

EU nationals: foster carers and fostered children

1. Introduction

Following on from the Government initiating the official EU withdrawal process in March 2017, there was –and continues to be – much speculation as what would happen to EU nationals who were currently residing in the UK.

The Fostering Network received enquiries from fostering services which had worries about approving people as foster carers who were non-UK EU nationals, and also about the long-term stability of placing fostered children with foster carers who were non-UK EU nationals.

In January 2018, The Fostering Network made a series of FOIs to local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, in an attempt to establish the impact on foster carers and fostered children.

We asked local authorities for the following information:

- a) The total number of registered foster carers;
- b) The number of registered foster carers who were non-UK EU nationals;
- c) The number of currently fostered children who were non-UK EU nationals;
- d) The number of UK national foster carers who foster outside of the UK, but within the EU.

While all local authorities should have information about their looked after children, one-third of foster carers work for independent fostering providers. The findings therefore, exclude all independent fostering provider foster carers.

2. Findings

2.1 Foster carers

We had responses from 193 out of 204 local authorities. However, 22 local authorities did not provide us with the information due to low numbers or the time it would take to look into each file, while 33 local authorities said they do not collect information on the nationality of foster carers. This left us with 137 local authorities providing the information.

- The 137 local authorities which gave us information reported 176 foster carers who were non-UK EU nationals. This represents 0.5% of their total foster carers.

Country	Number of non-UK EU national foster carers
England 92 out of 150 local authorities	168
Wales 20 out of 22 local authorities	5
Scotland out of 25 out of 32 local authorities	3
Great Britain 137 out of 204 local authorities	176

- According to the FOI requests, there were seven foster carers who foster in the EU outside of the UK, one for a Welsh local authority, and six from English local authorities.

2.2 Non-UK EU fostered children

Unfortunately, the data we received from local authorities on the number of fostered children who are non-UK EU nationals appears to be unreliable. Of the 193 local authorities which responded, only 129 local authorities submitted data (the others failing to do so due to either not having the information or being unwilling due to low numbers of children).

The initial data put the number of non-UK EU fostered children at 1,200. There were around 20 local authorities which reported significantly higher levels than others – some said they had over 100 non-UK EU national fostered children. The numbers seemed quite high so we went back and checked with some of the local authorities, who ended up revising their figures. However, given the Government has committed to allowing current EU citizens to remain in the UK, and the number of these fostered children are very low, we felt that there was limited value in going back to all the fostering services to check all the data.

3. Conclusion

While the survey did not look at independent fostering providers, over two-thirds of local authorities in Great Britain responded to the FOI requests. The findings showed that of 137 local authorities, there were 176 non-UK EU national foster carers, which equated to 0.5% of their total foster carer population.

The Government has already said that EU citizens in the UK will be able to apply to get settled or pre-settled status to enable them to continue living in the UK after December 2020.ⁱ Therefore, Brexit should not prevent those families from continuing to foster. In regards to non-UK EU nationals who want to become foster carers, the deadline for applying for settled or pre-settled status is 30 June 2021, so currently Brexit should not prevent those families from applying to foster.

Finally, even if EU citizens are put off applying to foster, it should not have a significant impact on foster care as a whole, because fostering services are not reliant on this group to make up their foster carer workforce. EU citizens are underrepresented among foster carers, accounting for only 0.5% of the foster carer population compared to 6% of the general population.ⁱⁱ

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ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>

ⁱⁱ Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, July 2018, Office for National Statistics