



REPORT

The Minimum Income Requirement for Non-EEA Family Members in the UK

AUTHORS: MADELEINE SUMPTION
CARLOS VARGAS-SILVA
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www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

In July 2012, the government implemented a new minimum income requirement that UK citizens and settled residents have to meet if they wish to bring their spouse or partner to live with them in the United Kingdom from outside the European Union. This report brings together available data on how the income threshold works and who it affects.

Key Points

Since July 2012, UK citizens and settled residents applying to bring a non-EEA partner to the country must meet a minimum income requirement of £18,600 per year before tax. The threshold is higher for those who are also sponsoring children.

The income threshold was based on analysis by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC, 2011), which was asked to advise on the income level at which migrants will not become a 'burden on the state', from a purely economic perspective. There is no single way to calculate such a level.

The £18,600 threshold was calculated as the level at which a specific example type of family – a single-earner household with no children paying £100 per week in rent – is no longer eligible for tax credits or housing benefit, which can be received while working. It does not measure their tax contributions net of benefit entitlements, nor their overall net contribution to the public finances.

A couple's net contribution to public finances depends on their individual circumstances and use of public services, making it difficult to calculate in practice. The MAC noted that, on average, requiring family income to cover the cost of all public services such as healthcare, education and defence would lead to a higher threshold. It suggested a level of up to £25,700.

Income thresholds based on absolute levels of pay or hours worked are used in other policy contexts and include the national minimum wage, the living wage or income support for the unemployed. These levels vary but are mostly below £18,600 per year.

Non-EEA nationals are ineligible for most welfare benefits in the first five years after arrival, but their presence (or their children's presence) in the UK may affect their UK partner's entitlement to means-tested benefits like tax credits and housing benefit – either increasing or reducing it, depending on their circumstances.

Under current rules, the non-UK partner's income does not count towards the threshold if they are working abroad, because of the concern that they may stop working after they come to the UK. Available data sources suggest that at least half of non-EEA family migrants work in the UK. Among those in work, estimates of average annual earnings have ranged from £15,000 to £23,000 depending on gender and hours worked.

The exact number of people prevented from coming to the UK due to the threshold is not known. In 2012 the government projected this figure would be between 13,600 and 17,800 per year.

Close to 40% of British citizens working as full-time or part-time employees in 2015 earned less than the income threshold. People are less likely to meet the threshold if they are young or female. A higher share of people living in London meet the threshold compared to the UK average.

Understanding the evidence

Family migration comprises primarily the spouses or civil partners and the children of people living in the UK (see our briefing on 'Non-European Family Unification and Dependents').

This report discusses the migration of spouses or partners of people who are UK citizens or non-European Economic Area (non-EEA) nationals with indefinite leave to remain (that is, permanent resident status) in the UK. Separate rules are in place for people who are the dependants of people with leave to remain for a limited period (such as people on skilled work or student visas), and for EEA citizens bringing a non-EEA partner to the UK. The European Economic Area includes nationals of all EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

When discussing spousal migration, this report uses the terms 'UK partner', 'UK spouse' or 'sponsor' to refer to the member of the couple who already has authorisation to be in the UK, and the term 'non-EEA spouse/partner' to refer to the person applying for authorisation to come here.

Since July 2012, people applying to bring a non-EEA partner to the UK must meet a minimum income requirement of £18,600 per year before tax

Since July 2012, UK citizens and long-term residents applying to bring a non-EEA partner or spouse to live with them in the UK must meet a minimum income requirement of £18,600 per year before tax. For applicants who are also bringing dependent children the post-2012 threshold rises by £3,800 for one child and £2,400 for each additional child. Data analysis conducted by the Home Office at the time of the MAC review suggested that more than 90% of applications were for a spouse/partner alone with no children (applications that would thus face the £18,600 level) (Home Office 2011b, p17). The level of the thresholds has remained the same since 2012.¹

