioned by respondents). Respondents who do not provide information about their country of birth (0.04% or 24,000) or nationality (0.04% or 28,000) are excluded



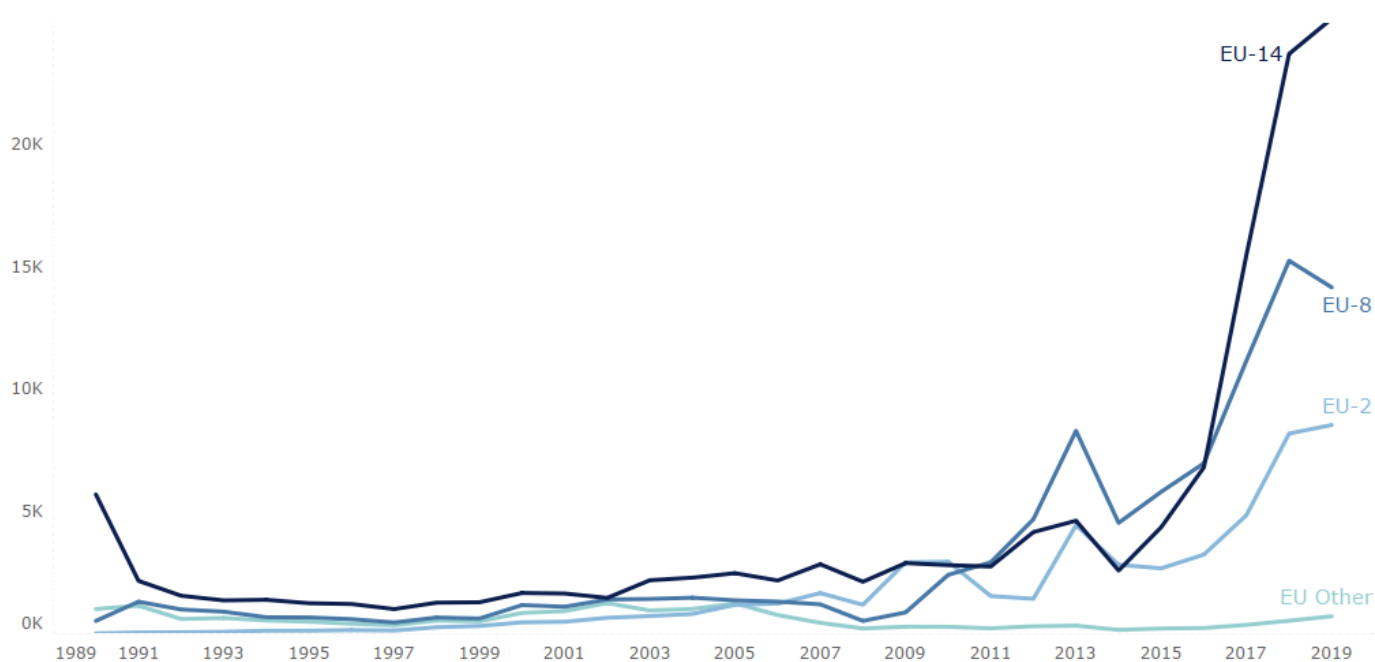
Scholars have argued that political and economic instability in the last ten years have made EU citizens living in other EU states more likely to become citizens than before (Graeber, 2016; Moreh et al., 2019). A recent study based on interviews with EU migrants, for example, found that EU citizens often saw becoming British as a way to ‘escape the negative stigma’ they felt was attached to being a migrant (Sigona and Godin, 2019).

After the Brexit referendum, the number of EU citizens granted UK citizenship increased sharply from previously low levels. From 2010 to 2014, an average of 10,800 EU citizens became UK citizens each year, and by 2019 this had increased to around 48,500 (Figure 3). However, even in 2019, EU citizens made up only 30% of all successful applications, despite making up an estimated 60% of non-UK citizens (Figure 1).

It is possible that these figures will increase from 2020 onwards, once the large number of EU citizens who have been granted settlement through the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) have held this status for at least a year and thus can apply more easily for citizenship.

Figure 3

Grants of UK citizenship by previous citizenship, 1990-2018
Only EU citizens



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Home Office Immigration Statistics, table cz06

