



**EMBARGO until Friday 14 August 2020, 00:01 (GMT)**

# BRIEFING

## Children of migrants in the UK

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PUBLISHED: 14/08/2020

NEXT UPDATE: 16/08/2021

1st Edition



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This briefing examines what we know about children of migrants who are under age 18 living in the UK. It looks at numbers and shares of foreign-born and non-UK citizen children, immigration statuses and pathways to citizenship, economic circumstances and academic performance.

## Key Points

In 2019, 6% (896,000) of children under age 18 were born abroad, and 8% (1,082,000) were non-UK/non-Irish citizens.

EU citizen children and adults are less likely to apply for UK citizenship than residents with a non-EU nationality.

More than a quarter (3,839,000) of children under age 18 living in the UK have at least one parent who is born abroad.

At the end of 2019, at least 175,643 non-EEA citizens under age 18 lived in families who have no recourse to public funds.

An estimated 43% of children under age 16 in non-EU born households experience some degree of deprivation, while this share is 29% among households where all their members are UK born.

The share of children under age 16 with at least one key-worker parent is 45% among those with UK-born parents, while this share is 38% for children whose parents are non-UK born.

Foreign-born children and children of foreign-born parents perform in school, at age 15, at a lower level than students with both UK-born parents, but the gap is smaller in the UK than in most EU-14 countries.

## Understanding the evidence

This briefing focuses on the *children of migrants* in the UK, who include both children under age 18 born overseas and children born in the UK with at least one parent born abroad, regardless of their citizenship. We also include information on children by citizenship, as acquiring UK citizenship is considered important for their integration as full members of British society (Home Office Indicators of Integration framework, 2019: 18). For a discussion of migration terminology and its effects, see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Who Counts as a Migrant: Definitions and their Consequences](#).

This briefing uses a variety of data sources, including the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)/Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#) 2019, the EU-Labour Force Survey Ad-Hoc Module 2018 on reconciliation between work and family life, the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) 2016–2018, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 survey, and Home Office Migrant Journey: 2019 report data. Given the multiple data sources used for the briefing, we won't describe in detail each of them here, although we include links to each data source in the reference section. It is, however, important to note that the country of birth and citizenship variables are self-reported (or reported by their guardian in the case of children under age 16) in all data sources with the exception of the Home Office data.

The APS/LFS only captures the first citizenship mentioned by respondents (i.e. children's guardian), which means that these surveys are likely to underestimate the number of people who have naturalised, as some people recorded as non-UK citizens will in fact hold dual citizenship. In addition, some migrant parents might not know whether their underage children are British citizens or entitled to apply for citizenship (Laguer et al. 2020).

The APS/LFS, UKHLS and the PISA data are sample surveys and therefore 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 statistically significant.

### Understanding the policy

Most policies that specifically focus on children of migrants tend to be implemented as education policies, as children spend a substantial amount of their time at school. In England, schools collect information on children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL), many of whom are foreign born. Having a low proficiency in English is one of the main factors explaining children of migrants' disadvantage in education, particularly of those arriving when they are older, who are likely to require intensive help with language (Department of Education, 2019; Hutchinson, 2018).

Children of migrants are also indirectly affected by multiple immigration policies, to the extent that these policies condition the lives of their parents. For example, children whose parents have the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status – which applies to most non-EEA citizens who are subject to immigration control – cannot receive free school meals, child benefit support or live in social housing. The UK government has, however, [temporarily extended the eligibility criteria for free school meals](#) to support families at risk during the COVID-19 outbreak.

It is important to clarify that having NRPF is not the same as facing financial hardship – only a small share of those with NRPF will be in this situation. It is not possible to know precisely how many families with NRPF are at significant risk of falling into poverty or destitution with the current data. Recent research has, however, highlighted that children in families on the Family and Private Life ten-year routes to settlement are particularly at risk due their NRPF condition as they are more likely to be on low income (The Children's Society, 2020). The NRPF condition can, however, be lifted if certain criteria are met (Gower, 2020). Home Office policy on lifting the NRPF condition was recently revised (Home Office, 2020a) in light of a High Court ruling in May 2020 that it had been too strict. The policy now recognises that people with this immigration status can apply for public funds if they are at imminent risk of destitution, that is, before they actually experience financial hardship or destitution.

Children of undocumented migrants, a share of whom might be eligible to become UK citizens, also face notable restrictions to access public services. Their exact number is unknown due to lack of accurate data on both the number of non-EU citizens in the UK and the number with right to remain.

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 places a general duty on local authorities to provide services to children in need or at risk of destitution regardless of whether their families have NRPF or are undocumented, although local authorities have discretion to judge what the child's needs are (for detailed information, see section 3 of the [online guidance by the NRPF network on children and families with NRPF](#)). Previous research has shown that there is substantial variation across local authorities in their assessments and services provided to children in need from families with NRPF, which can be explained by factors such as the strength of local advocates or the existence of dedicated NRPF teams (Price and Spencer, 2015).

## In 2019, 6% (896,000) of children under age 18 were born abroad, and 8% (1,082,000) were non-UK/non-Irish citizens

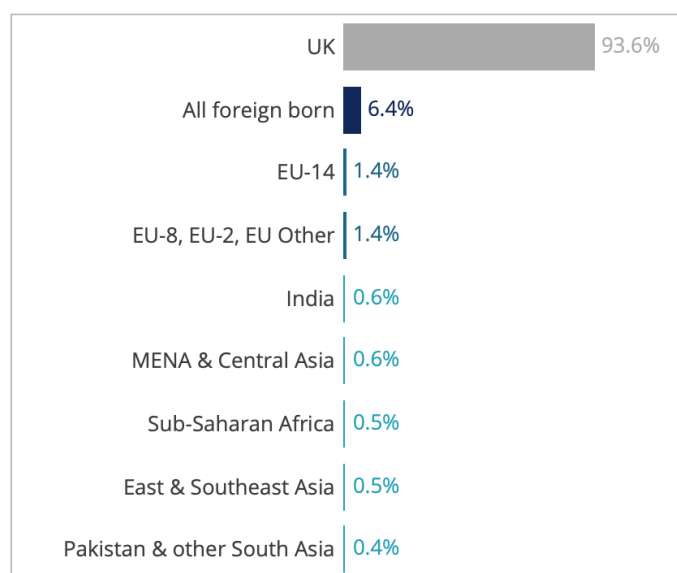
In 2019, 6% (896,000) of children under age 18 living in the UK were born abroad, with half of those children born in EU countries (202,000 in EU-14 countries and 199,000 in post-2004 EU accession countries) (Figure 1). Among the non-EU born population under age 18 (495,000), 88,000 were born in India (17%) and 84,000 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Central Asian countries (17%).