The income requirement must be met by the UK sponsor alone. Applicants cannot rely on offers of support from family members or other third parties. The non-EEA partner's earnings cannot be taken into account if they are working abroad or if they have a job offer in the UK but do not already have work authorisation. Those partners who are already working legally in the UK can count their income towards the threshold. This includes people on skilled work visas, whose holders must currently earn at least £20,800. A majority of people granted partner visas apply from outside the UK, however. In 2014, for example, the Home Office granted just over 26,900 out-of-country partner visas, compared to just over 8,900 in-country visas to people who were not previously recorded as holding a family visa (Home Office 2015, tables vi_04 and expc_01_f).²

Applicants who have cash savings can make up for a shortfall in earnings if the cash savings are at least £16,000 plus 2.5 times the shortfall. So, for example, someone with an income of £17,600 would require £18,500 in savings (=£16,000 + £2,500). People without income can qualify if they have cash savings of at least £62,500.

UK sponsors who are receiving certain disability-related benefits are exempt from the £18,600 threshold. The threshold also does not apply to EEA citizens, whose free movement rights under European law allow them to bring non-EEA spouses with them.

Based on an international comparison of family income policies conducted in 2015, the Migration Policy Group (2015) argued that the UK had the least generous policies on family unification among 38 high-income countries, dropping to the bottom of this ranking after the introduction of the family income threshold and other measures such as language requirements for spouses. A 2012 analysis using the same data source found that most countries either had no income requirement or had a requirement around the level of the minimum wage or the funds available through social assistance, and that only Norway had a higher income requirement than the UK at current exchange rates (Huddleston, 2012).

The minimum income requirement has been the subject of legal challenges

In July 2013, the High Court ruled that the family income requirement was not unlawful in itself and that the aims of the policy were legitimate. However, it ruled that the full package of requirements - including the level at which the threshold was set and the disregard of spouses' future income or credible offers of support from third parties - was disproportionate and unlawful. It identified some "less intrusive" policy options, such as reducing the income requirement to £13,500 or thereabouts (around the level of a full-time minimum wage job), permitting savings of less than £16,000 to supplement income, and allowing spousal income or third-party support to count towards the threshold (High Court 2013).

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1. The level has not been increased with inflation, which means that a higher share of UK earners now meet it than they did in 2012. Because the threshold was calculated with reference to the benefits system which has also changed since 2012 (becoming less generous), the income requirement would not necessarily be higher if it were recalculated using the same methodology today, however.
 2. Note that this does not include dependants of temporary visa holders (for example under Tier 2 of the immigration system).

This decision was overturned in July 2014 by the Court of Appeal, which ruled that the Home Secretary had “discharged the burden of demonstrating that the interference was both the minimum necessary and strikes a fair balance between the interests of the groups concerned and the community in general” (Court of Appeal 2014). The case is due to be heard by the Supreme Court in February 2016.

The income threshold was based on analysis by the Migration Advisory Committee, which was asked to calculate the level at which migrants will not become a ‘burden on the state’, from a purely economic perspective

In 2011, the government conducted a consultation on proposed changes to family migration rules, where it stated that the purpose of the income requirement was to “ensure that migrants are supported at a reasonable level that ensures they do not become a burden on the taxpayer and allows sufficient participation in everyday life to facilitate integration” (Home Office 2011a).

The Home Office asked the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) – an independent public body that advises the government on migration – to advise on a threshold that, from a purely economic perspective, would allow sponsors to support their partners “independently without them becoming a burden on the State” (MAC 2011). It was not asked to take into account other economic or non-economic objectives, such as the wellbeing of UK citizens or settled residents applying for family unification or that of their children.

A key question for the MAC was therefore what constitutes a “burden on the state,” since there is no clear definition of this concept. The MAC laid out three possible approaches to thinking about minimum income levels: (1) whether the person receives a given absolute level of pay, such as the National Minimum Wage; (2) whether the person’s net contribution to the public purse (that is, their tax payments minus the cost of providing benefits or services to them) is positive or negative; and (3) whether the person is receiving any means-tested welfare benefits.