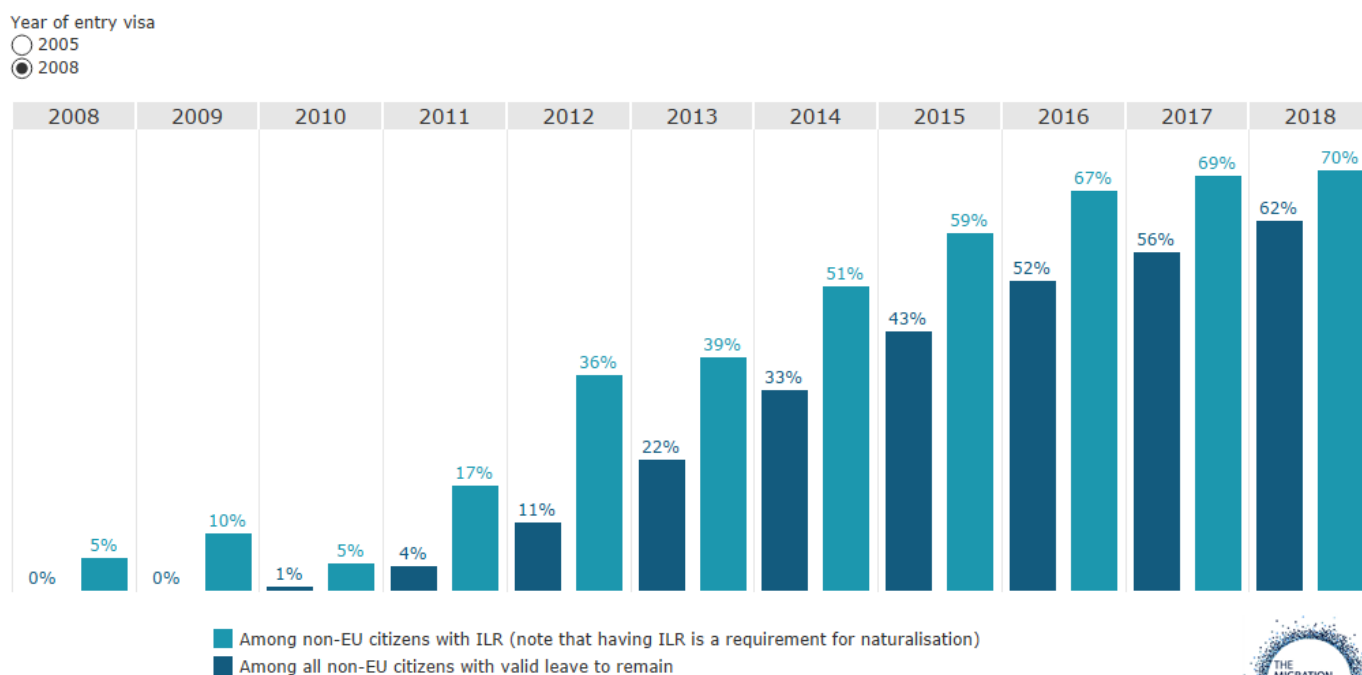


The majority of non-EU migrants who are still in the UK 10 years after getting their initial visa will have become British citizens

The longer people have lived in the UK, the more likely it is that they will have become a UK citizen. The majority of non-EU migrants with more than 10 years of residence since their entry visa are British citizens (Figure 4). For example, among non-EU citizens granted an entry visas in 2005, 65% had become UK citizens by the end of 2015 and 75% by the end of 2018 (Figure 4). The shares are slightly higher (72% by 2015 and 79% by 2018) if we exclude people who do not have ILR and thus will usually be ineligible for citizenship.

Figure 4

Successful applications for British citizenship among non-EU citizens for a given entry year (2005 or 2008)



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Migrant Journey data 2018, table MJ01.
 Note: citizenship status is measured at the end of each year, i.e. the '0-1 years' category gives the status at the end of December for anyone granted a visa d..



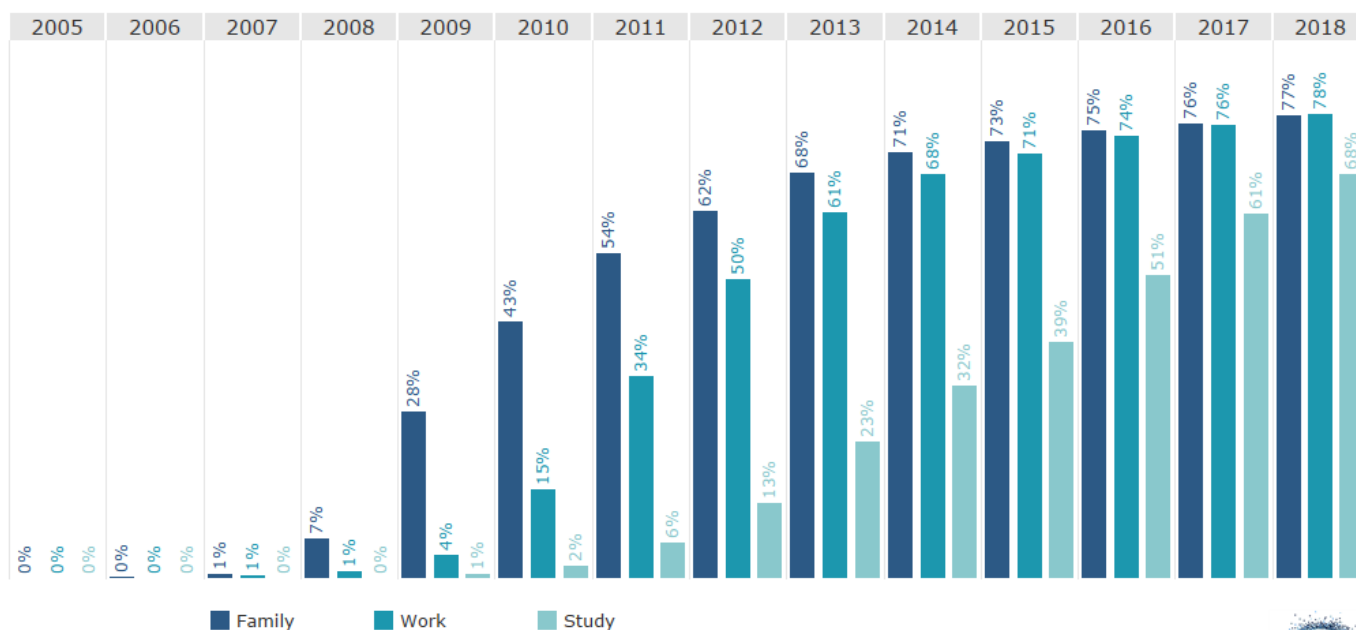
Migrants who come to the UK with a family entry visa receive citizenship faster than those entering with a work or a study visa