Figure 1a

### Children's citizenship and place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18

○ By citizenship  
● By place of birth



○ By citizenship  
● By place of birth

UK	13,198,000
All foreign born	896,000
EU-14	202,000
EU-8, EU-2, EU Other	199,000
India	88,000
MENA & Central Asia	84,000
Sub-Saharan Africa	76,000
East & Southeast Asia	66,000
Pakistan & other South Asia	59,000

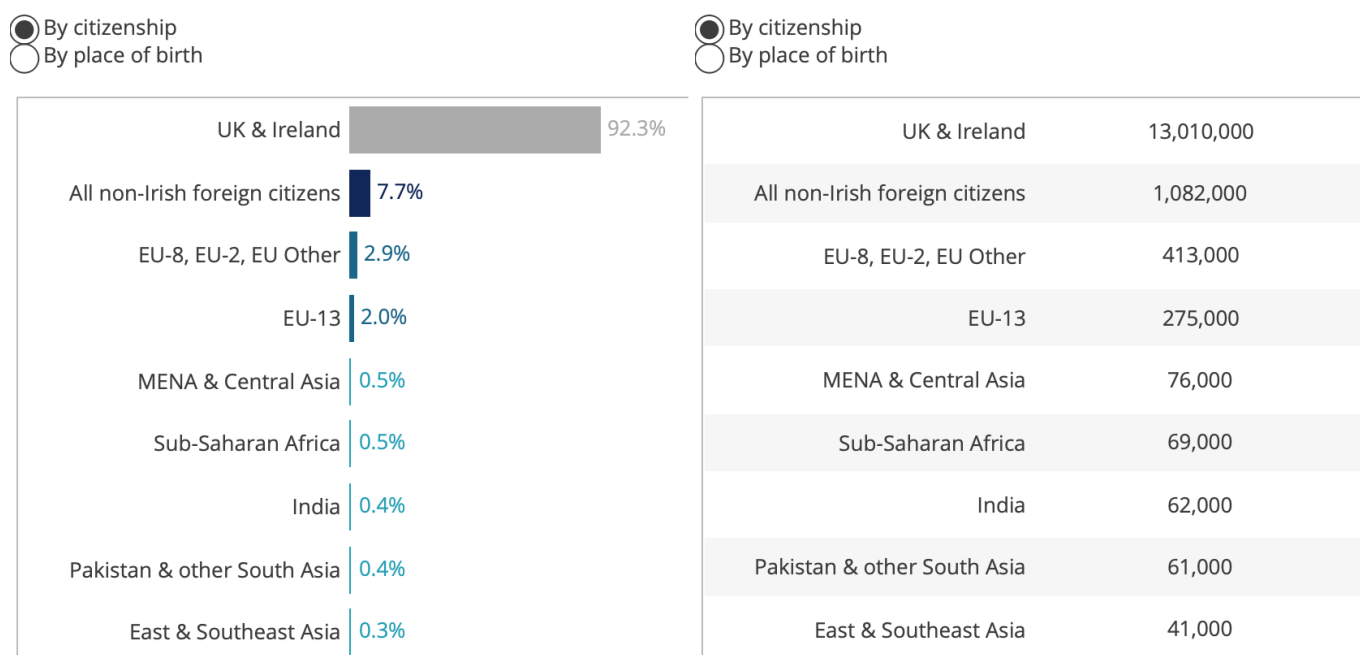
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.



Figure 1b

## Children's citizenship and place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.



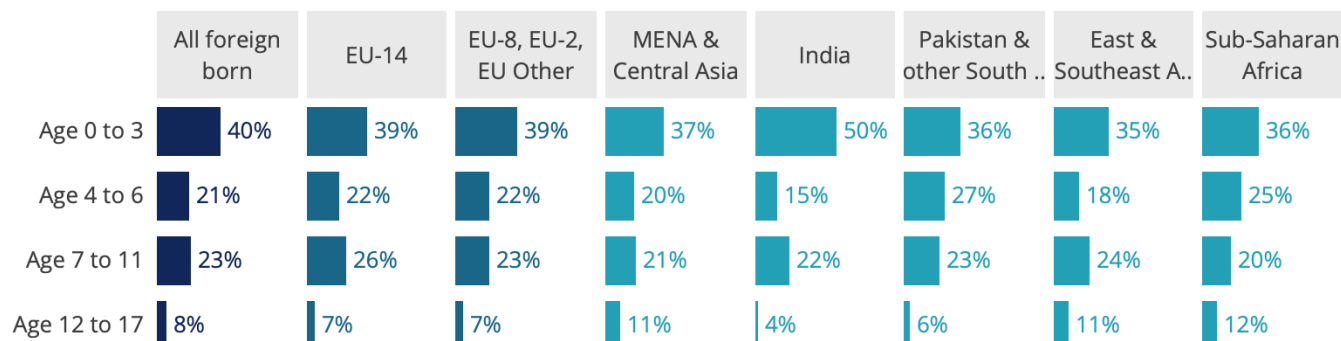
## About 40% of foreign-born children moved to the UK at age 3 or younger

Children who arrive to the destination country when they are younger tend to find it easier to learn the language, if necessary, and to adapt to the new environment (Rumbaut, 2004). For example, in 2018, children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) who started school in England before age 9 have a similar average attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 compared to non-EAL students. By contrast, those arriving after age 12 and, especially, after age 14, performed worse than their non-EAL peers (Department of Education, 2019). In 2019, about 61% of foreign-born children moved to the UK at age 6 or younger (544,000) and 8% (69,000) moved to the UK at age 13 or older (Figure 2).

Figure 2

## Age of arrival to the UK, by region of birth, 2019

Children under age 18



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019.

Note: age of arrival based on age at last arrival

## EU citizen children and adults are less likely to apply for UK citizenship than residents with a non-EU nationality

EU citizens have traditionally been less likely to apply for UK citizenship than citizens from non-EU countries. This explains why the share of EU citizen children among the total non-UK citizen population under age 18 (66%) is higher than the share of EU-born children (45%) (Figure 3). Since the Brexit referendum, the number of EU citizens granted UK citizenship increased sharply from previously low levels and it is possible that this upward trend may continue in the coming years. For more information about differences in citizenship acquisition across migrant groups, see the Migration Observatory briefing [Citizenship and naturalisation for migrants in the UK](#).

Figure 3

## Children under age 18 who are foreign born or non-UK citizens, 2019

Children with non-UK citizenship



Children born outside the UK



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019



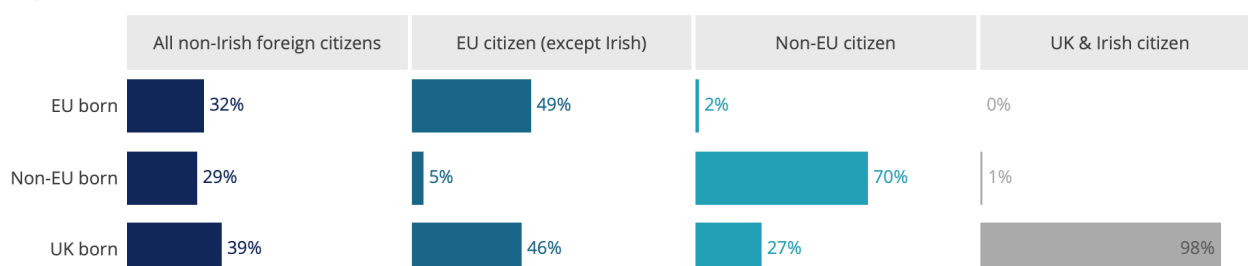
## In 2019, about 39% (421,000) of non-Irish/non-UK citizens under age 18 were born in the UK

Children who are born in the UK are not necessarily British citizens. In 2019, about 39% (421,000) of non-Irish foreign citizens under age 18 were born in the UK (Figure 4). This included 46% (314,000) of EU citizens (excluding Irish) under age 18 and 27% for children with a non-EU citizenship (108,000). Irish citizens, by contrast to other EU citizens, are considered 'settled' from the moment they take up residence in the UK.