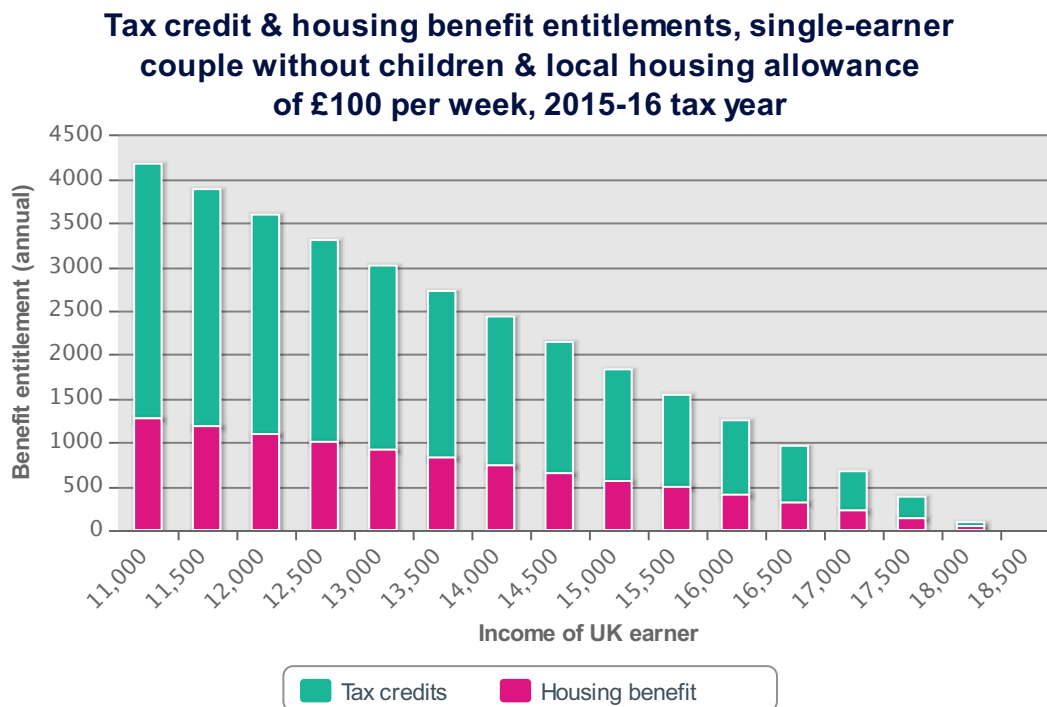
As the MAC made clear in its report, each of these metrics raises different problems when it comes to the assumptions and data required and there is no ‘best’ way to make the calculation.

The £18,600 threshold is the level at which a specific type of family – a single-earner household with no children paying £100 per week in rent – is no longer eligible for tax credits or housing benefit. It does not measure their tax contributions net of benefit entitlements, nor their overall net contribution to public finances

The £18,600 threshold is based on one of various options proposed by the MAC: whether a person is eligible for means-tested benefits, regardless of the amount to which they are entitled. In particular, the MAC examined eligibility for tax credits and housing benefit. These benefits supplement the incomes of low-wage workers, and are withdrawn gradually as earnings increase.

Figure 1 shows the amount of tax credits and housing benefit received by a couple with no children and only one partner working, living in private rented accommodation costing £100 per week. We have chosen this scenario because it mirrors the calculation made by the MAC. The £100 figure was calculated as the approximate average of the maximum housing allowance levels across UK local authorities.

Figure 1



The Migration Observatory: www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

Source: authors' estimation using data from the entitledto.co.uk benefits calculator, one of the main benefits calculators recommended by the government for calculating individual entitlements.