The time it takes to become a citizen varies depending on how the person qualified to come to the UK initially (Figure 5). This is primarily because the route to permanent settlement or ILR (which is required before citizenship) is longer for some groups, such as international students. For example, among people granted entry visas in 2005 and whose visas had not expired, family members tended to become citizens the fastest, with 57% already UK citizens by the end of 2011 (i.e. after 6-7 years). International students took longer to become British citizens, but the gap narrowed significantly after 10 years since arrival – so by 2018 the overall the share of UK citizens was only slightly lower for migrants with student entry visas than for those with family entry visas (Figure 5). This mirrors the trends in settlement statistics, where we also see that non-EU students take longer to get ILR, as shown in the Migration Observatory briefing, [Settlement in the UK](#).

Figure 5

Successful applications for British citizenship among non-EU citizens, by entry visa category

Only migrants whose entry visa was issued in 2005



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Migrant Journey 2018, table MJ01

Note: figures exclude non-EU nationals with expired visas; some people with ILR or valid leave to remain may no longer be present in the UK



Evidence suggests that becoming a citizen may help migrants' economic and social integration, especially among those from disadvantaged groups

In policy discussions, citizenship is often seen as something that can help migrants to integrate. For example, the [Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework](#) describes citizenship as an “important bedrock to the integration of any individual in a society” (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019: 18).

However, there is an ongoing political debate about the role of naturalisation on migrants' integration. On one hand, some have argued that it should not be too easy to become a citizen, or that citizenship policy should be a ‘reward’ for integration. For example, a government-commissioned review of citizenship in 2008 suggested that “the requirements for the acquisition of citizenship should stimulate integration and civic participation as well as constitute proof that those processes are taking place to existing citizens” (Goldsmith, 2008).

On the other hand, there is some evidence that becoming a citizen has a positive impact on economic and social integration, suggesting that high barriers to citizenship could make integration harder. For example, the OECD (2011) found that naturalisation improved the labour market outcomes of many groups of foreign nationals in France, Germany, Sweden and the United States, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

A study from Switzerland shows positive effects of naturalisation on social integration (measured by a combination of factors such as planning to stay permanently, local club membership and reading local newspapers), with the largest effects for traditionally marginalised migrant groups (Hainmueller et al., 2017). Another study found that, in Germany, faster access to citizenship improved the economic situation of migrant women, and that migrants with shorter residency requirements for citizenship were more likely to invest in language and vocational training (Gathmann and Keller, 2018). However, such findings are not universal. For example, Bartram (2019) found that

becoming a citizen did not increase measures of political participation among migrants in the UK.

Non-EU migrants from high-income countries are less likely to become UK citizens

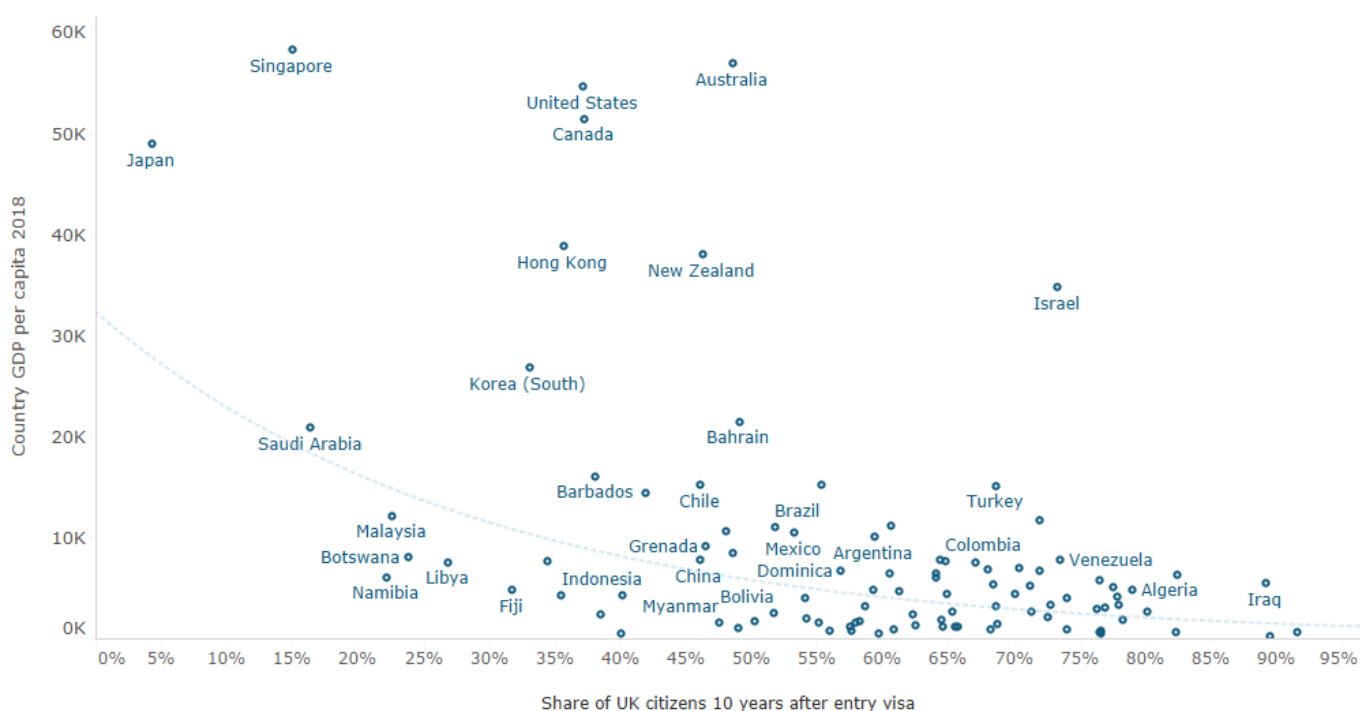
Among the top countries of origin for non-EU citizens, people from higher-income countries are in general less likely to be UK citizens 10 years after arrival than those from lower-income or politically unstable countries (Figure 6). For example, among non-EU citizens granted entry visas for work, family or study in 2004–2008 and who were settled in the UK 10 years later, over 80% of those from the Philippines, Russia, Somalia and Afghanistan were citizens, compared to less than half of those from the United States or Canada (Figure 6).

