



After the Fact | [A World in Motion: Global Demographics Explained - Part 2](#)

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TRANSCRIPT

[Music]

Dan LeDuc, host: This is “After the Fact” from The Pew Charitable Trusts. I’m Dan LeDuc.

London is a city in motion.

After a decline in population following the Second World War, the city’s population is now at a record 8 ½ million people. And it’s expected to pass 9 million by the year 2021. And here’s the thing that says a lot about London—and about the world: Seventy percent of babies now born in London have at least one foreign-born parent.

Think about that: Seven in 10 babies born in London have at least one parent that wasn’t. That’s our data point for this episode—and you’ll recall it was also our data point for our previous episode as well. That’s because we’re continuing our look at the world’s changing demographics.

Last time, we spoke with the Pew Research Center’s Mark Hugo Lopez, who explained current global migration trends. You can listen to that conversation wherever you get your podcasts.

In this second part of our look at global migration, we traveled to London. We wanted to see up close how the movement of millions of people around the globe can be seen in one place.

We went to Brixton, where Ben Rogers, director of the [Centre for London](#), was our guide. The center is an independent think tank that studies the city’s trends, and its research led to the findings about births and foreign-born parents.



Ben Rogers walked us through the streets of Brixton, that's grown from a quintessential South London neighborhood into a dense multicultural hub.

It's also home to Electric Avenue.

[Street noises, background conversation]

So this is—we're on Electric Avenue now. And so, 100 years ago we were seeing some of the first light bulbs in London that would have been hanging over our heads.

Ben Rogers, director, Centre for London: Right, that's right. It's been pedestrianized in the last 15 years. I suppose the other distinctive feature of Brixton is it's got quite an extensive network of covered markets with lots of small stalls in it.

Dan LeDuc: Denean Rowe, a development officer for the Centre for London, joined us on our walk.

[To Denean] You live near here, right?

Denean Rowe, development officer, Centre for London: I do, yeah. So I live near here. It's about 10 minutes away. And I've grown up around here for my whole life.

Dan LeDuc: Oh good.

Denean Rowe: So from Electric Avenue, and pretty much the whole Brixton market, you can hear the music in the background. You start to hear a lot of reggae, bashment, and Jamaican music. Caribbean food's all around here. Authentic food. If you want to cook a meal from the Caribbean, you're either going to come to here or you're probably going to go to Peckham if you're in South London.

There used to be a lot of music stores with vinyls where you could just hear the music screeching out all day long. And it was just vibrant. It was just a place, like I said, home away from home for lots of people.

Ben Rogers: My grandmother grew up not that far from here, born around 1900. And she remembers this as being a sort of, you know, a place where you come to—there was a big department store that was considered to be rather glamorous. So I think she wouldn't recognize the Brixton of today.



Dan LeDuc: Wow.

Ben Rogers: I suppose one of the big changes is that this was always the center of migration. Thirty or 40 years ago, there would have been a large number of migrants from a small number of countries. And what we've now seen is almost the diversification of migration. So actually, you've got a huge array of different migrant groups represented in this area—and in London as a whole.

Dan LeDuc: So from where? Where are they coming from?

Ben Rogers: I'm tempted to say from everywhere.

Dan LeDuc: Really?

Ben Rogers: I think that's pretty true. Traditionally Caribbean, but that's been now African, Eastern European, Western European. There's a big Portuguese population here.

Dan LeDuc: So how much of this change is driven by migration?

Ben Rogers: A huge amount of it's been driven by migration, which is why now we're in a position where 70 percent of Londoners today are born with at least one parent from overseas. It's also the case that migrant groups have a higher fertility rate. So even where migrants have been here for a generation, they're having more kids, which is a direct effect of migration, I suppose.

Dan LeDuc: Right, because they're here, they're staying, and they're having more children.

Ben Rogers: Yeah. And London has changed, actually, in a way in which I think has even taken the experts, the demographers, by surprise. I remember when we had the last census in 2010, it transpired that the proportion of white British people in London was now less than 50 percent, which no one was expecting.

London was, a generation ago, London was declining in population—or two generations ago. So it's a big change. It's one that's taken people by surprise. If you look, recently we did a piece of work just looking at the official population projections for London, and they're just systematically wrong.



[Laughter]

Ben Rogers: *[Laughing]* Systematically wrong. Every 10 years, they get it completely wrong.

Dan LeDuc: Local historians have called Brixton “the black capital of Europe.” When Nelson Mandela visited London in 1996, he came to Brixton. Before American actress Meghan Markle, who is biracial, married Britain’s Prince Harry in May, she also visited Brixton.

[Street sounds]

[To Ben] So we’ve just taken a stroll past Pop Brixton, which is this cool set of old containers and restaurants and shops and all that stuff. It’s a terrific neighborhood. So let’s pause for a moment and fill us in a little bit more on the bigger picture of London—the change that migration is making to the city at large and what that portends here.

Ben Rogers: Well, maybe I’ll begin by talking a bit about London’s relationship to the rest of the country, because I think one of the most striking developments in the last 20 years is the way in which London has raced the hedge—not just in population terms and not just in diversity, but also economically—from the rest of the country. Back in the 1970s, average per capita GDP in London was about 1 ¼ times what it is elsewhere. Now it’s 1 ¾. So again, it’s this phenomenon of global cities powering ahead of their nations. And that’s caused a lot of tension. It’s a bit like relationships between the big U.S. cities and the rest of the nation. It played out here in the Brexit elections with, I think, people feeling almost a sort of resentment or deep misgivings about the way in which power and prestige and status—everything is concentrated in these large cities, and particularly in London.