In practice, rents vary substantially by local area, as do the amounts that can be received in housing allowance. A recent analysis of minimum income standards found that average rents for a working-age couple in the bottom quartile of the housing market, for example, were more than twice the UK average in Outer London and more than three times the UK average in Inner London (Padley et al 2015). The maximum allowed housing benefit is also considerably higher in London than other areas of the country, currently £260. If the same methodology were used to calculate separate thresholds for different UK regions, the threshold would therefore be higher in London and lower in lower-cost areas like the North East. (Indeed, the MAC used the same methodology to calculate an income threshold based on London's maximum housing benefit payment, producing a figure of £36,200). The MAC argued that it did not see a strong case for regional variation in the threshold, however, and that such variation could encourage sponsors to move temporarily to lower-cost areas in order to meet the requirement.

The £18,600 level is not a measure of net fiscal contribution, because it does not take into account taxes paid or the cost of the public services the couple may use. Some people who are receiving means-tested benefits will also be paying taxes that exceed the amount they receive in cash benefits. For example, a couple with one person earning £15,157 per year in 2015-16 would be entitled to approximately the same amount in housing benefit and tax credits (£1,757) as they would be paying in income tax and employee national insurance contributions. They would also be paying council tax and indirect taxes such as VAT.

How 'benefits' are defined also affects the calculation. The MAC considered the two major benefits and their main calculation was for couples without children. For couples with children, entitlements to in-work benefits are higher. If different benefits were included, the calculation would also change.

For example, the MAC did not consider child benefit, which at the time of their report was not means tested. From January 2013, however, the government introduced a form of means-testing for child benefit, removing the entitlement for couples with one person earning at least £50,000 per year. The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculated in 2013 that 85% of families eligible for the benefit would continue to be eligible based on their income

(Joyce 2013). Thus, if the minimum income requirement was based on gross receipt of income-related benefits today, the vast majority of households with children would be ineligible for family migration as a ‘burden on the state’, including many families who make significant net contributions to public finances.

A couple’s net contribution to public finances depends on their individual circumstances and use of public services, making it difficult to calculate in practice

The MAC report notes that in order to create an income threshold that is genuinely related to the concept of costs and benefits to the state, it would make sense to consider factors other than benefits receipt, including how much a couple pays in taxes and the cost of public services like the National Health Service or schools.

The main challenge in implementing this approach is that an individual or couple’s actual contribution to public finances depends on their individual circumstances. Use of public services, for example, will depend on factors like people’s health and whether they have children. It will also vary over time, as the household’s circumstances change. Benefits entitlements vary depending on where someone lives. Housing benefit, for example, varies with rent levels in the local housing market, and entitlements are highest in London (up to £260 in 2015) (Valuation Office Agency 2015). People with savings may also have their benefit entitlements reduced.

Several studies have attempted to calculate the net fiscal impact of people born inside and outside of the UK, although the results depend heavily on the assumptions and methodological choices the analysts make, and there is no consensus about which approach is most rigorous or defensible (Vargas-Silva 2015).

The MAC proposed an alternative threshold, not implemented by the government, based on the idea of net fiscal contribution. Rather than calculating the net fiscal contribution of a specific type of family—a calculation too complicated to implement in practice with the available data—the MAC proposed that at any point in time about half of the UK’s population is likely to be making a net fiscal contribution (MAC 2011, p62). Based on this assumption it calculated an alternative threshold based on the average (mean) household income for a one-earner household at £25,700 per year in 2011–12 prices.

Income thresholds based on absolute levels of pay or hours worked are used in other policy contexts and include the national minimum wage, the living wage or income support for the unemployed. These levels vary but are mostly below £18,600

Income thresholds based on absolute levels of pay are used in various different policy fields, and have been used to regulate family migration in some other countries, as noted earlier. The MAC considered the idea of a threshold based on an absolute pay threshold or hours worked, but noted that these measures do not relate directly to the question whether someone is a net contributor to public finances. This is because even full-time workers may use benefits or services that cost more than their tax contributions if their wages are low.