This is consistent with trends found across EU countries (Dronkers and Vink, 2012), and is thought to be because migrants from lower-income perceive the relative benefits of taking on a new nationality to be higher (Kochenov, 2019)

Figure 6

Relationship between country of origin GDP per capita and UK citizenship acquisition

GDP per capita 2018 of migrants' country of nationality (in constant 2010 US\$) and share of non-EU migrants with UK citizenship 10 years after receiving entry visa



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Migrant Journey 2018 data, table M101 and World Bank data 2018. Note: data refers to all non-EU nationals who were granted an entry visa for work, family or study between 2004 and 2008 and excludes expired visas. Not all those with ILR or citizenship will still be living in the UK. GDP per capita is gross domestic product divided by midyear population. Data is expressed in constant 2010 US dollars



People who moved to the UK as children are more likely to be British citizens, and this trend is particularly clear among the EU born

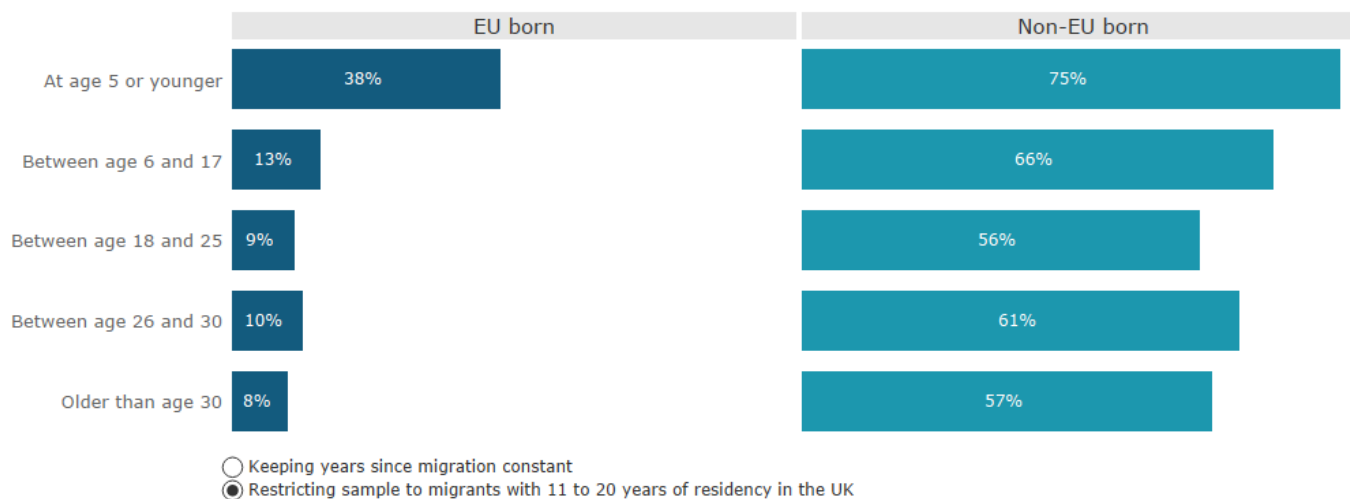
Both EU- and non-EU-born migrants who moved to the UK when they were children (especially those who moved at age 5 or younger) are more likely to be UK citizens than people who moved later. This is partly because people who moved to the UK when they were younger are more likely to have been in the UK for longer than those who

moved at older ages. Figure 8 takes this into account and presents the share of UK nationals among migrants who came to the UK at different ages, but keeps their years of residency in the UK constant (i.e. that is, we show the relationship between age of migration and being an UK national that is unrelated to years of residency in the UK). This confirms previous research showing that migrants who migrate at younger ages are more likely to become citizens (Peters et al., 2016; Chiswick and Miller, 2009). Among people who moved to the UK as adults, however, the likelihood of being a UK citizen is unrelated to their age of migration (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Share of foreign born who are UK nationals, by age at migration, 2018

