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Brexodus of EU citizens from the UK is picking up speed

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Fewer EU citizens are now coming to the UK and more are leaving, according to new migration statistics that give credence to the idea of a growing “Brexodus” following the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

Overall 90,000 more EU citizens came to the UK than left in the year to September 2017, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), but this level of net migration was 75,000 lower than the same figure in September 2016. In the same period, 130,000 EU citizens emigrated, the most since 2008.

The ONS head of migration statistics, Nicola White, said Brexit “could well be a factor in people’s decision to move to or from the UK,” though she noted that “people’s decision to migrate is complicated and can be influenced by lots of different reasons.”

Overall net migration – the difference between the number of people coming to the UK and the number of those leaving – stood at 244,000 in the year to September 2017. This was 29,000 lower than the previous year, though it is not a statistically significant change. While these levels

Author



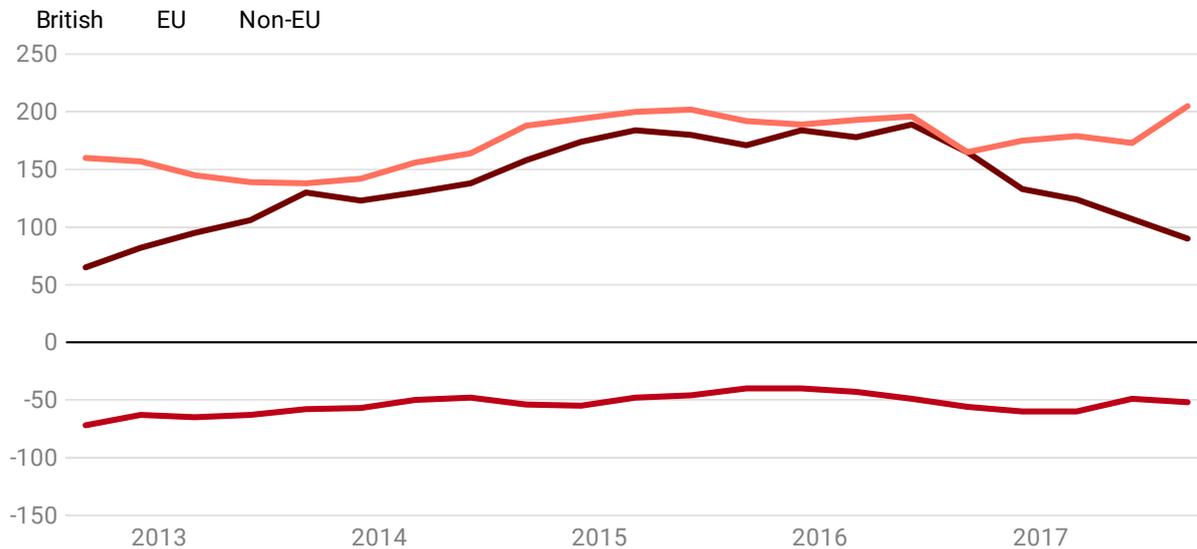
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are lower than the record level of net migration found between March 2015 and June 2016, they are very similar to those recorded in 2014.

Net migration to the UK by citizenship

Thousands of people. Negative numbers are people leaving the UK.



Figures for 2017 are provisional.

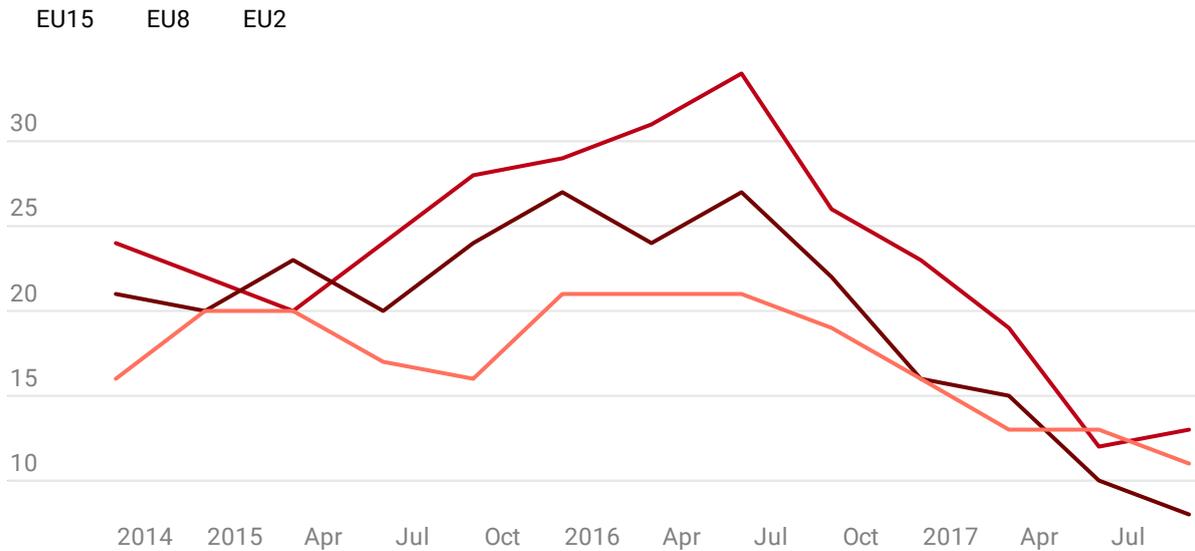
Source: [Office for National Statistics](#) • [Get the data](#)

The fall in EU net migration is particularly apparent for the “old” EU member states, such as France and Spain, known as the EU15, and for Romania and Bulgaria known as the EU2. There was no statistically significant change in the net migration level from the eight newer EU member states, which include Poland and Hungary. There were fewer EU citizens coming to the UK looking for work in year ending September 2017, however, there was no statistically significant change in the numbers of EU citizens arriving with a definite job.