For example, the national minimum wage is the amount that employers are required to pay their workers and is set at a level designed to “help as many low-paid workers as possible without any significant adverse impact on employment or the economy” (Low Pay Commission, 2015). The current minimum wage for people over age 21 is £6.70, and the Office of National Statistics defines ‘full-time work’ as 30 hours or more per week. The annual earnings of a full-time worker would therefore be a minimum of £10,452 for people working 30 hours or £13,936 for people working 40 hours per week.

The Living Wage Foundation estimates that the hourly wage needed to allow a “minimum acceptable standard of living” is higher than the national minimum wage. For 2015–16 this living wage was estimated at £8.25 per hour outside of London and £9.40 inside London (Living Wage Foundation 2015). That translates into annual earnings outside London of £12,870 to £17,160 (for 30 to 40 hours of work, respectively), and annual earnings in London of £14,664 to £19,552.

Other examples of minimum income levels include financial support provided to the unemployed. For example, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance for a couple is currently £114.85 per week and can be supplemented with housing benefit. A person who pays £100 per week in rent and supports a non-working partner with no children might therefore receive approximately £11,200 per year in JSA and housing benefit. Asylum support rates are lower, at £73.90 per couple per week (equivalent to £3,843 per year).

Non-EEA nationals are ineligible for most welfare benefits in the first five years after arrival, but their presence in the UK may affect their UK partner's benefits entitlement - either reducing or increasing it, depending on their circumstances

Newly arriving non-EEA nationals are not eligible for most means-tested benefits, such as Jobseekers Allowance or tax credits, due to restrictions on access to public funds within the first 5 years after arrival before a person is eligible for indefinite leave to remain.

In theory, an income threshold based on eligibility for benefits is therefore not relevant if the person cannot receive benefits. However, the UK partner can apply for certain benefits that are awarded to couples rather than individuals, notably tax credits and housing benefit. The UK partner would be eligible for these benefits on an individual basis even if their partner is not allowed to come to the UK. But because entitlements are calculated differently for couples compared to single parents, arrival of the non-EEA spouse may affect household's entitlement to benefits.

Whether the amount of benefits they can receive goes up or down will depend, among other things, on how much they earn and how they affect their partner's earning capacity. If the non-EEA partner does not work, the couple's entitlement may increase as a result of an extra person joining the household. If the non-EEA partner does work or if they take on childcare responsibilities that allow the UK partner to work, the entitlement may decrease or they may become ineligible for benefits entirely. Employment and earnings of non-EEA migrants are discussed in the next section.

There is currently no mechanism for couples applying for a spousal visa to be made ineligible for these benefits, for example in the same way that the non-EEA national is barred for 5 years from most other public funds and benefits.

There is also no official data available on actual benefits claim rates for the non-EEA spouses of UK citizens and permanent residents. DWP and HMRC hold information on benefit claims by year of arrival and nationality at the time a person registered for their national insurance number, which in principle could be used to estimate the extent to which recently arrived non-EEA spouses of UK citizens are receiving benefits. However, this data has not been made publicly available.³

The non-UK partner cannot count their income towards the threshold if they are working abroad, because of the concern that they may stop working after they come to the UK

The income threshold is based only on the income of the UK sponsor. Regardless of how the income threshold is formulated, it is less likely that a couple would meet an economic definition of a 'burden on the state' if both spouses are earning. Higher household income reduces entitlement to means-tested benefits and increases tax contributions. For example, if the sponsored spouse earned £2,000 per year (equivalent to between 5 and 6 hours a week at the current minimum wage), the couple would be ineligible for tax credits once the UK earner was receiving just over £16,000.

The MAC argued that there was a 'strong case', in principle, for taking account of the sponsored spouse's future earnings for this reason. However, the government argued that "employment overseas is no guarantee of finding work in the UK" and that this income should therefore be excluded (Home Office, 2012b).