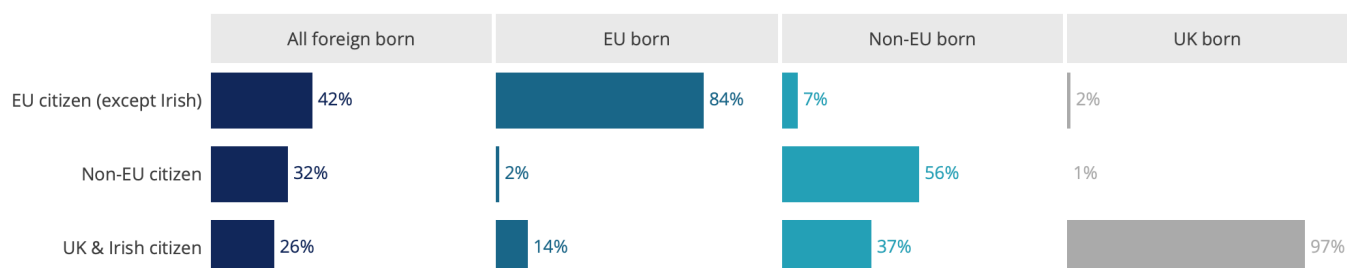
**Figure 4**

Children under age 18 by citizenship and place of birth, 2019

### By citizenship



### By country of birth



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.



If children under age 18 were born in the UK to at least one British or settled parent (e.g. with indefinite leave to remain [ILR] or settled status) at the time of birth then they are automatically British citizens and do not have to pay any fees for their citizenship application. Children can also apply to register as British citizens (and thus pay a fee for their application) by entitlement if they were born in the UK and their parents became British citizens or settled residents; if they were born and lived in the UK until age 10; or if they were born in the UK, have always been stateless, have lived in the UK for the last five years and are under 22 years old at the date of the application. In 2019, there were about 177,000 children with non-UK citizenship who have been living in the UK for at least 10 years (Table 1).

There is also a general discretion for the Home Secretary to register any child as British, but these type of applications usually require legal guidance due to their complexity and are decided by the Home Office on a case by case basis (CORAM Children's Legal Centre, 2017).

**Table 1***How many non-UK citizens under age 18 have been in the UK for at least 10 years?*

		<i>Number</i>	<i>Share among children with same citizenship</i>
EU citizen	Foreign born	66,000	9%
	UK born	63,000	8%
Non-EU citizen	Foreign born	26,000	7%
	UK born	22,000	6%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2019

### More than a quarter of children under age 18 living in the UK have at least one parent who is born abroad

More than a quarter (28% or 3,839,000) of children under age 18 living in the UK have at least one parent who is born abroad (Figure 5). An estimated 14% of children living in the UK are UK born themselves and have both parents born abroad (1,927,000). The share of children with a parent born abroad and a UK-born parent is 9% (1,201,000).

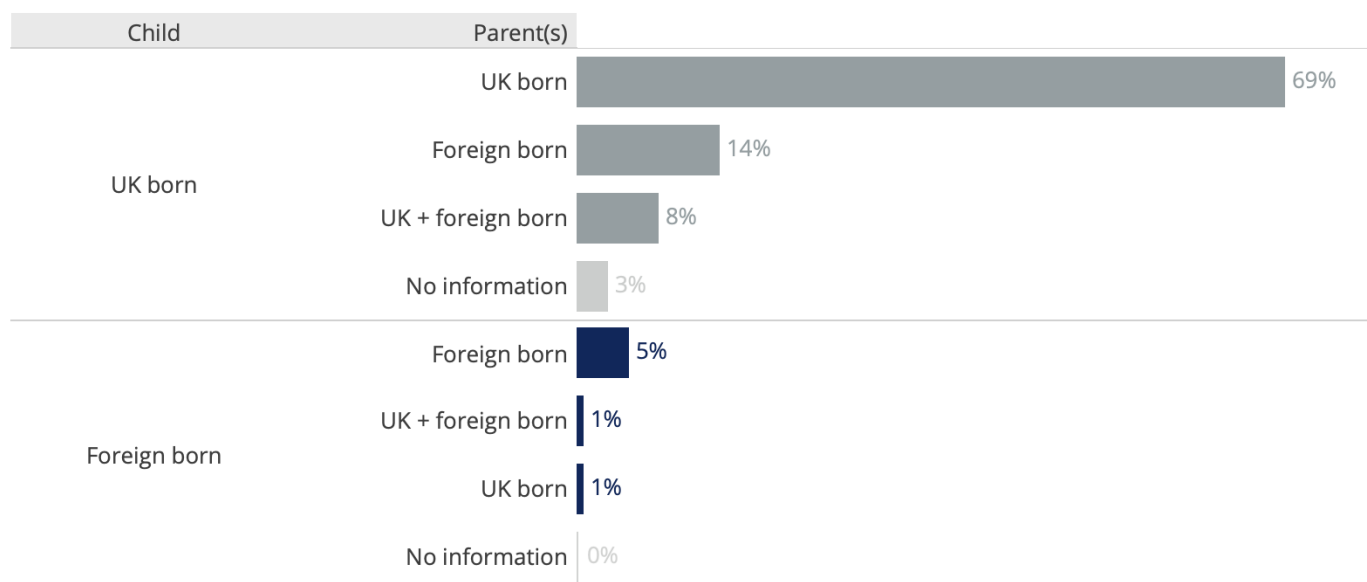


Figure 5a

## Children under age 18 by parents' citizenship/place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18

- By citizenship  
● By place of birth



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2019 (average of four quarters).

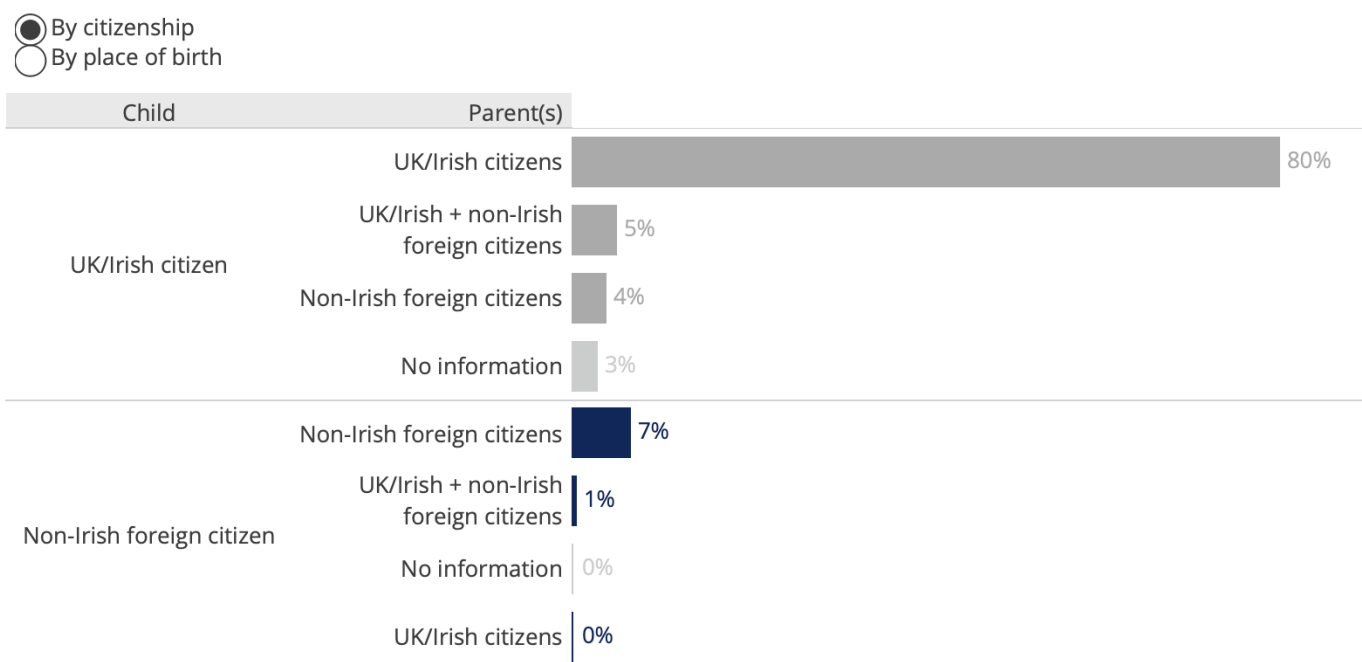
Note: the category 'no information' refers to cases where it is not possible to link parents' to children's data. The Labour Force Survey does not provide information about parents' citizenship or country of birth if they are not living in the same household as the child. In those cases, we only consider information of the coresident parent. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.