Department for Work and Pensions figures cited by the ONS show a 17% decrease in the number of National Insurance number registrations over the year to December 2017. The decrease was particularly large for Polish nationals (down 34%) and Spanish nationals (down 25%).

EU citizens coming to the UK looking for work

Thousands of people



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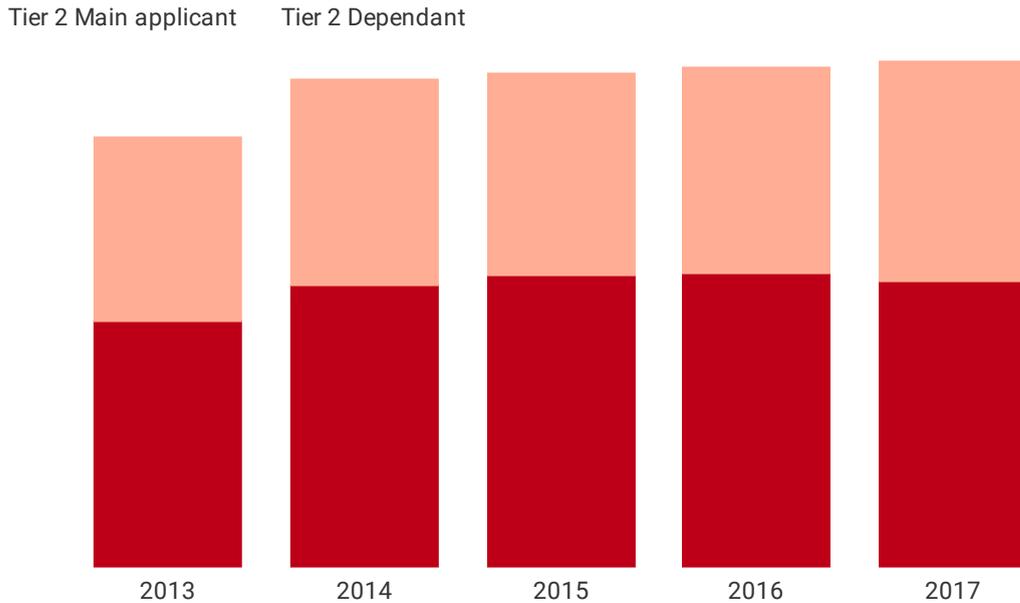
Source: [Office for National Statistics](#) • [Get the data](#)

But the patterns of migration are different for EU and non-EU citizens. Non-EU net-migration increased in the year to September 2017 and now stands at more than twice as high as the level of EU migration. The main reason for this, according to the ONS, was an increase in the number of people from outside the EU who are arrived in the UK to study.

Visa blockages

There was a 1% increase in the total number of work-related visas to non-EU citizens granted over the same period. This was despite the fact that there had been a 2.4% decrease in visa sponsorship applications overall. The majority of those visas granted were for skilled workers, known as Tier 2 visas.

Number of Tier 2 visas granted for skilled workers into UK



Source: Home Office • [Get the data](#)

But by February 2018, the UK had hit its cap on Tier 2 visas for skilled non-EU migrants for three months in a row. This means more and more employers are having applications to sponsor visas for highly skilled workers from outside the EU refused. This, combined with the decline in the numbers of EU workers, is causing headaches for employers. As Gerwyn Davies, senior labour market adviser to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, put it: “The government’s continued rhetoric of an immigration system that only works to attract ‘the brightest and the best’ simply doesn’t tally with what employers want or the economy needs.”

There are persistent concerns among the British public that migrant workers and in particular those from the new EU member states are taking jobs from British workers. Those who were expressing support for ending the EU citizens rights to live and work in the UK were also more likely to support the vote for Leave in the EU referendum.

Yet, numerous studies on the labour market impact of immigration, including my own, show that overall, any negative impact of immigration on the job prospects and wages of native workers is small and very short-term. It depends on relative skill characteristics of immigrant and native workers as well as on the characteristics of the local and national economy. In the long run the native workers benefit from the presence of immigrant workers in the labour market.

Although an anticipated large fall in overall net migration levels did not materialise – with levels similar to those reported in November 2017 – there has been another fall in EU net migration. It seems that, for a number of reasons, the UK is becoming a far less attractive place EU citizens – not least because of the uncertainty of Brexit and because very little is known yet about what future immigration policy will look like towards EU citizens once the UK has left the EU.

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