3. In response to Freedom of Information requests, DWP and HMRC noted that providing the data would exceed FOI cost limits.

The couple must demonstrate that they still meet the income threshold after 2.5 years when they apply to renew their visa. At this point, the non-EEA spouse may count their income towards the threshold because they are in the UK working legally, although there is no publicly available data on what share of non-EEA applicants are working when they make this application.

There is also no data that directly answer the question whether spouses who are already working before they come to the UK generally continue to do so afterwards. However, there are some data sources that can illustrate the employment situation for non-EEA spouses overall, described in the next section.

Available data sources suggest that at least half of non-EEA family migrants work in the UK. Among those in work, estimates of average annual earnings have ranged from £15,000 to £23,000 depending on gender and hours worked

The Home Office (2011b) analysed survey data on the employment and earnings of people who came to the UK as spouses, partners or other dependants in 2010. The study found that the employment rate for the population age 16 and above was 66% for men and 44% for women (age 16 and above in both cases). The report notes that about two thirds of partners coming to the UK are women. If this is the case for the sample of family migrants analysed in the Home Office report, this would imply that approximately half were employed at the time of the 2010 survey. Among those in work, median earnings of men who came for family reasons were £21,300, and for women they were £15,000. These figures include both full-time and part-time workers.

Another Home Office (2015) analysis using data from 2012–2013 found a similar result. Just under 58% of working-age non-EEA family migrants were employed either part-time or full time. The average (mean) weekly hours for non-EEA family migrants were 39 for men and 31 for women. Among full-time workers, median weekly earnings were £450 for men and £423 for women—equivalent to an annual income of approximately £23,000 and £22,000, respectively. This includes people who arrived as children.⁴

Bearing in mind the limitations of the data, this analysis suggests that while family migrants have lower employment rates than the UK average, a significant share do work in the UK and thus in theory could be expected to continue to contribute to bringing family income above the threshold after they arrive.

The share of non-EEA spouses who work in the UK is likely to be higher if one considers only those who were already working at the time of making their application (and thus who might in theory count their income towards the £18,600 threshold). Data on how many applicants were working at the time of their application is very limited, although a Home Office (2011b) analysis of a sample of spouses and partners applying to come to the UK from the top countries of nationality for family migration in 2009 found that 28% were in paid employment at the time of making the application. If this is representative of all family migration and trends have not changed significantly over time, this suggests that, on average, employment rates are higher after family migrants arrive in the UK than they are beforehand.

The exact number of people prevented from coming to the UK due to the threshold is not known, although in 2012 the government projected this figure would be between 13,600 and 17,800 per year

The Home Office (2012a) impact assessment for changes to the family migration rules estimated that between 13,600 and 17,800 fewer people would be prevented from coming to the UK per year as a result of the income threshold. This calculation assumed – based on data from previous applications and data on earnings of UK citizens

4. Note that the statistics in this section are based survey data which means that it will have some sampling error. However, the Home Office (2015) analysis pooled two years of data to achieve a relatively substantial sample size of 486 non-EEA family women and 595 men with earnings data available.

living in the UK - that between 35% and 45% of people who would otherwise have applied successfully would not meet the income requirement.