Figure 5b

## Children under age 18 by parents' citizenship/place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2019 (average of four quarters).

Note: the category 'no information' refers to cases where it is not possible to link parents' to children's data. The Labour Force Survey does not provide information about parents' citizenship or country of birth if they are not living in the same household as the child. In those cases, we only consider information of the coresident parent. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.



Among children whose parents were born in different regions, the most common combination is to have a UK-born parent and a parent born in North Africa, the Middle East or an Asian country (408,000 children, of which 255,000 have a South-Asian born parent); and a UK-born parent and a parent born in a EU-14 country (302,000 children) (Figure 6). Among children whose parents were born in the same non-UK region, the most frequent combination is having parents born in South Asia (550,000), which represents over two thirds of children in the 'MENA and Asia' category (Figure 6).

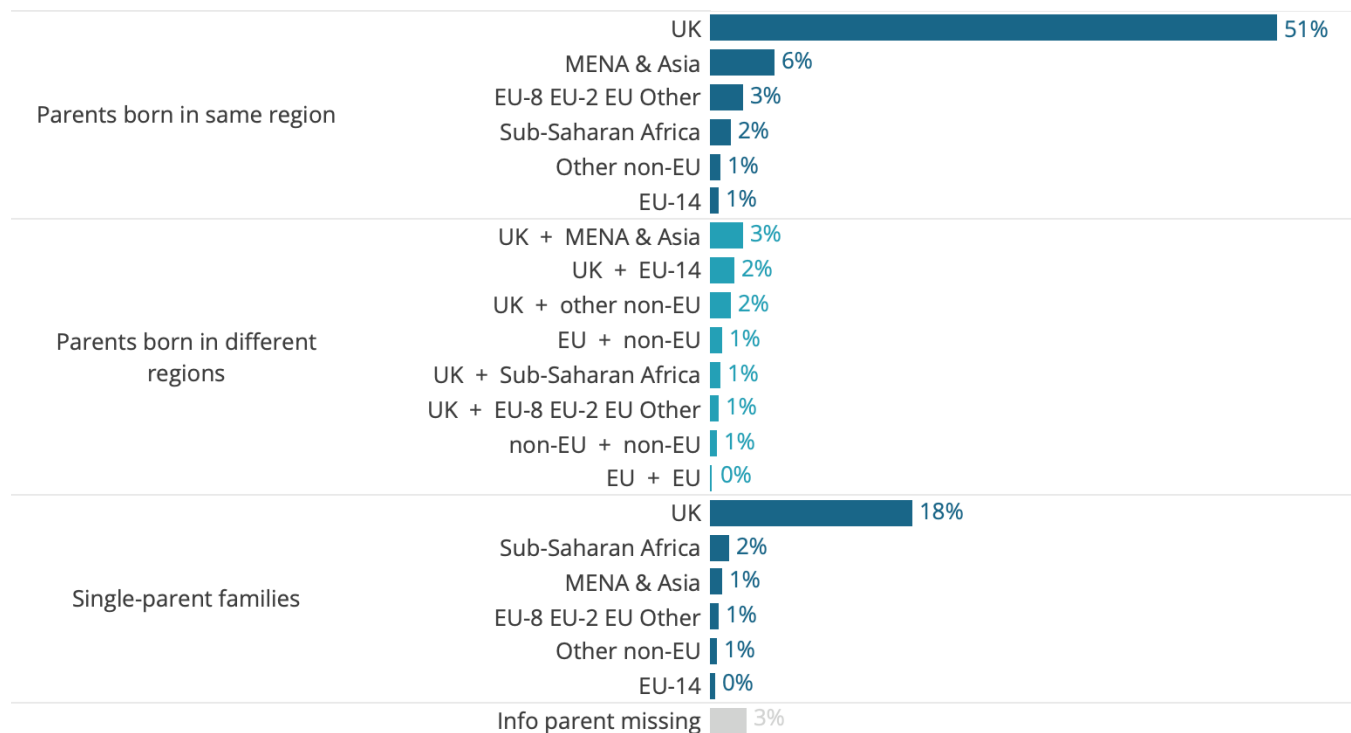
Figure 6a

## Children under age 18 by parents' citizenship/place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18

○ By citizenship

● By place of birth



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2019.