All ages



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2018

Note: nationality data is self-reported and only captures one citizenship (first citizenship mentioned by respondents). For the estimation which keeps years of residency in the UK constant, we restrict the sample size to those who have been in the UK for more than 5 years. The variable years since migration to the UK has the following categories: during the last two years, between 3 and 5 years ago, between 6 and 10 years ago, between 11 and 15 years ago, and more than 15 years ago

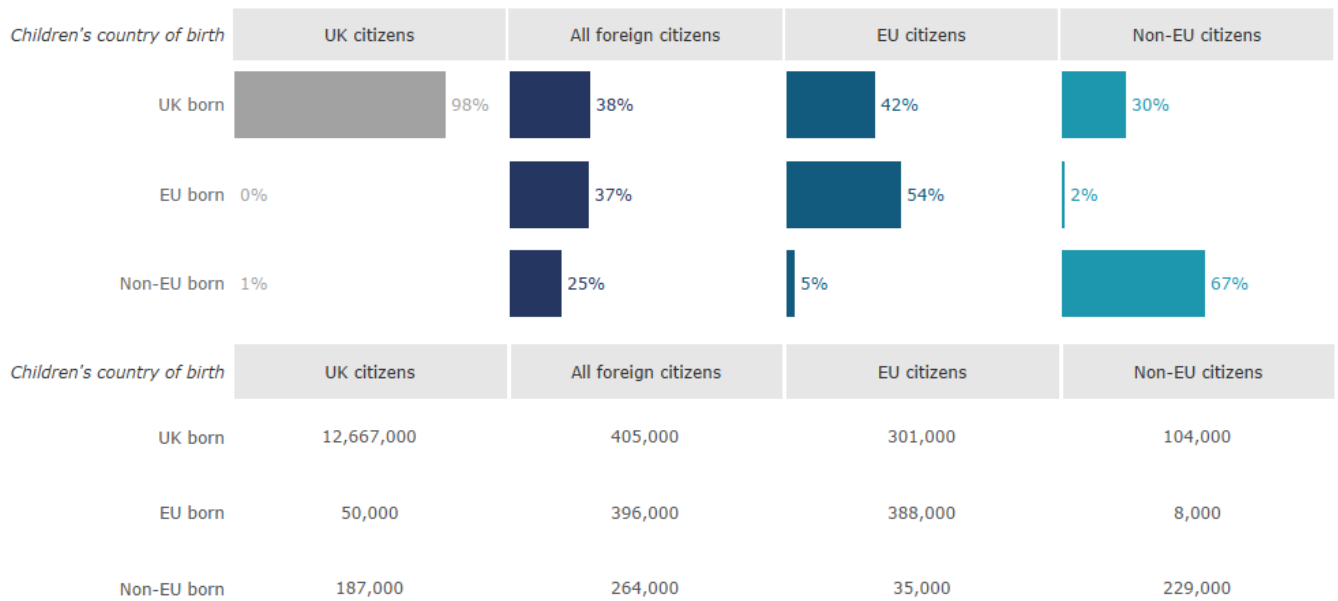


In 2018, there were an estimated 1 million non-UK citizen children living in the UK, of whom approximately 400,000 were born in the UK

UK-born children are not necessarily automatically British nationals. See the Home Office [Registration as a British citizen](#): children for detailed information about the process of becoming a UK national for minors. In 2018, there were an estimated 1,067,000 children under the age of 18 who were not British citizens living in the UK, the majority of whom were EU citizens (Figure 8). Among children with EU citizenship, an estimated 42% (301,000) were born in the UK. Among non-EU citizen children, the share was lower: 30% or 104,000. Note that children's citizenship in the APS data is usually reported by their parents, and in some cases the parents may not know whether their children are UK citizens because of the complexity of citizenship rules (see 'Understanding the Policy,' above).

Figure 8

Children's citizenship by country of birth, 2018
Children under age 18



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2018
Note: nationality data is self-reported or reported by parents/guardians for respondents under age 16, and only captures one citizenship (first citizenship mentioned by respondents)



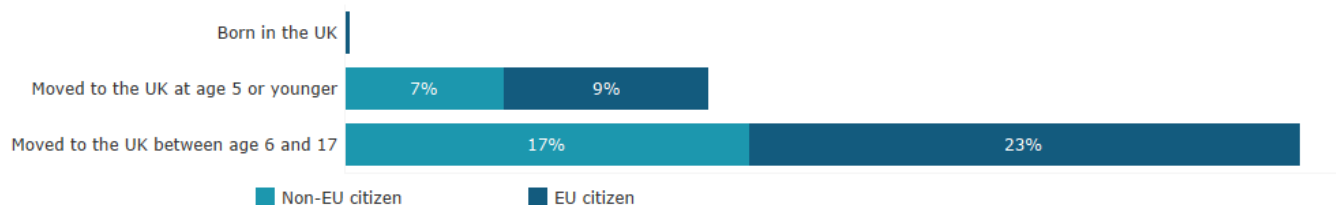
Most children who are currently not UK citizens are likely to become citizens by the time they are adults. However, some do not. In 2018, there were an estimated 90,000 EU or non-EU citizen adults (age 18+) who had been born in the UK, plus 111,000 non-citizen adults who had moved to the UK at age 5 or earlier (Figure 9). (Note that some dual UK citizens may be included in these figures if they report a non-UK nationality first, as described above in *Understanding the Evidence*.) The reasons for remaining a non-citizen cannot be identified in these data, but could include either choice or barriers to registration – for example due to the fee, discussed in the next section.