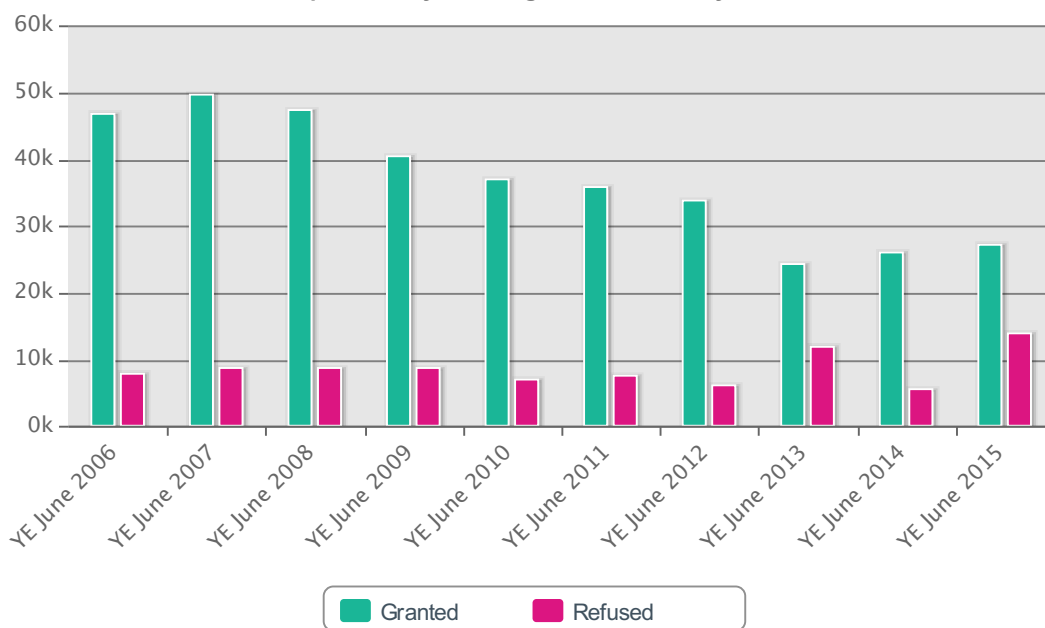
The actual numbers that have been prevented from coming to the UK to date is not known. The number of entry visas granted to partners had also begun to decrease several years before the threshold was introduced (Figure 2). The number of partner entry visas granted fell by 9,388 between the year ending June 2012 and the year ending June 2013—the first year in which the income requirement applied. During the same period, the number of refused applications increased by 5,855. Some of these rejections may have been for reasons other than income.

Approximately 4,000 applications were put on hold due solely to failure to meet the maintenance requirement between the High Court and Court of Appeal judgments in 2013 and 2014, a period of almost exactly one year. This is the most conservative estimate of the number of people prevented from coming to the UK due to the threshold in a given year, since many will not have applied, knowing that they were ineligible.

Figure 2

Number of partner entry clearance visas granted & rejected, 2006-2015

Chart provided by www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source : Immigration Statistics table fa_02.

Note: 'post-flight partners' are included from July 2012 only. Excludes partners for immediate settlement

Close to 40% of British citizens working as employees in 2015 earned less than the income threshold. People are less likely meet the threshold if they are young or female. A higher share of people living in London meet the threshold compared to the UK average

The income threshold is more difficult to meet for some people than others. This is because earnings vary considerably depending on demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such as age, education, ethnicity and location within the UK. An extensive literature shows that women, young workers and those with less education, for example, have lower earnings than other groups of the population (e.g. Chevalier, 2007; Gosling et al., 2000). Because of this variation in earnings, some groups are therefore more likely than others to meet the government's definition of a 'burden on the state'.

By 2015, 41% of British nationals working as full-time or part-time employees did not earn enough to meet the £18,600 income threshold. This is lower than the 47% previously identified by the Migration Observatory in 2012, because of increases in nominal earnings over time (Migration Observatory, 2012).

The share of people who currently do not meet the threshold increases to 51% for those sponsoring a spouse and one child and 57% for sponsoring a spouse and two children (Table 1). Almost three quarters of men earned enough to sponsor a non-EEA spouse, while the majority of women did not. More than half young workers (age 20 to 29) as well as those without higher education do not meet the threshold.

