

# Population Review

Volume 55, Number 2, 2016

Type: Article pp. 75-80

## **Brexit: Potential Migration Wave and Population Gains and Losses in the European Union and the United Kingdom**

**Authors:** Shrinidhi Ambinakudige and Giorgio Carlo Cappello

**Affiliations:** Department of Geosciences, Mississippi State University (Ambinakudige); National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center, Mississippi State University (Cappello)

**Corresponding author/address:** Shrinidhi Ambinakudige,  
e-mail: [ssa60@msstate.edu](mailto:ssa60@msstate.edu)

### **Abstract**

Now that the United Kingdom voted in favor of exiting from the European Union, a process commonly known as Brexit, there is a possibility that we will witness a tremendous migration wave between the EU and the UK once Brexit is implemented. This will ultimately affect every aspect of European society and will have repercussions on the global economy and geopolitics. In this paper, we analyze the migration effectiveness between the EU and the UK. The results indicate that, currently, there is an efficient redistribution of the population in favor of the UK, compared to most other EU countries. For instance, the number of UK citizens living in Belgium, Cyprus, Luxemburg and Spain is greater than the number of citizens of Belgium, Cyprus, Luxemburg and Spain living in the UK. Between France and the UK, there is an almost equal number of migrants living in each country. The UK must contend with the possible migration of a significant percent of the 2.9 million EU migrants currently residing in the UK. In addition, the UK has to update its policies to accommodate the 0.8 million UK citizens living in other EU countries.

### **Keywords**

Brexit, migration, migration effectiveness index, European Union

## Introduction

The Schengen Agreement of 1985 helped Europeans to move freely throughout the continent. This free movement was required for Europe to solve its labor shortage problem, resulting from a growing native depopulation and natural decrease (Lichter et al. 2016). With the creation of the European Union (EU), the movement of labor expanded to the non-Schengen countries of Europe that are members of the EU. About 1.3 million people migrated from one EU member state to another EU member state, according to the 2011 census (Eurostat 2016). Furthermore, nearly one million immigrants returned to their country of citizenship. The free movement of people in Europe is helping the member countries to become socially, economically and culturally assimilated.

However, not everything is well within the EU. For some countries, their EU membership is a matter of prestige, which has given them a new identity. Many countries are eager to procure a membership in this elite club. Countries such as the UK, however, did not join the EU wholeheartedly; in fact, they were always concerned about degradation of their sovereignty. The UK joined the European Economic Community (EEC) after a majority vote of 67.2 percent in the 1975 referendum. Many members of British society have always longed to withdraw from the EU. Now, the UK voted to leave the EU, a process commonly known as *Brexit*. UK's withdrawal from the EU will begin forthwith. If the Brexit leads to a return migration of the EU migrants currently in the UK and a return migration of the UK migrants currently in the EU, then the effect on the EU's and UK's workforce must be analyzed. Indeed, such a return migration would be one of the greatest waves of migration experienced by Europe in the near future; ultimately, it would affect every aspect of European society and wreak possible repercussions on the global economy and geopolitics.

Approximately 2.9 million EU nationals are living in the UK compared with the 0.8 million Britons who live in the EU (Eurostat 2016). More EU migrants were attracted to the UK than the UK migrants were attracted to other EU countries. In fact, the flow of EU migrants to the UK has increased since 2004. Generally, EU migrants are more likely to have a university education and be employed (Falkingham et al. 2016). If and when the EU migrants decide to leave the UK, their jobs will become vacant; thus, either these vacancies will need to be filled by locals or the UK will need to change its migration policies to encourage highly skilled workers to stay in the UK. Ultimately, the direction taken will depend on how the UK and EU manage the Brexit process. The post-Brexit policies on migration in both the UK and the EU will decide if these migrants will be able to move freely between the EU and the UK (The Economist 2016). Similarly, the UK citizens living and working in the EU also face a complicated situation, as they need to decide whether to return to the UK or stay in the EU. The post- and pre-Brexit laws and policies regarding the residency status for migrants will also influence their decision to migrate.