Figure 9

Non-UK citizen adults who lived in the UK as children, 2018

Only age 18+

What share of adults who lived in the UK as children are non-UK citizens?



How many adults who lived in the UK as children are non-UK citizens?

	EU citizen	Non-EU citizen	All foreign citizens
Born in the UK	66,000	24,000	90,000
Moved to the UK at age 5 or younger	63,000	48,000	111,000
Moved to the UK between age 6 and 17	305,000	224,000	528,000

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2018
 Note: nationality data is self-reported and only captures one citizenship (first citizenship mentioned by respondents)



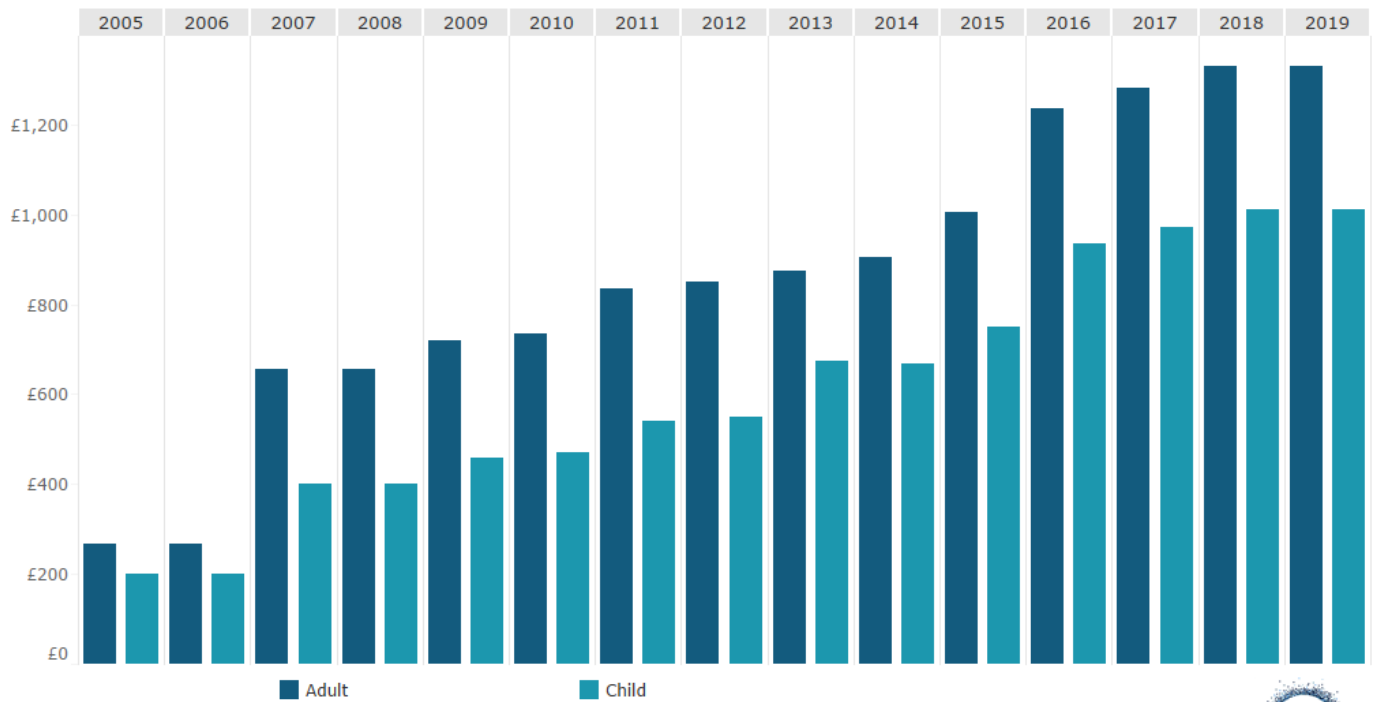
Citizenship fees and language requirements may create barriers to becoming a UK citizen

Citizenship fees in the UK are high compared to many other countries. According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (2015), non-EU citizens in the UK who want to settle permanently or become British citizens face among the highest costs in the developed world. In 2019, the cost of an adult citizenship application was £1,330, up from £268 in 2005 (Figure 10). This compares to an estimated cost of £372 to process each application (Home Office, 2019), and the ‘surplus’ is used to fund other parts of the immigration system. This cost excludes any additional costs applicants may face, such as legal advice or time completing applications.

The effects of fees on the citizenship application rate is hard to measure, although a 2019 report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration documented concerns among lawyers, civil society and applicants about the impacts of high costs of citizenship registration for children in particular (ICIBI, 2019; see also Ealing Law Centre, 2014). EU citizens in the UK have cited the fee as a significant deterrent (Sigona and Godin, 2019), and evidence from the United States (where fees are lower) has found that fee subsidies significantly increased application rates (Hainmueller et al, 2018).