Table 1 - Percentage of British nationals not eligible to sponsor a non-EEA family member by demographic and socio-economic characteristics, 2015

	Not eligible to sponsor spouse (£18,600)	Not eligible to sponsor spouse + 1 child (£22,400)	Not eligible to sponsor spouse + 2 children (£24,800)
All	41%	51%	57%
Gender			
Males	27%	38%	44%
Females	55%	64%	69%
Age			
20 to 29 years old	53%	66%	73%
30 to 45 years old	33%	43%	48%
46 to 60 years old	36%	46%	51%
Ethnicity			
White	41%	51%	56%
Non-White	45%	54%	59%
Education			
GCSEs & A levels	53%	64%	70%
Higher ed or Degree	24%	32%	37%

Notes all tables: Statistics come from the LFS Q2 2015. Income is based on earnings from the person's two main jobs (if the person holds more than one job). Includes British national people working as employees.

Table 2 shows the same information by region. In London, 27% of British employees did not earn enough to meet the income requirement, and it is the only region in which more than half earned enough to sponsor a spouse and two children. By contrast, approaching half of those working in the North East, South West and Northern Ireland did not meet the threshold.

Table 2 - Percentage of British nationals not eligible to sponsor a non-EEA family member by region of the UK

	Not eligible to sponsor spouse	Not eligible to sponsor spouse + 1 child	Not eligible to sponsor spouse + 2 children
North East	48%	60%	66%
North West	45%	56%	62%
Yorkshire & Humberside	45%	56%	62%
East Midlands	41%	53%	58%
West Midlands	45%	53%	59%
East	37%	47%	52%
London	27%	34%	40%
South East	38%	47%	52%
South West	47%	57%	63%
Wales	41%	54%	60%
Scotland	41%	53%	58%

UK citizens living in London are more likely to earn enough to sponsor a non-EEA partner. This is to be expected, since salaries are higher in London than in other parts of the UK. (Costs of living are also higher in London and the threshold does not account for geographical differences in prices.) There are also differences in earnings among the residents of London based on demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Table 3). For example, about 41% of non-white London employees with UK citizenship earn below the income threshold, compared to 21% of those who identify as white.

Table 3 - Percentage of British nationals not eligible to sponsor a non-EEA spouse by London/outside London location

	Outside London	London
All	43%	27%
Gender		
Males	28%	22%
Females	57%	33%
Age		
20 to 29 years old	57%	31%
30 to 45 years old	35%	23%
46 to 60 years old	37%	25%
Ethnicity		
White	43%	21%
Non-white	48%	41%
Education		
GCSEs & A levels	53%	47%
Higher ed or degree	25%	14%

Evidence gaps and limitations

Calculating the economic costs and benefits associated with different categories of migration is a challenge because there is relatively limited data available on migrants by reason for migration. The actual net fiscal contribution of a particular individual or family will depend significantly on their individual circumstances. Migration also has other economic impacts that are not captured by analysis of the impacts on public finances.

Family migration policies may have broader impacts on UK households, both economic and non-economic. For example, if the family income threshold prevents a partner's entry to the UK, this will have implications for the member of the couple who remains in the country and any UK citizen children they may have (see, for example, Children's Commissioner 2015). If the threshold only delays entry to the UK while the UK spouse is waiting to acquire sufficient savings or income, this could also affect the integration prospects of the non-EEA spouse once they do arrive. Because we do not have data on the outcomes of UK residents who have been unable to sponsor a spouse, these longer-term possibilities are hard to quantify.

There is also limited publicly available data about the actual use of benefits by specific categories of migrants. HMRC and DWP hold data from their internal records on benefits claims for people who were non-UK citizens when they registered for a national insurance number, although only a small selection of these statistics are made publicly available. This makes it hard to assess to what extent family migrants may be receiving certain types of benefits despite having no recourse to public funds.

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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.



COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk

About the authors

Madeleine Sumption
Director, Migration Observatory
madeleine.sumption@compas.ox.ac.uk

Carlos Vargas Silva
Senior Researcher
carlos.vargas-silva@compas.ox.ac.uk

Press contact

Rob McNeil
Head of Media and Communications
robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk
+ 44 (0)1865 274568
+ 44 (0)7500 970081

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