In this paper, we use the migration effective index (MEI) to analyze the migration effectiveness between the EU and the UK. The MEI is a function of the movements of people to and from an area in a particular period (Ambinakudige and Parisi 2010; Stillwell et al. 2003). The MEI measures the efficiency or effectiveness of population redistribution (Manson and Groop 2000; Ambinakudige and Parisi 2015). It also helps to explain the anomalies in the directionality of intermigration flow. In this study, the migration effectiveness index was calculated (Equation 1) to determine the directionality of the international migration in the UK, with respect to each EU member country:

$$MEI_{ij} = 100 \times \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{D_{ij} - O_{ij}}{D_{ij} + O_{ij}} \quad (1)$$

where  $MEI_{ij}$  is an MEI index of a country ‘i’ with respect to a country ‘j’  $D_{ij}$  is an in-migration toward the country “i” from the country “j,” and ‘ $O_{ij}$ ’ is an out-migration from the country “i” toward the country “j.” In this study, ‘i’ represents the UK and “j” is an EU member country. The MEI values range from -100 to +100, with -100 indicating unidirectional out-migration and +100 indicating unidirectional in-migration. When the MEI equals 0, the in-migration and out-migration are equal. The same MEI can arise from small or large flows (Manson and Groop 2000). A positive MEI value indicates a population gain, and a negative MEI value indicates a population loss.

## Results

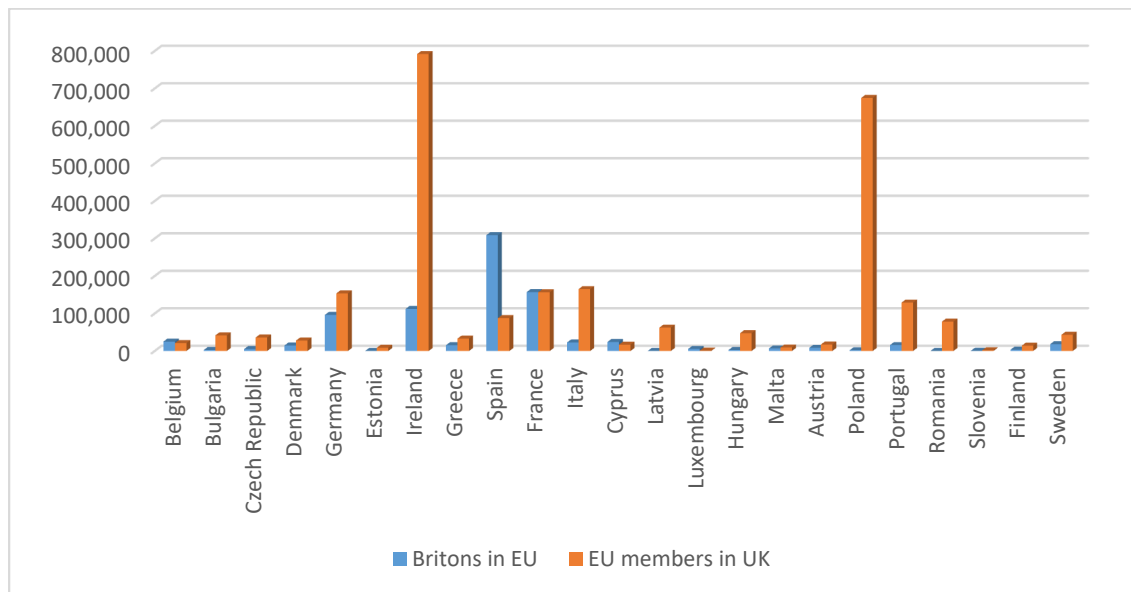


Figure 1. UK and EU migrants in other territories

Eurostat 2011 census data were used to analyze the migration stock in the UK and the EU. The Eurostat census data for the UK comprise data for the constituent countries of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The census data on British Overseas Territories are not included in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the number of UK migrants in each EU country and vice versa. In most cases, there are more EU-member country migrants in the UK than UK citizens in EU countries. With respect to France, however, the number of French migrants in the UK is almost same as the number of UK migrants in France. Furthermore, there are 87,650 more UK citizens living in Spain than Spanish citizens living in the UK. It is obvious that the post-Brexit migration policy will make a significant difference in both the EU and UK as there will be a significant outflow of EU migrants back to the EU from the UK if the restriction on free movement is introduced.