Figure 10

Naturalisation fees, 2005-2019



Source: Immigration and Nationality Fees Regulations on legislation.gov.uk
 Note: includes £80 citizenship ceremony fee for adults



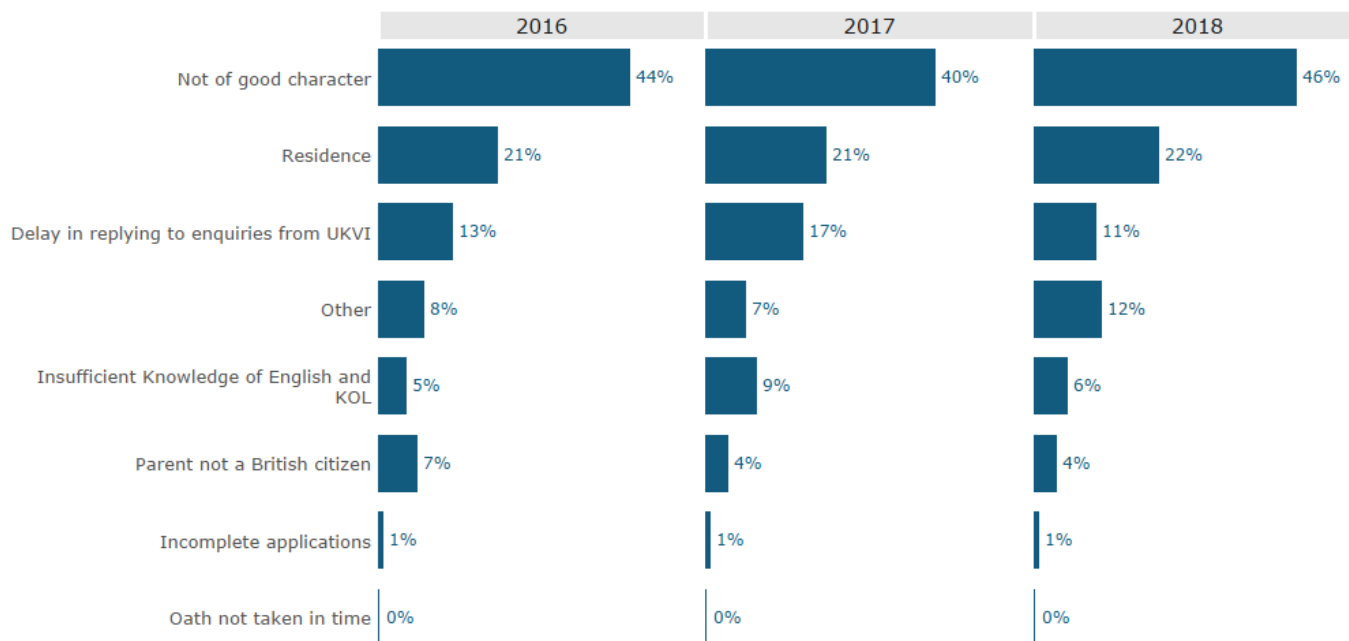
Previous research has identified various other barriers to becoming a UK citizen in addition to fees, including the ‘Life in the UK test’ (see e.g. van Oers, 2014; Valdez-Symonds, 2019). So-called ‘civic integration’ tests like Life in the UK, which was introduced in the UK in 2005, have become common in European countries since the early 2000s (Goodman, 2011).

In total, around 8,400 or 5% of citizenship applications were refused in 2018 (excluding withdrawn applications). The most common reason for refusal was not passing the ‘good character’ test (Figure 11). According to the Home Office, applicants for citizenship aged 10 or older will not be considered of good character if they have been involved in crime, have not paid their taxes, have been deliberately dishonest or deceptive in their dealings with the UK government, have breached immigration law or have been deprived of their citizenship before (Home Office, 2019).

Refusals data do not tell us what the main barriers to citizenship are for non-citizens in the UK; this is because we do not know how many foreign citizens have not applied because they believe that they will be refused or cannot afford the fees.

Figure 11

Refusals of citizenship, 2016-2018



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration statistics, table cz09
 Note: excludes withdrawn applications and applications that are *rejected* (rather than *refused*) without substantive consideration because they were deemed invalid (e.g. because they were incomplete)



In Q2 2019, the pass rate for the ‘Life in the UK’ test was 80% (Home Office, 2019, table LUK_01). This figure by definition only includes those who took the test, and does not show whether people were deterred from applying for citizenship because they believed they would be unable to pass the test.