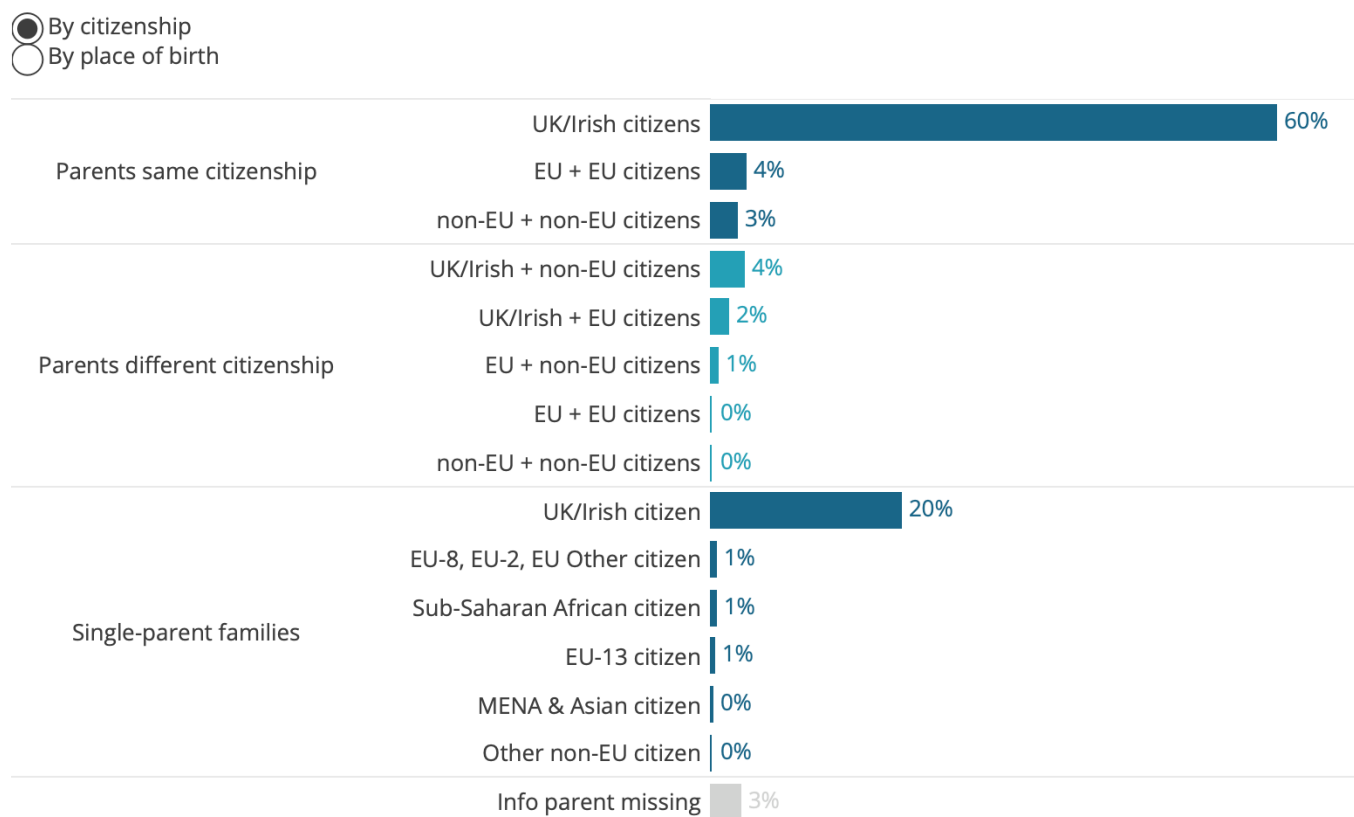
Note: the category 'no information' refers to cases where it is not possible to link parents' to children's data. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) does not provide information about parents' citizenship or country of birth if they are not living in the *same household* as the child; in those cases, we only consider information of the coresident parent. In the LFS, information on country of birth and nationality is presented in an aggregate format with the following categories: UK, EU-15, EU-8, EU-2, EU Other, Other Europe, Middle East and Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, North America, Central and South America, and Oceania. These regional categories have been used to determine whether parents were born in the same or different regions.



Figure 6b

## Children under age 18 by parents' citizenship/place of birth, 2019

All children under age 18



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2019.

Note: the category 'no information' refers to cases where it is not possible to link parents' to children's data. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) does not provide information about parents' citizenship or country of birth if they are not living in the *same household* as the child; in those cases, we only consider information of the coresident parent. In the LFS, information on country of birth and nationality is presented in an aggregate format with the following categories: UK, EU-15, EU-8, EU-2, EU Other, Other Europe, Middle East and Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, North America, Central and South America, and Oceania. These regional categories have been used to determine whether parents were born in the same or different regions.



## At the end of 2019, at least 175,643 non-EEA citizens under age 18 live in families who would be expected to have no recourse to public funds

Most children who are non-EEA citizens (citizens from countries other than EU-27, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and who do not have permanent residency in the UK (ILR) have visas with the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status, which prevents them from accessing most state-funded benefits, tax credits and housing assistance. By the end of 2019, there were at least 175,643 children under age 18 in families who would be expected to have NRPF (Table 2). Note that some of these children might have had their NRPF condition lifted, albeit the number is likely to be small. However, there has been a sharp increase in change of conditions applications during the lockdown (Home Office, 2020b), which could be a consequence of the worsening of economic situation due to the pandemic. The Home Office has also extended the criteria for granting recourse to public funds to people who apply for leave to remain on the basis of family or private life, following [a high court decision](#) in May 2020.

This includes children under age 18 on student visas (44,623); children who moved to the UK as family members on their parents' work visa (79,696) or as dependants joining or accompanying a family member (10,983); and children in the 'other' visas category (15,323), who are those moving to the UK with an out-of-country visa (work,

family, study) but then switched to other grants of leave, including grants of discretionary leave. The total number of 175,643 children likely to have NRPF does not include children of irregular parents, who cannot access public funds or services due to their irregular status. The exact number of children with an irregular immigration status is unknown because there is no administrative data on both the number of non-EU citizens in the UK and the number of people with leave to remain (for a discussion of the problems to measure the number of irregular migrants in the UK, see the commentary on [Pew Research Centre Estimates](#)).

There are 11,375 children whose asylum application was still pending as of January 2020, a number that includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Table 2). Children in asylum-seeking families are likely to face financial hardship because their parents or legal guardians are not allowed to work, although they can apply for Section 95 support, which, at the time of writing, covers housing plus £39.60 per week for each person (at the time of writing). Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are under the care of local authorities' children's services (5,070 in 2019).

**Table 2**

### Children with valid leave to remain other than ILR or citizenship at the end of 2019 (for those issued visas from 2004 onwards) and with pending asylum applications at the end of January 2020

*Children with valid leave to remain other than ILR or citizenship at the end of 2019 (for those issued visas from 2004 onwards)*

No NRPF	EEA Family Permits	25,616
	Protection*	4,252
NRPF	Family	25,018
	Dependant joining or accompanying	10,983
	Other	15,323
	Study	44,623
	Work - Non-PBS & Other	379
	Work - Tier 1	8,213
	Work - Tier 2	69,142
	Work - Tier 5	1,962
	Total NRPF	175,643

### *Children with pending asylum applications at the end of January 2020*

Asylum application pending (Jan 2020)	11,375
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Source: Home Office Migrant Journey: 2019 report data, table MJ\_D01 and underlying datasets. Eurostat migr\_asypenctzm asylum data.

Note: **this table only includes children who were initially granted an out-of-country entry visa.** It does not include children who have been granted protection (asylum, humanitarian protection or alternative forms of leave or resettlement) as a result of an in-country application. **It is not possible to tell from the data whether individuals are currently in the UK. Some of these children might have had their NRPF condition lifted.**

\* The protection category only includes children who moved to the UK with an out-of-country visa. Protection grants that are the result of in-country applications are thus not included in this data.

## The exact number of eligible children who have not yet applied to the EU Settlement Scheme is unknown

By the end of March 2020, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) scheme had seen 261,880 grants of settled status and 150,940 grants of pre-settled status given to children under age 18 (Table 3). EEA citizens and their qualifying family members living in the UK before the 31st of December 2020 are required to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme before the 30th of June 2021 in order to secure their right to continue to live lawfully in the UK. Parents or legal guardians can link their EUSS application to their children's; in these cases, all family members included in a linked applications will receive the same status.

It is not possible to know the exact number of eligible resident children who have not yet applied because there is no population register in the UK. In addition, it is not clear how many children are eligible to apply. This means we cannot make straightforward comparisons between the Home Office data on (pre-)settled status applications and the ONS estimates of the EU citizen children population (for a discussion of the EU Settlement Scheme, see the Migration Observatory report [Not Settled Yet? Understanding the EU Settlement Scheme using the Available Data](#)). For example, the estimated number of non-Irish EU citizen children residing in the UK in the first quarter of 2019 is 683,000 (this number could be slightly higher given that children's nationality is based on self-reporting and some parents might not be aware that their UK-born children need to register in order to become UK citizens), but the number of concluded applications of EEA citizen children by March 2020 is 415,140 (261,880 corresponding to grants of settled status and 150,940 to grants of pre-settled status)(Table 3). If we make a direct comparison between the Home Office EUSS statistics and the ONS estimates of the resident population, we would conclude that 61% of EEA citizen residents under age 18 have applied to the EUSS, while the same share for adults is 101%. However, it is not possible to calculate a valid estimate of children's nor adults' take-up rates with the available data and it is thus difficult to conclude that the take-up rate of children is substantially lower than that of adults.