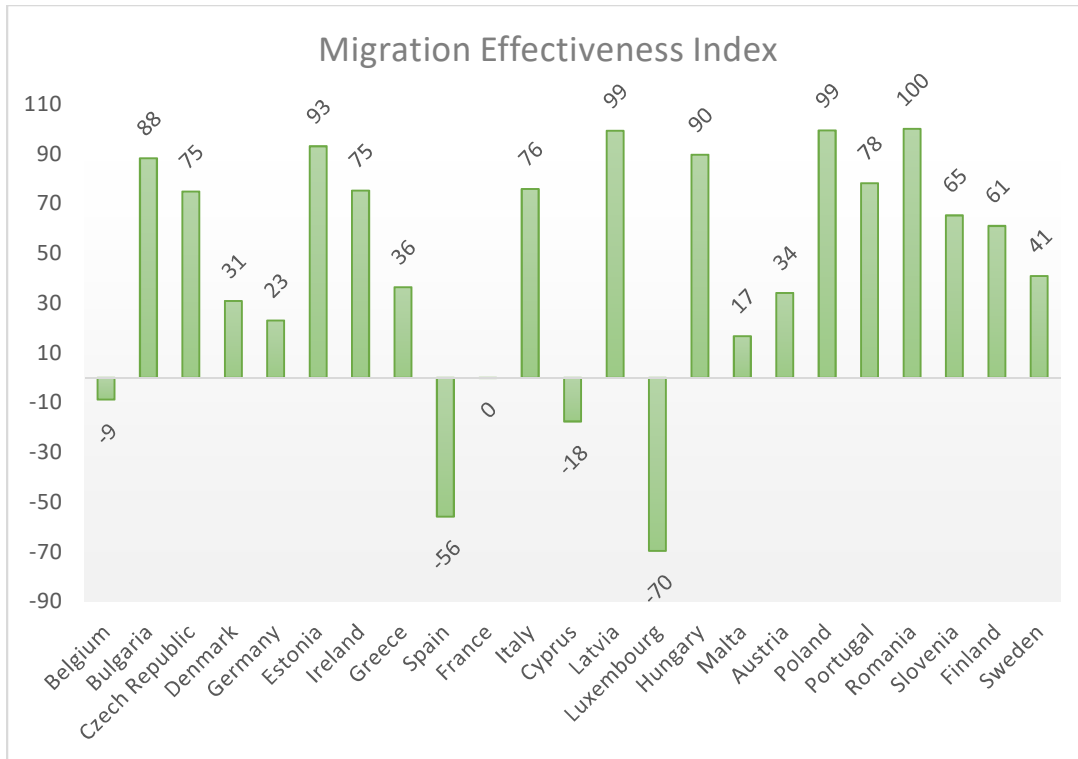


Figure 2. Migration Effective Index between the UK and EU-member countries

Figure 2 depicts the migration effective index. The MEI represents the magnitude of the migration flow. In most cases, its values for the UK with EU countries are positive and are greater than 60. This indicates that the migration flow from these countries to the UK is highly effective in population redistribution. With countries such as Latvia, Poland and Romania, the MEI values were 100 or close to 100. In these cases, there is a negligible number of UK citizens in these countries. However, with countries such as

Table 1. Main reason for in-migrating to the UK and out-migrating from the UK to other EU countries

Reasons to Move	Inflow to UK (%)	Outflow from UK (%)
All reasons	38.0	40.3
Work related reasons	23.9	19.5
Definite job	14.4	12.0
Looking for work	9.5	7.4
Accompany / Join	3.7	2.5
Formal study	6.8	3.8
Going home to live	1.3	6.6
Other reasons	1.3	3.4
No reason stated	1.0	4.6

Source: Long-Term International Migration, estimates from the International Passenger Survey: Annual Data, 2014. Main reason for migration to and from the United Kingdom according to the country of last or next residence groups. Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Cyprus, Luxembourg and Spain the MEI values are negative, indicating a greater UK migrant inflow to these countries than the migrant outflows from these countries to the UK. Redistribution of the population between these countries and the UK is efficient but negative.

Table 1 (previous page) shows reasons for the migration to and from the UK from the country of last residence, as estimated by the International Passenger Survey: Annual Data, 2014. According to these data, about 23.9 percent of migrants from the EU go to the UK for work-related reasons, yet only 19.5 percent of out-migrants leave the UK for the same reasons. Work-related, job-related and education-related reasons all yield higher percentages for in-migrants to the UK than for out-migrants from the UK. It is also interesting that the percentage of people going home to live is higher in the case of outflow than inflow.

## **Conclusions**

Brexit is real. In the next decade, the socioeconomic morphology of the EU and the UK will change drastically. The next couple of years are crucial as both the EU and the UK will be formulating policies on people mobility, which will affect millions of people living on both sides. Based on our analysis of migration stock from Eurostat (2016), it is clear that the UK has to deal with the possible migration of the 2.9 million EU migrants currently in the UK. In addition, the UK needs to update its policies to accommodate the 0.8 million UK citizens living in other EU countries. The MEI indicated that there is an efficient redistribution of the population in favor of the UK from most other EU countries. Between France and the UK, however, there is an almost equal number of migrants from each other. Brexit, once implemented, will affect not just Europe, but the entire globe because of the significant influence that the EU and UK have on the global economy and the mobility of people.

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