Dan LeDuc: In these large cities, yeah.

Ben Rogers: And then within London itself, of course, if you are—I can see if you were outside London, you look at the city, and it seems that the streets are paved with gold and that everybody’s doing fantastically well. But if you dig deeper, what you see is, yeah, a really rich city, incredible house prices, a lot of people certainly doing really, really well. But also in many ways a very divided city. And poverty remains stubbornly



high, and child poverty, and increasingly in-work poverty, is a real phenomenon in London. And even people on average incomes have really suffered.

So earnings have stagnated over the last decade. And living costs have gone up. And actually, we came up, the Centre for London, with this term “ENDIS” to describe this phenomenon of middle-class people who are struggling. ENDIS stands for Employed, No Disposable Income or Savings. And that’s a real big city, but particularly a London, phenomenon.

Dan LeDuc: The core of the city has drawn a great deal of wealth. The outer cores, as I understand it, is sort of where the less wealthy are settling. But what I’ve been trying to figure out is where does the middle live in London anymore? The cost of living has become so high.

Ben Rogers: That’s a great question. So I think the pattern has really changed. I think the original London model, if you like, was at the center. It was characterized by rich and poor living cheek by jowl. Think of Pygmalion. That was London—unlike Paris, where the rich always live in the center, and the poor live towards the outside. London was much more mixed up. And then as the suburbs grew, the suburbs were genuinely middle class, affluent.

That story is changing a bit, particularly where the suburbs are concerned. And we’re seeing a lot of poor migrants being squeezed out. Central London—or inner London—has become more unaffordable, being squeezed out to outer London, in a way, which I think is storing up problems—not only because a lot of people who are still in outer London are feeling a bit displaced or uneasy about the changes, but also because those new, poorer migrants are having to move into rented accommodation. They still can’t afford to buy their own homes. They don’t have the social networks and the other things that have traditionally supported them in inner London. So I do really worry about the changing nature of outer London and some of the problems that we might be storing up for ourselves.

Dan LeDuc: So there’s been clearly an enormous change in the population of this city over the last few decades. Talk to us about the current demographics of London. What’s the city look like today and by the numbers.



Ben Rogers: Well, London is growing fast, at least by European standards: population of about 8 1/2 million and growing by 100,000 a year, or a million every decade. And in the way that demographers do, they're just projecting that into the future. Then they sort of become much more diverse—we're seeing a greater cleavage between wealthy property owners and those without property. And a gradual change in the economic geography of London, with inner London becoming more gentrified—more affluent—and outer London, which was traditionally more affluent, or consistently affluent, part of the city actually becoming, in parts, poorer.

Dan LeDuc: And the projections are well over 9 million by when?

Ben Rogers: In the next three years. Which no one would have predicted, because the story of London is a city which declined in the postwar years, in the years after the Second World War, encouraged by government policies. It was partly deliberate policy, but it was more just the collapse of industry and the decline of empire and the decline of Britain's economy. Then in a way which no one expected, from the early 1990s, the economy and the population have recovered. And it's been growing ever since.

Dan LeDuc: You have these global cities, whether they're London or Los Angeles—are always this beacon that draws a migrant population. Migrant populations, you know, when they enter a new country, don't go out into the rural areas traditionally. They're really focused in these urban areas like London. I mean, this has been true throughout history.

Ben Rogers: It is, and I think they work well if you're a migrant, partly because they are somewhat accepting of—more accepting of—migration, and there were already some networks there that can help you integrate into the city. But in some ways they are becoming tougher places for migrants, at least in economic terms.

And there is this phenomenon, which we see in London and also in U.S. cities, which is second- or third-generation migrants then move out, because life is so tough within cities. And we're definitely seeing that.

Denean Rowe: Yeah, definitely. I mean up until—it was quite a few years ago, you would have had grandparents on the road much where we are like now, a bit quieter. You would have had their children living in the same area, or maybe one area, and then



their children hoping to live not on their parents' doorstep but still relatively close. You build your family here. You build your community here.

But it's gotten really difficult with property prices and gentrification coming in. It's tough to build that same community around you because we just can't afford to do it. I think that is a source of a lot of tension, especially with people my age who want to be a part of the community that they've known and that their family has helped to build, but there just isn't any room for it. And there just isn't the finance to do it.

Dan LeDuc: Hmm. In our visit here in Brixton and in London, I've been really struck by sort of the multiculturalism and all of the changes around us. And clearly, so much of it is driven by people who have come from somewhere else—migration. Are we looking at the future here for not just London but elsewhere?

Ben Rogers: I'm always worried about predicting the future, and I'm sure we'll gradually become more diverse. But I'm not sure it's going to become gradually more happily multicultural. And in fact, we're living through a period of reaction against migration and against the many ways globalization—not just here in Britain—and the Brexit vote was a vote against globalization and in a way a vote against open borders.

But I think in some ways, London is a bit of an unusual story. So, yeah, we have managed the process successfully here. But will we manage it successfully elsewhere? What does the future hold? I'm not sure we know.

[Music]

Dan LeDuc: We have a link to the Centre for London's report, "London Identities," on our website at pewtrusts.org/afterthefact.

If this is your first time listening to us, click "subscribe" and browse through our episodes. We've covered such global topics as overfishing in Europe, the threat of antibiotic resistance, and how to protect the world's oceans.

Our thanks to Ben Rogers and the Centre for London for showing us around Brixton.

['After the Fact' theme music]



And thanks to you for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc, and this is "After the Fact."