Civil society organisations have raised concerns about EEA children in care in the UK – 5,000 in 2019, according to the Home Office ([written question 222791](#)) and 4,000 care leavers – who need to apply to the EUSS. As of January 2020, 3,612 of children in care and care leavers had been identified by local authorities and 11% had been awarded status (The Children's Society, 2020).

Table 3

## Concluded applications to the EU settlement scheme, by outcome type, at the end of March 2020

Children under age 18 with EEA citizenship or with EEA citizen parents

Application outcome	Applications	Share of total with the same outcome
Settled	261,880	14%
Pre-settled	150,940	12%
Withdrawn or Void	1,790	8%
Invalid	520	5%
Refused	20	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>415,140</b>	<b>13%</b>

## Non-Irish EU citizen children living in the UK, Jan-March 2019

In the UK for 5 years or longer	400,000	59%
In the UK for less than 5 years	283,000	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>683,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Home Office EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) statistics to end March 2020 (Table EUSS\_04) and the Labour Force Survey quarter Jan-March 2019.

Note: we cannot directly compare Home Office EUSS statistics with ONS data on resident population. For a discussion of this topic, see the Migration Observatory report *Not Settled Yet? Understanding the EU Settlement Scheme using the Available Data*.



## About 43% of children under age 16 in non-EU born households experience some degree of material deprivation, while this share is 29% among households where all family members are UK born

The material deprivation index for children (under age 16) aims at capturing their living standards and measures the *inability* of households *to afford* particular goods and activities that are typical among children, *irrespective of whether they would choose to have these items*. In order to measure children's material deprivation, parent(s) (or children's guardian) are asked questions such as, for example, whether they could afford to go on holiday once a year, whether children have access to an outdoor space where they can play, or whether they can afford eating fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Not all items are equally important and hence the index of material deprivation gives different weights to each of them.

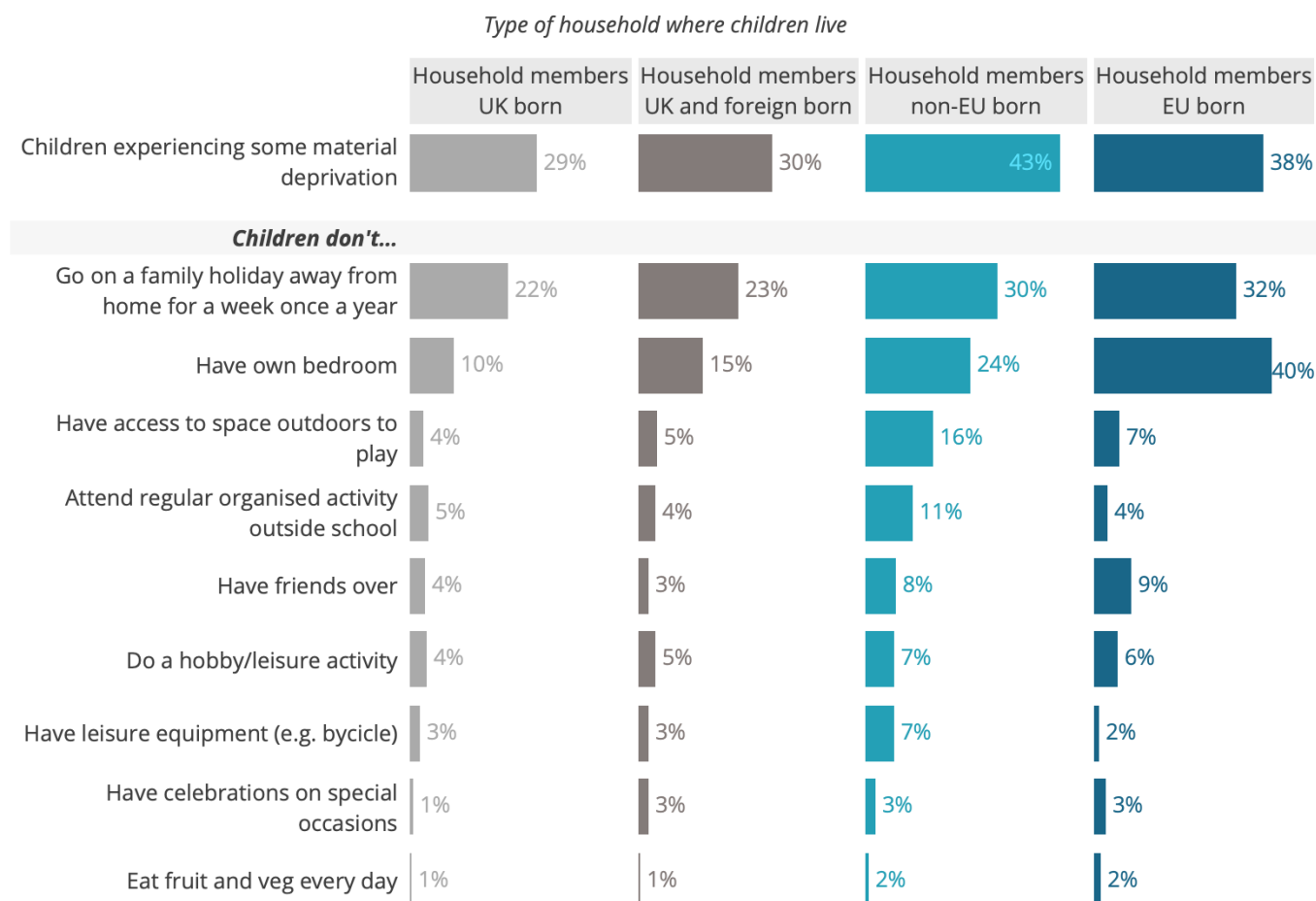
Children in migrant households are more likely to experience material deprivation (i.e. lacking at least one of the items of the index because their families cannot afford it) than children in households where all family members are UK born (Figure 7). Material deprivation is highest among children living in households where all their members are non-EU born; for example, 16% of children in non-EU households don't have access to a space outdoors to play,

while this share is 4% among UK-born households, while 40% of children in households where all members are EU-born don't have their own bedroom, compared to 10% among UK-born families (Figure 7).

Figure 7

## Share of children under age 16 who experience some degree of material deprivation, by household composition, 2016-2018

Children under age 16



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the UK Household Longitudinal Survey/Understanding Society, wave 8.

Note: material deprivation index for children (under age 16) measures living standards and refers to the *inability of households to afford* particular goods and activities that are typical among children at a given point in time, irrespective of whether they would choose to have these items, even if they could afford them. The household composition takes into account the country of birth of all household members aged 16 and above. The 'EU born' category includes a small number of mixed EU and non-EU born households.



Children in recent migrant families are also more likely to live in poverty compared to those in UK-born or long-term resident families, according to recent research (Vizard et al., 2018). This is because they are more likely to live in households where at least one adult is not in employment, in privately rented accommodation and are more likely to have NRPF due to their parents' immigration status.