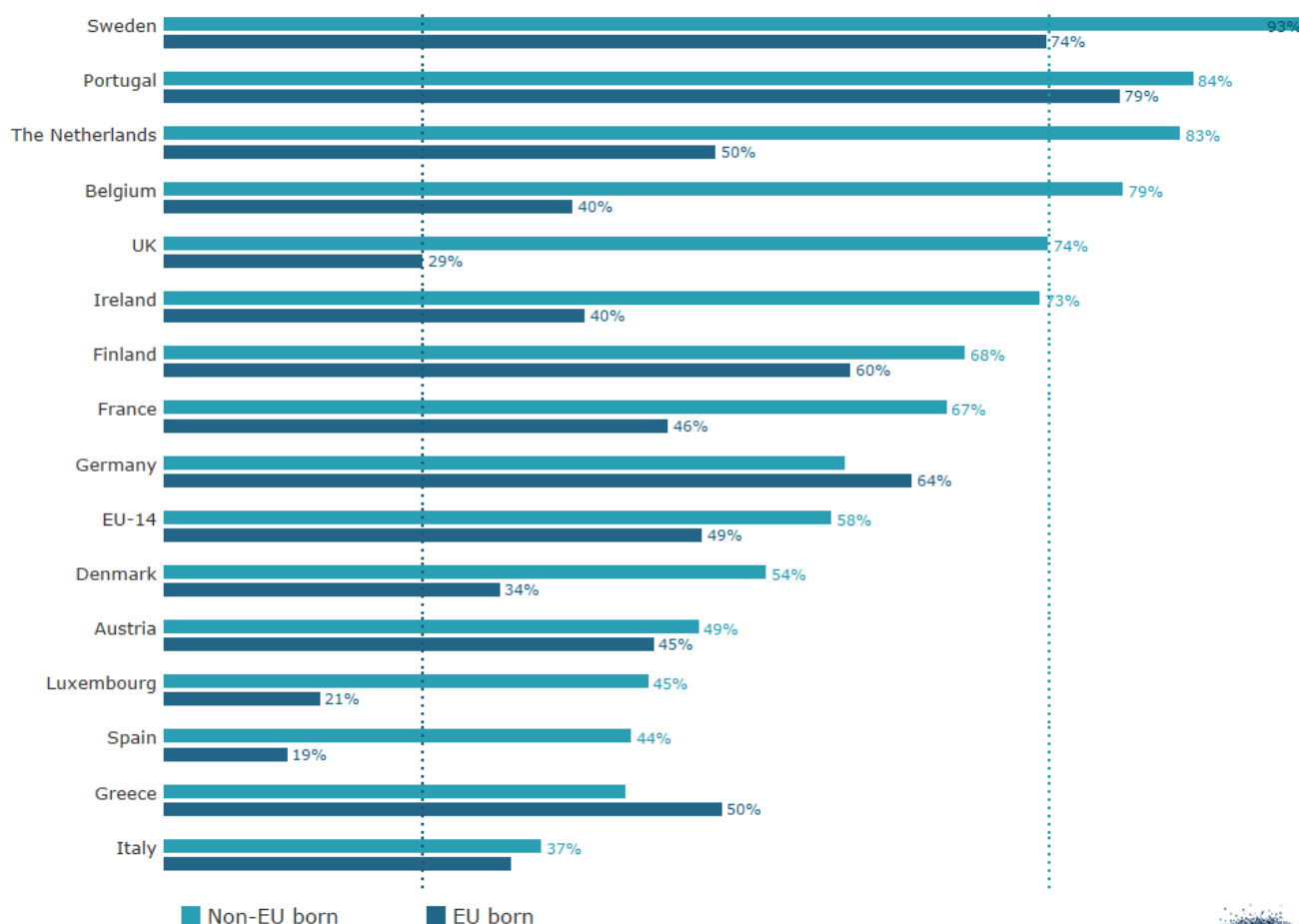
Non-EU migrants are less likely to become citizens of the country where they live in EU-14 countries than in the UK

Non-EU born migrants are more likely to be UK citizens (74% in 2018) than those in EU-14 countries are to be citizens of those countries (58%), when considering migrants with more than 10 years of residence. By contrast, EU-born migrants are less likely to be citizens compared to EU-born migrants living in EU-14 countries (Figure 12).

In general, countries with inclusive citizenship policies such as Sweden or Portugal tend to have higher shares of naturalised migrants (Figure 12). Favourable citizenship policies are typically considered to include factors like the recognition of dual nationality, automatic citizenship for those born in the country of residence, 5-year residence requirement, free and flexible language courses and tests, low citizenship application fees, and security of status once granted (Migrants Integration Policy Index, 2014). Note, however, that the national composition of EU and non-EU migrants varies across EU-14 countries and the UK, and this could also explain some of the differences.

Figure 12

Share of foreign-born population who are citizens of the country where they reside in EU-14 countries and the UK, 2018..



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the EU Labour Force Survey 2018
 Note: the EU-LFS does not distinguish between foreign-born nationals who naturalised (acquired their country of residence citizenship by fulfilling certain requirements) from those who acquired this citizenship by ancestry.



Figure 12 does not distinguish between the foreign-born who naturalised (i.e. acquired their country of residence citizenship by fulfilling certain requirements) from those whose citizenship has been recognised by descent (i.e. because their parents or ancestors were born in that country). In the UK, citizenship by descent is only possible for one generation. In other countries such as Germany, however, many ‘ethnic’ German communities living in the former Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union have been granted German citizenship automatically. This could explain the high share of EU-born German citizens in Germany (64%) relative to the non-EU born (59%).

Evidence gaps and limitations

There is a major gap in the evidence about dual citizenship. As noted above, the UK’s main population survey (the APS) does not capture more than one citizenship and does not prioritise UK citizenship where a person has more than one. Some other data sources that do collect some information on dual citizenship only have information about the passport someone holds; however, a dual citizen may choose not to renew one of their passports if they do not need it to travel, so these figures are likely to understate the prevalence of dual citizenship.

Available data sources for the UK do not tell us when a person became a citizen (e.g. the year of naturalisation) or how they became a citizen (e.g. by descent or residence in the UK), which makes it harder to research the effects of

becoming a citizen on individuals and families.

It is also very difficult to measure the impacts of specific policies related to naturalisation – for example, how many people are deterred from becoming a citizen because of the fees or language requirements. While qualitative research suggests that these policies could have an important impact, few studies have been able to produce a quantitative estimate of the effects (for exceptions, see Hainmueller et al, 2017 and Hainmueller et al, 2018).

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