**The share of population with childcare responsibilities using childcare services is lower among people born in new EU accession countries (12%) or in South Asia and Southeast Asia (11%) than among those born in the UK (20%) or EU-14 countries (28%)**



Among adults with childcare responsibilities, those born in EU-14 countries were most likely to use childcare services (28%) in 2018, while this share was 12% among adults born in post-2004 EU countries, and 11% among those born in South Asia and Southeast Asian countries (Figure 8). Differences in childcare services use can be explained by factors such as household composition and economic resources or the number of economically inactive adults within the household, among others.

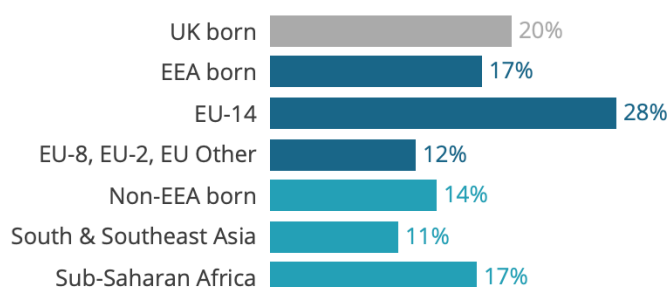
More than half of respondents mentioned that the main reason for not using childcare services is because they managed to take care of their children alone, with their partners or with further informal support (Figure 8). The share of people who do not use childcare services because of the high cost is lowest among the UK born (15% among those who do not use these services) and highest among Sub-Saharan African born adults (24%). Migrant parents granted leave with NRPF are not allowed to apply to all the existing childcare schemes, so these different entitlements might explain some of the observed differences across migrant groups. Since September 2019, the eligibility criteria to access government-funded early education and childcare has been extended to include 2-year-old children in low-income NRPF families.

**Figure 8**

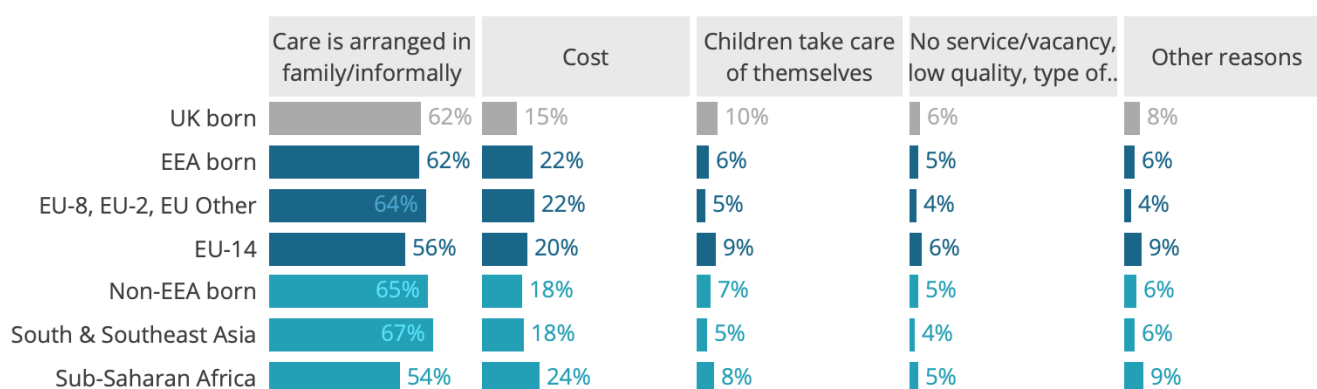
## Use of childcare services, by region of birth, 2018

Population aged 18 to 64 with childcare responsibilities

### Share using childcare services for all their children



### Main reason for not using childcare services (among those who do not use them\*)



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the EU-Labour Force Survey Ad-Hoc Module 2018 on reconciliation between work and family life.

Note: care responsibilities are assumed to exist for all respondents' and spouses' or cohabiting partners' children up to the age of 14 who live inside the household. The category 'EU-14' also includes people born Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

\* Includes a small share who use childcare services *only for some* of their children



## **The share of children under 16 with at least one key-worker parent is 45% among those with UK-born parents, while this share is 38% for children whose both parents are non-UK born**

In March 2020, the Cabinet Office and Department for Education jointly published a list of occupations and sectors considered central to maintaining basic economic and public health infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this list is to identify people who should be able to go to work if they need to and send their children to school. Since the 23rd of March 2020, all schools in the UK have been shut down for at least two months, but children of key workers and other vulnerable children continued attending school during this period.

The share of children under 16 with at least one key-worker parent is 45% among those with UK-born parents (including children with a UK-born single parent), while this share is 38% for children whose parents are both non-UK born (911,000) and 44% for children with a UK-born and a foreign-born parent (478,000) (Figure 9). These differences reflect the different occupational profiles across migrant communities; for example, the share of key workers is higher among people born in India or Sub-Saharan Africa due to their high presence in the health care sectors (for an analysis of migrant key workers, see the Migration Observatory report, [Locking out the keys?](#)).

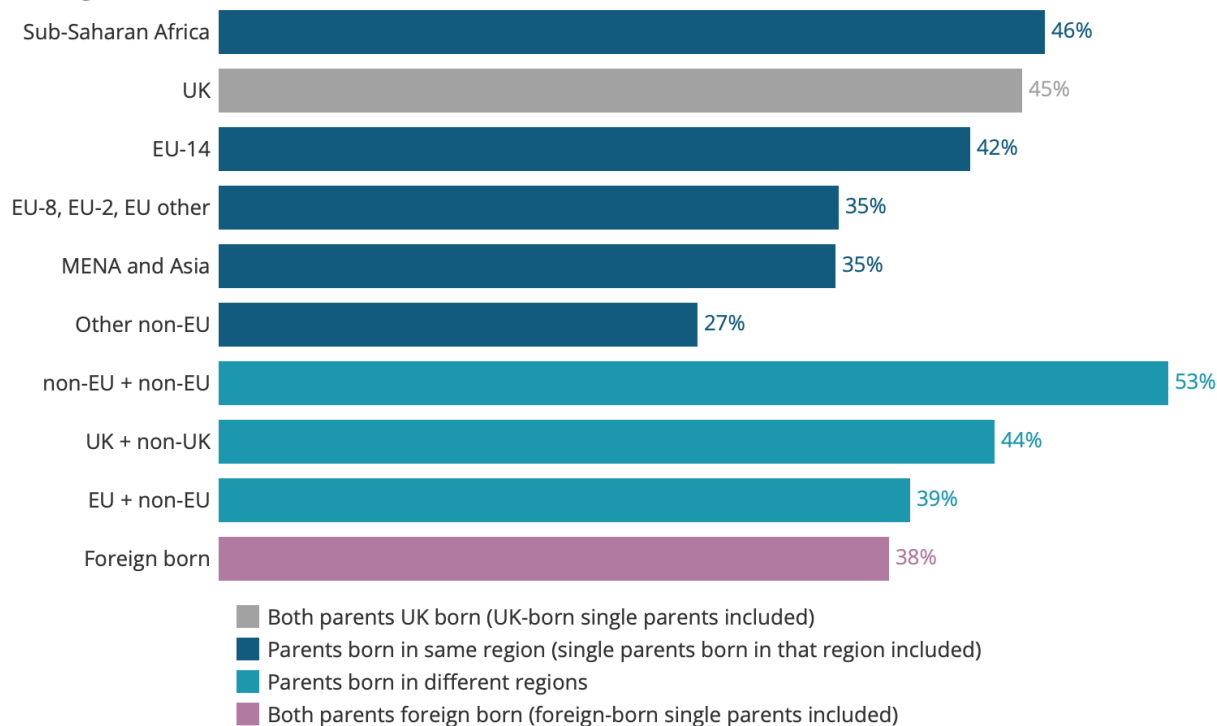
While not all schools and childcare providers will have been able to stay open for eligible children, it is expected that children of key workers will have been more likely, on average, to be at school settings during the lockdown than children whose parents are not key workers. Scholars have highlighted that remote learning during the pandemic might be detrimental for children of disadvantaged backgrounds (for a summary of the evidence on remote learning on educational outcomes, see Drayton et al., 2020).

Figure 9

## Share of children with at least one key worker parent, across parents' regions of birth, 2019

Children under age 16

### Parents' region of birth



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2019 (average of four quarters).

Note: children who cannot be linked to parents' are excluded from the chart. The Labour Force Survey does not provide information about parents' citizenship or country of birth if they are not living in the same household as the child. In those cases, we only consider information of the coresident parent. Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding. Key workers (those whose work is considered critical to the COVID-19 response) have been identified following ONS interpretation of UK government guidelines.



## Foreign-born children and children of foreign-born parents perform, at age 15, at a lower level than students without a migrant background, but their disadvantage is substantially smaller in the UK than in most EU-14 countries

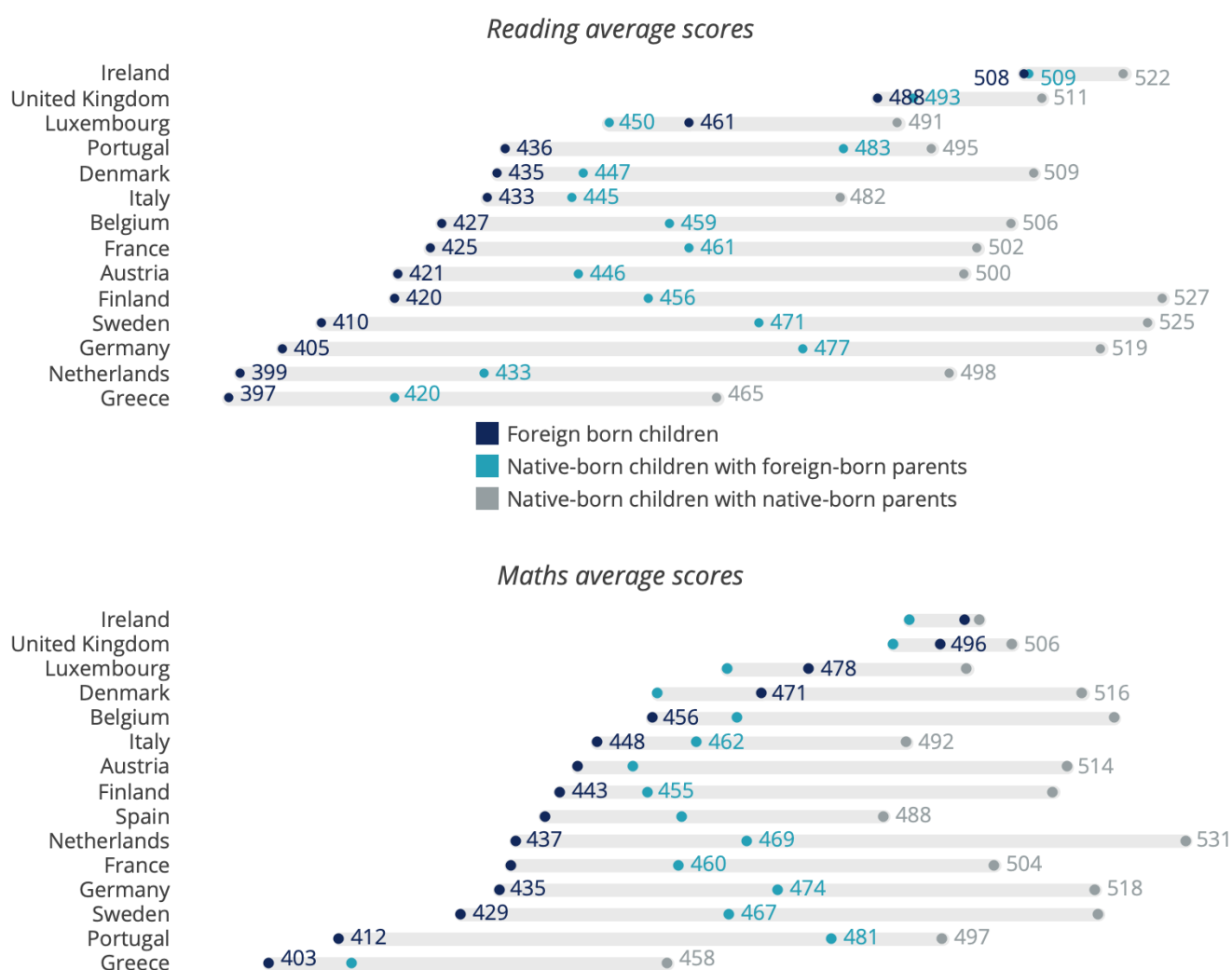
The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to evaluate 15-year-old students' performance in maths, science and reading. This survey allows us to compare students' skills in these three subjects across multiple countries. In most OECD countries, children with non-migrant parents outperformed children born abroad as well as those born in the country with parents born abroad (OECD, 2019).

The gap in performance is, however, much smaller in the UK and Ireland compared to other EU-14 countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany or France (Figure 10). Countries that separate students into different academic and vocational paths at an early age (e.g. Germany or the Netherlands) tend to have larger gaps in performance between migrant and non-migrant students at age 15 simply because migrants are more likely to be in vocational schools. However, migrant students are also heavily disadvantaged in other EU-14 countries with educational systems that do not separate students before age 16, e.g. Sweden, Italy, or Spain.

Figure 10

## Average scores in Reading and Maths, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018

Students aged 15 in the UK and EU-14 countries



Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2018 Reading, Mathematics and Science.



## Evidence gaps and limitations

This briefing uses multiple data sources and addresses different topics that are relevant to understand the situation of children of migrants in the UK. Each data source and section of the briefing has thus its own limitations. One of the main limitations, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis, is the inability to identify the exact number of children in NRPF families that are facing economic hardship. This is because surveys do not ask respondents about their immigration status and Home Office administrative data does not have information on visa holders' economic situation or labour market status.

This briefing does not include information on the exact impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant children's educational outcomes. Next year Department of Education statistics based on the National Pupil Database will shed some light on the differential impact that remote learning and school closure might have had on children living in

economically disadvantaged families.

*Thanks to **CJ McKinney**, **Rupinder Parhar** and **Ilona Pinter** and **Carlos Vargas-Silva** for providing valuable feedback on an earlier draft. This briefing is part of the Migration Observatory's Integration Initiative, which is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF). The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is an independent funder working to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives. This briefing was also made possible by the University of Oxford Social Science Division's Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Impacts of Covid-19 – Urgent Response Fund.*

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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.



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## Recommended citation

Fernández-Reino, M. (2020) *Children of Migrants in the UK*. Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford