



HM Government

Restoring Control over the Immigration System

May 2025



Restoring Control over the Immigration System

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of His Majesty

May 2025



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Public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

or

Home Office
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Foreword by the Prime Minister

In 2023, under the previous government, inward migration exploded to over a million people a year – four times the level compared with 2019. This was a political choice that was never put before the British people. In fact, quite the opposite – the previous government repeatedly promised inward migration would be brought under control. Instead, Britain became a one-nation experiment in open borders.



The damage this has done to our country is incalculable. Public services and housing access have been placed under too much pressure. Our economy has been distorted by perverse incentives to import workers rather than invest in our own skills. In sectors like engineering, for example, apprenticeships have almost halved while visas doubled.

But arguably even worse is the wound this failure has opened when it comes to trust in politics. It is a wound, as I said on my first day as Prime Minister, that can only be healed by actions not words. This White Paper is just that.

We will restore control to our borders. Since this government came to power, visa applications are down nearly 40%. But now is the time to go further and faster. To assure the British people that the experiment is over. And that this Government will return migration policy to common sense.

At its heart is a simple message of fairness. Migration is part of Britain's national story and an essential element of a strong economy. But if people want to come to Britain to start a new life, they must contribute, learn our language and integrate. And if employers want to bring workers from overseas, then they must also invest in the skills of workers already in Britain.

We know that thousands of British businesses already do this – our strategy will back them. But this White Paper also signals a new era. We will still be competitive in attracting the world's best talent. At the same time, we will wean our national economy off its reliance on cheap labour from overseas. The end result will be a reformed immigration system that no longer ignores the millions of people who want the opportunity to train and contribute. And that backs our young people with the hope of good, well-paid jobs in their community.

That is what our economy needs. It is what people want. And it is what this White Paper, alongside my Plan for Change, will deliver.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Rishi Sunak'.

Foreword by the Home Secretary

Our country is an interconnected and outward looking nation. Our history and geography mean that for generations, British people have travelled overseas to live and work, and people have come here to the UK to study, work, invest or seek sanctuary. British citizens draw on heritage from all over the world and that has made us the country we are today. Our trading nation, global leading universities, and strong historic international connections mean that migration will always be an important part of our country's future as well as our past.



But immigration needs to be properly controlled and managed. For too long it hasn't been. As a nation, we need to be able to control our borders, control who is lawfully in the country, who is entitled to work or use public services, the terms on which people can bring family here, and how people should be able to integrate in local communities. Those decisions are an important part of the identity of any nation.

As part of our Plan for Change, this Government is determined to bring net migration down and restore control and order to the immigration system. **Migration matters but it must be controlled and managed so the system is fair and works for UK.**

During the last Parliament, the previous Government lost control not just of the number of people arriving, but of the entire immigration system, with serious consequences for public confidence, the working of our economy, public services, the housing market and community cohesion.

Net migration quadrupled in the space of just four years to a record high even though the Government promised it would fall; overseas recruitment shot up while training in the UK was cut, lower skilled migration soared while the proportion of UK residents in work plummeted, and hundreds of thousands of people were given visas to arrive and stay in the UK without any requirement on them to speak or learn English.

Exploitation increased as unregulated care companies were allowed to bring in low skilled workers to do jobs that didn't meet proper standards, and criminal gangs were allowed to build an entire smuggling industry along our borders undermining security and creating a crisis in the asylum system. Meanwhile the rules were too often just ignored. Enforcement and returns by 2024 were down by over a third compared to 2010.

Too often this was the result of direct government choices. Immigration policy during the last Parliament replaced free movement with a free-market experiment which incentivised employers to freely recruit from abroad rather than train at home, allowed education institutions to pursue unlimited expansion of overseas students without proper checks in place, and directly encouraged the NHS and care organisations to bring in far more staff from abroad while still cutting support or training places in the UK.

At the same time, the growing complexity and chaos of the immigration framework has meant that too much of the system has developed based on decisions by the courts on individual cases rather than deliberate principles and rules endorsed by Parliament.

This Government's choices are different. We are clear that this chaotic system is unsustainable, and so too are the record levels of net migration we have inherited.

We know that economic migration can help fill skills shortages and bring top international talent. But it should never be an alternative to training and recruiting at home.

We know that migration needs to be managed to support families, communities and cohesion, with proper support for integration as people seek a better life either here or abroad. But there need to be clear rules about contributing to the UK. Where the pace of migration is too fast, or where integration is too weak, it can make it harder to maintain community bonds and relationships. Most fundamental of all, the rules need to be respected and enforced. For the system to have credibility, decisions need to be fair, and misuse and exploitation must be tackled fast, preventing illegal migration, overstaying, exploitation and undercutting.

Later this Summer, we will set out further reforms to the asylum system and to border security in response to irregular and illegal migration, including plans for new legislation building on the new measures already set out in the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill that is currently passing through Parliament.

But in this White Paper we set out reforms to legal migration, so that we can restore order, control and fairness to the system, bring down net migration and promote economic growth, all underpinned by five core principles:

First, net migration must come down so the system is properly managed and controlled.

Second, the immigration system must be linked to skills and training requirements here in the UK, so that no industry is allowed to rely solely on immigration to fill its skills shortages.

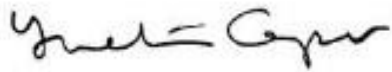
Third, the system must be fair and effective, with clearer rules agreed by Parliament in areas like respect for family life, to prevent confusion or perverse outcomes.

Fourth, the rules must be respected and enforced - from our crackdown on illegal working to the deportation of foreign criminals.

And finally, the system must support integration and community cohesion, including new rules on the ability to speak English and the contribution that people bring to the UK.

Throughout our history, Britain has been strengthened by people coming to start new businesses, study at our universities, contribute to our sporting or creative excellence, work in our NHS or do some of the toughest jobs in our country. We have a proud tradition as an outward-looking nation, investing and trading abroad, and welcoming the creativity, ideas and diversity of those who come to contribute here.

But to be successful, effective and fair, our immigration system must be properly controlled and managed. This White Paper sets out how those controls and a fair managed system will be restored.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa May', is positioned below the text.

Chapter 1: Net Migration Must Come Down

INTRODUCTION

1. Immigration is important for Britain. For centuries people have come to this country to build a better life, contributing economically and culturally to our society and helping to rebuild our country after major shocks such as the Second World War. From Uganda to Ukraine, Britain has also proudly played its part in offering refuge – and in many cases, a fresh start – to those fleeing violence and persecution overseas.

2. It is precisely because of immigration's historic significance to our country, that it must be properly controlled and managed, so that the public can have confidence in the system, so that it properly benefits the UK and so that the system itself is fair. Delivering such an immigration system, coupled with strong border security, is one of the foundations of this Government's Plan for Change.

3. Over recent years, proper control and management of the immigration system has been lost. While much attention has rightly been focused on the surge in illegal migration across the Channel, reaching a peak of 45,744 small boat arrivals in 2022, there has been less focus on the rapid increase in the levels of legal net migration since 2019. Levels of net migration were approximately 200,000 per year throughout most of the 2010s and have risen from 224,000 in the year to June 2019 to a record high of 906,000 in the year ending June 2023- a four-fold increase in the space of under four years.¹

4. At the same time as a significant expansion in overall levels of migration, driven by particularly by non-EU nationals and their dependants coming to the UK for work and study, the mix of visa holders also changed – shifting increasingly away from higher-skilled migration, and towards lower-skilled migration.

5. Those unsustainably high levels of migration have also added extra demand to our public services and our housing supply during a decade when both are already stretched, adding to pressure on key services and the housing market, and fragmenting social relations. High levels of migration can also result in widespread labour exploitation, as migrant workers' rights are violated, and employers who play by the rules are undercut.

6. It is this Government's intention to restore confidence in the immigration system, so that we can support and see benefits from migration whilst ensuring it is properly controlled and is not used as an alternative to fixing problems here in the UK. That is what this White Paper seeks to achieve.

¹ Long-term international migration: Year ending June 2012 to year ending 2024, Table 1, Office for National Statistics (www.ons.gov.uk), published 28th November 2024, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalimmigrationemigrationandnetmigrationflowsprovisional/yearendingjune2024/ltimspreadsheetnov2024finalv2.xlsx>

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

7. Net migration hit a record high of +906,000 in June 2023 and quadrupled from its level of 224,000 in June 2019. In the latest data, for the year ending June 2024, net migration was +728,000. While levels of net migration have come down slightly in the latest year, it remains significantly above the level of net migration at any period in recent history, having averaged between 200,000 to 300,000 per year from 2010 to 2019.²

8. Recent high levels of net migration have been driven by non-EU nationals and their dependants coming to the UK for work, study, and humanitarian reasons. This includes temporary factors such as humanitarian migration from Ukraine and Hong Kong. Recent policy changes have reduced the number of migrants particularly on the health and care and study routes.

9. The recent significant increases followed the introduction of new immigration policies in 2020, following the UK's departure from the EU – a system which made a number of key changes as part of the transition to a single EU/non-EU set of rules, including reducing the overall skills threshold for migration from degree-level (Regulated Qualifications Framework Level 6 or RQF 6) to A-Level-equivalent (RQF 3), and setting a new basic salary threshold for all countries at £25,600.³

² Long-term international migration: Year ending June 2012 to year ending 2024, Table 1, Office for National Statistics, published 28th November 2024, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalimmigrationandnetmigrationflowsprovisional/yearendingjune2024/ltimspreadsheetnov2024finalv2.xlsx>

³ The UK's points-based immigration system: policy statement, GOV.UK, published 19th February 2020, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement>

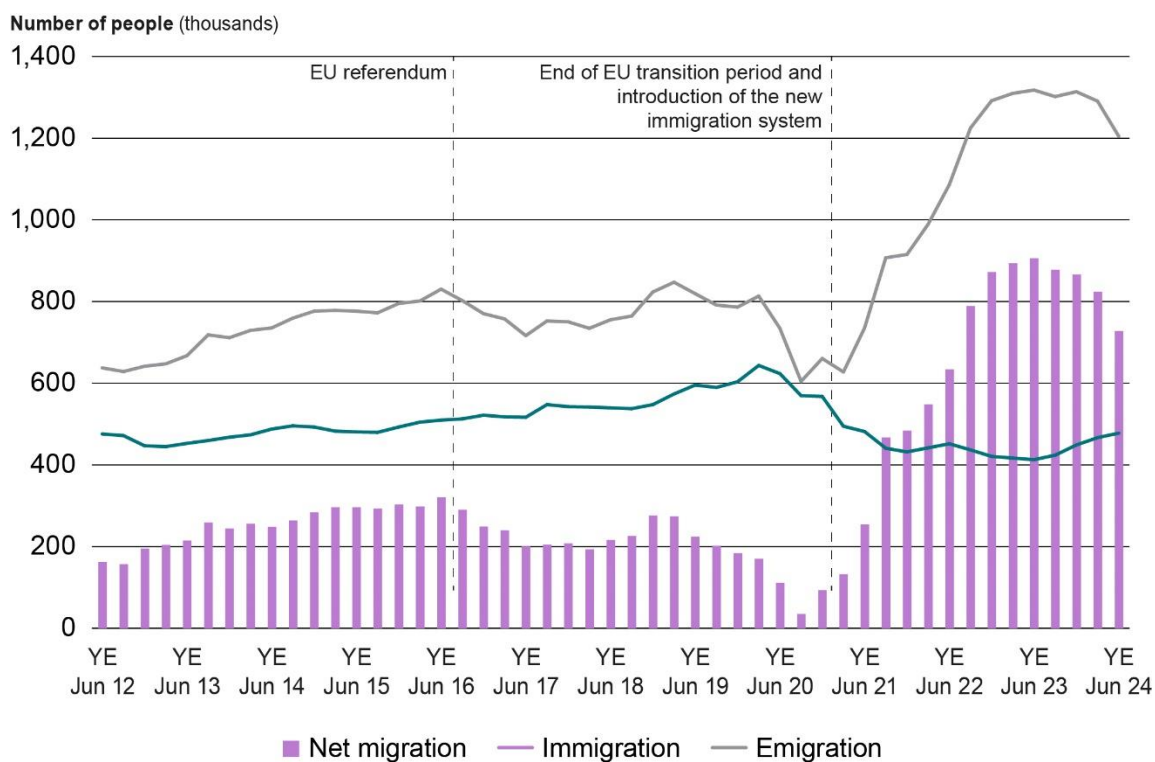


Figure 1: Immigration, emigration and net migration, Year Ending (YE) June 2012 to YE June 2024. ⁴

⁴ Long-term international migration: Year ending June 2012 to year ending 2024, Table 1, Office for National Statistics, published 28th November 2024, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalimmigrationemigrationandnetmigrationflowsprovisional/yearendingjune2024/ltimspreadsheetnov2024finalv2.xlsx>

10. Over the period since the introduction of those new rules, we have seen a number of key drivers of those steep increases in net migration, including:

- A big increase in overseas recruitment including a shift towards **lower-skilled migration**, with a substantial increase in worker visas issued below degree level. In 2022, only 16,200 visas were issued to people taking up lower skilled jobs. By 2023, this had increased to 27,900 following increases in people coming to work in food preparation and hospitality occupations. The expansion of the Health & Care visa route in February 2022 to include the social care workforce also triggered a sharp increase in the number of people arriving via this route to work in below degree-level jobs, from 37,000 in 2022 to 108,000 in 2023.⁵
- A rapid increase in **sponsored study visas at lower-ranked education institutions**, driven by a rapid increase in international students applying for master's degrees in the UK. UK visas for universities globally ranked between 601 and 1,200 increased by 49% between 2021 and 2023; whilst visas for top 100 universities fell by 7% over the same period.⁶
- A significant increase in **visas for dependants**, with a rise in both workers and students arriving in the UK with family members in recent years:
 - Between 2021 and 2023, there were large increases in dependants of workers driven by the Health and Care sector. 55% (315,000) of visas issued to Health and Care workers between 2021 and 2023 were to dependants. Numbers have since fallen from their peak in 2023, though they remain proportionally high with 75% of Health and Care Worker visas in 2024 being issued to dependants⁷

⁵ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020), year ending December 2024, Table Occ_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc85edba253db298782ce2/occupation-visas-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁶ Home Office Management Information

⁷ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79addd86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

- Whereas just 5% of study visas from 2017-19 were issued to dependants (a total of 16,000 in 2019), that proportion increased to 20% from 2021-23 (reaching a peak of 143,000 in 2023). While volumes have fallen since then (back to 22,000 or 5% in 2024),⁸ most remaining eligible study visa dependants are still able to come without a requirement to speak English, limiting their ability to integrate into the UK, and find work.
 - The **stay rate of migrants** – that is the proportion who choose to, and have legally been able to, remain in the UK over the long-term – has also increased over recent years. Following the opening of the Graduate route in 2020, more graduate students have been staying in the UK longer-term. More than half of students arriving in 2020 still held leave after three years, the highest level on record. Stay rates for workers have also increased.⁹ Both the higher inflows, and longer stay rates have contributed to higher net migration in recent years.
11. Adding to all the effects of increases in legal net migration – including some of the key drivers set out above – has been the increase in recent years in the numbers of people **arriving illegally in the UK or staying illegally** when they have no right to remain here, adding to the UK’s unacceptably high asylum backlog and asylum accommodation costs. From 2018-2024, 220,000 people were found to have arrived via irregular means (150,000 having crossed the Channel in small boats),¹⁰ the vast majority of whom claimed asylum. This is in addition to people who claim asylum having arrived legally in the UK on visas intended for study, work or visitor purposes, including 40,000 in 2024.¹¹
12. In all the above areas, and others set out in this White Paper, this Government wants to see net migration come down further and faster over time to sustainable levels. We will do so by making clear and informed choices about who comes to the UK, how long they are allowed to stay for, and the acceptable pathways to settlement, both to restore control and place much greater value on the different contributions that people bring.

⁸ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79add86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁹ Migrant Journey: 2023 report, GOV.UK, published 14 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrant-journey-2023-report/migrant-journey-2023-report#study>

¹⁰ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Irregular migration to the UK datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Irr_01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8506d157fd4b79add8d/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-dataset-dec-2024.xlsx>

¹¹ Source of asylum claims in 2024, GOV.UK, published 30 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/source-of-asylum-claims-in-2024/source-of-asylum-claims-in-2024>

IMPACTS OVER RECENT YEARS

13. Despite the significant increases in long-term migration over recent years, economic growth and living standards have stagnated. Since Q4 2019, overall GDP has risen by just 3.4% despite record high levels of migration – in contrast to 4.9% in the Eurozone, and over 12% in the United States.¹²

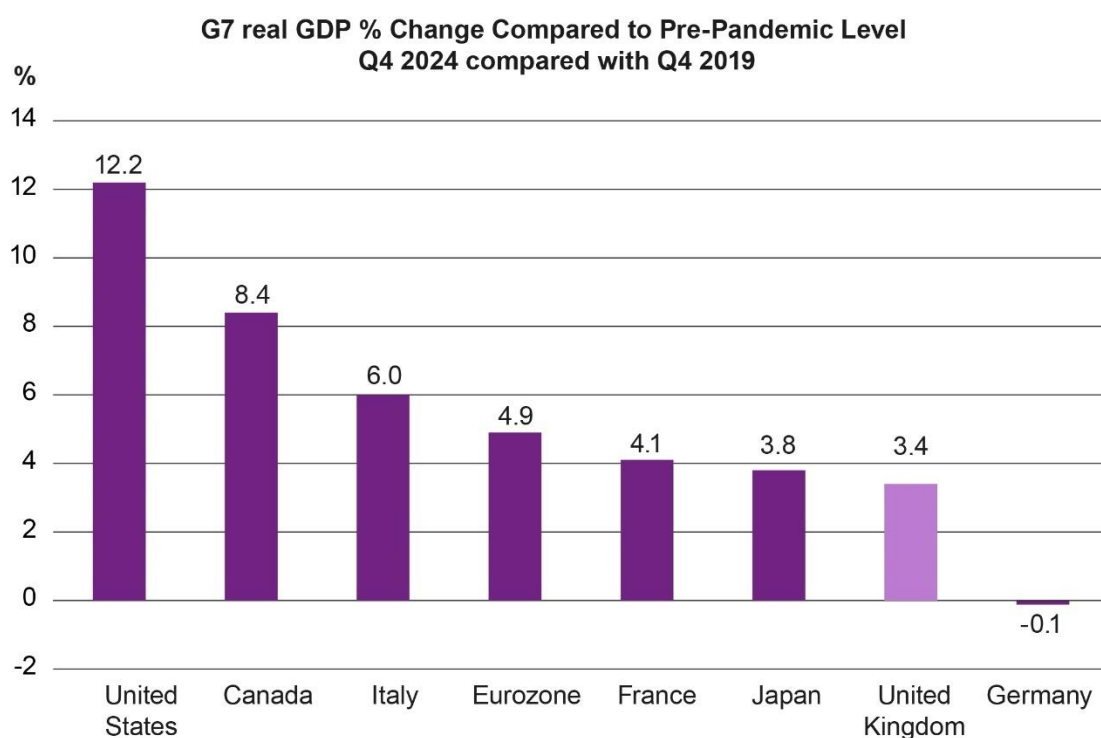


Figure 2: G7 real GDP % Change Compared to Pre-Pandemic Level¹³

14. Highly skilled migrants can have a significant positive impact on the labour market where they are able to fill skill-shortages, and where they bring a new set of skills to complement UK workers, increasing overall productivity.

15. However, evidence suggests inflows of lower-skilled migrants are more likely to distort the labour market – which is precisely why the balance and mix of migration is so crucial.¹⁴ Whilst there are currently record levels of migrant workers filling shortages in the UK labour market, the figure below shows that 6 out of the 10 sectors seeing this highest change in payrolled employments of non-EU nationals have been correlated with declines in UK employment over the period.¹⁵

¹² OECD data explorer, Quarterly real GDP growth – OECD Countries, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, published 2025. Available at: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>

¹³ OECD data explorer, Quarterly real GDP growth – OECD Countries, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, published 2025. Available at: [OECD Data Explorer](https://data-explorer.oecd.org/)

¹⁴ Dustmann et al. (2008)

¹⁵ UK payrolled employments by nationality, region, industry, age and sex from July 2014 to December 2024, HM Revenue and Customs, published 20 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-payrolled-employments-by-nationality-region-industry-age-and-sex-from-july-2014-to-december-2024/uk-payrolled-employments-by-nationality-region-industry-age-and-sex-from-july-2014-to-december-2024#payrolled-employments-by-nationality-and-region>

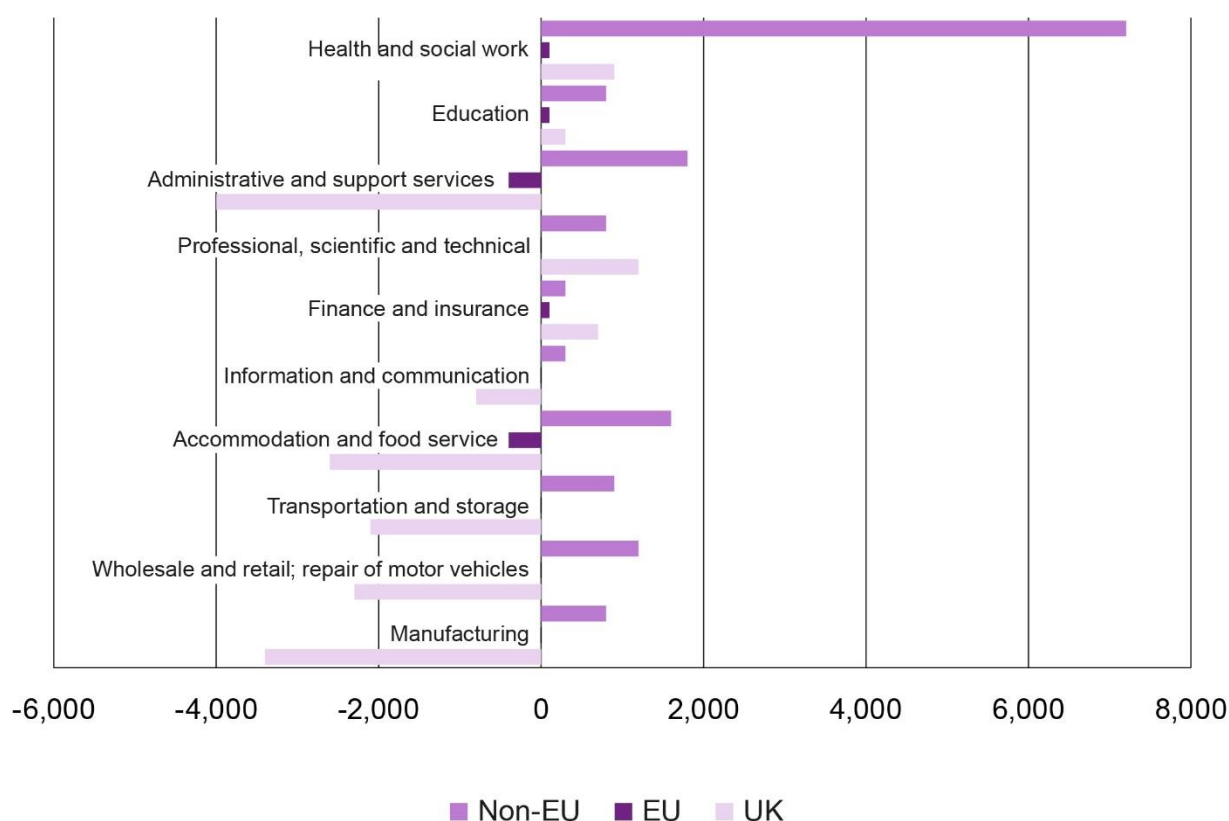


Figure 3: The change in UK payrolled employments by nationality group.¹⁶

16. The metric that best describes the impact on the living standards of the UK population as a whole is GDP per capita, which shows how rising national wealth is benefiting individual UK residents regardless of annual fluctuations in net migration. This Government has made raising the living standards for every part of the UK a cornerstone of its Plan for Change. This means more than boosting economic output; it means making sure that boost is felt by everyone.

17. However, despite the significantly high levels of net migration over recent years, GDP per capita has also stagnated, falling in every quarter since 2022 and by Quarter 2 2024, real GDP per capita was 0.6% below its pre-COVID-19 pandemic level.¹⁷

¹⁶ OECD data explorer, Quarterly real GDP growth – OECD Countries, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, published 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-payrolled-employments-by-nationality-region-industry-age-and-sex-from-july-2014-to-december-2024/>

¹⁷ UK real net domestic product per capita - chained volume measures (reference year = 2022) £: seasonally adjusted, Office of National Statistics, published 28 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/timeseries/mwb6/ukeya>

18. Housing demand (including, but not limited to net migration) has far outpaced the rate of housebuilding in recent years – whilst the big increase in overseas recruitment has been associated with falling support for skills in the UK. While the number of new apprenticeships in engineering in England fell from 26,970 in 2021/22 to 18,520 in 2024/25,¹⁸ the number of visas issued for work for Engineering Professionals rose from 3,427 in 2021 to 5,495 in 2024.¹⁹

19. We understand that the impacts of high levels of net migration are not felt evenly across the UK. In December 2024 non-UK nationals made up nearly 21% of payrolled employees in England, but only 12% in Scotland, 11% in Northern Ireland and 10% in Wales.²⁰ Whilst recognising the importance of having a single immigration system that covers the whole of the UK our proposals recognise the differing labour markets across the constituent nations. Relevant bodies within the Devolved Governments will make up an important part of our proposed Labour Market Evidence Group to ensure that the evidence picture accurately captures variations amongst different nations.

¹⁸ Apprenticeships academic year 2024/25, Department for Education, published 27 March 2025. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2024-25>

¹⁹ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020), year ending December 2024, Table Occ_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc85edba253db298782ce2/occupation-visas-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

²⁰ UK payrolled employments by nationality, region, industry, age and sex from July 2014 to December 2024, HM Revenue and Customs, published 20 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-payrolled-employments-by-nationality-region-industry-age-and-sex-from-july-2014-to-december-2024/uk-payrolled-employments-by-nationality-region-industry-age-and-sex-from-july-2014-to-december-2024#payrolled-employments-by-nationality-and-region>

MEASURING MIGRATION

20. To underpin a more controlled Points-Based migration system, and inform policy development, the process for measuring and modelling migration and its impacts also needs to improve.
21. The initial measurement of net migration by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is marked as provisional and is regularly subject to a series of very substantial upward revisions, partly reflecting uncertainty over the proportion of migrants who have remained in the UK long term. The repeated difficulties that our most expert bodies have had in accurately measuring and modelling migration point to considerable scope to improve our current systems for doing so.
22. This is not a new problem. Data gathered on migration flows has historically been inadequate, and modelling emigration has always been challenging. But the complex structural and dynamic changes in underlying trends in migration in recent years – including the sudden pace of those changes – has contributed to the number of inaccuracies and revisions both in the measurement and forecasting of net migration, and that has undoubtedly undermined confidence in the system and made it harder to determine appropriate policy responses.
23. This also has implications for modelling the impact of migration changes on the economy. Limited research has so far been done on the full impact that very high levels of net migration have had on the UK labour market, on displacement or on GDP per capita. As the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) says, the impacts of net migration on the economy “are highly sensitive to alternative assumptions”.²¹
24. Our roll out of digital border arrangements including eVisas, eGates and new information systems will improve the accuracy of data gathered and measurements taken and will not affect the operation of the Common Travel Area. In addition to this we will work with the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), the ONS and the OBR on overhauling the future data gathering and research needed to develop accurate measurements and forward plans.

²¹ The impact of migration on the fiscal forecast, Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2024, Office for Budget Responsibility, published 6 March 2024. Available at: <https://obr.uk/box/the-impact-of-migration-on-the-fiscal-forecast/#:~:text=They%20are%20sensitive%20to%20assumptions%20around%20the%20composition,sets%20as%20a%20response%20to%20the%20higher%20population.>

NEXT STEPS

25. While migration has begun to come down from the peak reached in the year ending June 2023, the future profile remains very uncertain and recent experience has shown how far forecasts are subject to change. Those figures will continue to feed through to net migration over the course of 2025/26.

26. However, we must go significantly further to ensure that migration continues to fall from the unsustainably high levels of the last few years, to reduce overseas recruitment in favour of training UK workers, and also to change the pattern and skill mix of the migration we do allow, to ensure a better contribution to the UK. Subsequent chapters set out a series of measures to achieve those goals, and restore order, control and fairness to the immigration system.

27. That includes a series of specific new and stronger visa controls:

- Increasing the threshold for skilled worker visas to graduate level so we reduce lower skilled migration
- Only allowing a narrow list of critical shortage occupations onto the Temporary Shortage List, alongside workforce strategies to increase training and participation rates in the UK
- Closing the social care visa route to overseas recruitment
- Restricting dependants for lower skilled workers on the temporary shortage list and increasing salary thresholds for all visa holders seeking to bring in dependants and
- Increasing English language requirements for visa holders and dependants.

28. The new framework and further measures set out in this White Paper will also allow us to go further in bringing down net migration and restoring order and control to the immigration system. Our new labour market reforms will allow for further reductions in overseas recruitment as skills and training improve. Reforms to family reunion rules will mean a fairer framework for all. New earned settlement and citizenship rules will mean that people will need to have clearly contributed for longer before securing long term settlement rights in the UK.

29. And we will separately set out new reforms to asylum and border security to reduce small boat crossings, smash the gangs responsible for them, increase deportations and returns, bring the asylum system back under control and end the use of asylum hotels.

30. While migration has begun to fall in the past year, we need to go significantly further to bring order and control back into the immigration system. Record high levels of migration have led to serious consequences distorting the labour market, increasing pressure on the housing market and public services, and undermining cohesion and confidence, and those consequences are still as serious as ever today. We want to see a properly managed and controlled, fair immigration system that benefits our country and has the confidence of communities. That is why net migration must come down.

Chapter 2: Migration, Labour Market and Growth

31. For generations, people have come here to work in our public services and contribute to the economy, to start up new businesses and care for our loved ones in the NHS. When managed in the right way, economic migration can help fill our skills shortages, and attract the best talent, entrepreneurship and investment into our country.
32. But failure to control the scale, pace and mix of migration can also put increased pressure on public services, public finances and the housing market. And far from boosting the economy, uncontrolled migration can distort the labour market and undermine productivity and per capita growth.
33. In recent years, net migration increased substantially and at record pace to an all-time high of more than 900,000,²² driven predominantly by a fourfold increase in overseas recruitment.
34. Economic migration shot up while training of the domestic workforce has fallen, and lower skilled migration soared while the proportion of UK residents in work fell. That surge in lower skilled migration, particularly in the care sector, also saw an increase in the abuse and exploitation of workers, paid at wages that undercut reputable employers, and in many cases broke the law.
35. For too long, labour market policy and the immigration system have not been sufficiently considered in the round – and the result has been a reduction in investment in skills, rising inactivity of the domestic labour market, poor future workforce planning and high levels of recruitment from abroad.
36. At a time when skills matter more than ever to the economy and people's employment prospects, there has been a long-term lack of coordination or investment to deliver the skills and capabilities our economy needs. Alongside this, training by employers has fallen, and investment in adult education has been cut.
37. Even in the sectors directly under Government control, we have seen an overreliance on the immigration system, including from countries in need of their own domestic workforce. The result is that skills shortages in the UK economy have grown and so too has the pressure to recruit from abroad even in sectors where we have the capacity and capability to train here at home.

²² Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2024, Office for National Statistics, published 28 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2024>

38. Until the reforms announced last year by the Work and Pensions Secretary, there has been no serious plan either to increase the domestic labour supply or get inactive people back into work. A broken welfare system and lack of action to support people to come off benefits and into the labour market has led to one in eight young people not currently being in work,²³ education or training and 9.2 million people being economically inactive.²⁴
39. Nor has there been any strategic workforce planning for critical sectors on which economic growth and vital public services depend. For too long, there has been no growth strategy and no industrial strategy and therefore little sign of effective partnerships between government and industry in developing the key skills – including for sectors like technology and construction – that are needed to drive growth and support our economy.
40. The same is true in failing and fragmented sectors of the labour market like social care, where poor pay, conditions and shift patterns even in some of the better workplaces, and abuse, exploitation and sub-minimum wages in the worst, has made it much harder to recruit UK residents into jobs, and left any reputable employers, who look after their staff, badly undercut.
41. In the absence of proper co-ordinated action across these three dimensions of labour market policy – participation, skills, industrial strategy – all the pressure has fallen on the fourth: migration and recruitment from abroad.
42. This is a damaging way for labour market policy to be driven. It has led to over recruitment from abroad and under training in the UK. And it has left UK growth too often reliant upon short-term, immigration-driven increases in the size of the labour market, rather than on sustained increases in productivity and growth per capita through investment in skills and innovation here at home.
43. UK immigration policy during the last Parliament allowed employers to freely recruit from abroad, education institutions to pursue expansion of overseas students without proper checks in place and encouraged the NHS and care organisations to bring in staff from abroad from countries with recruitment demands of their own, all of which have contributed to record high and uncontrolled net migration levels.
44. Employers were encouraged to recruit from overseas in shortage occupations with the introduction of a 20% wage discount below the going rate when recruiting for jobs on the shortage occupation list, even though reducing pay levels and undercutting in shortage sectors was likely to make UK recruitment even harder, make the shortages even worse, and lead to ever greater reliance on overseas labour.

²³ New Report reveals young people nearly five times more likely to be put out of work, GOV.UK, published 20 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-report-reveals-young-people-nearly-five-times-more-likely-to-be-put-out-of-work>

²⁴ Economic update: Inactivity due to illness reaches record, House of Commons Library, published 20 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-report-reveals-young-people-nearly-five-times-more-likely-to-be-put-out-of-work>

45. An entirely new approach is required to repair the damage. That will mean some immediate changes to immigration rules, but also much more fundamental changes to prevent immigration always being the lever that gets pulled whenever labour market problems emerge.
46. The new approach the Government is setting out will mean much stronger links between the Points-Based System and training here in the UK. We will introduce requirements for workforce strategies and bring together a new Labour Market Evidence Group to work together to gather and share evidence about the state of each workforce in key sectors, training levels and participation by the domestic labour market.
47. The first stage of our reforms will mean much tighter restrictions on and reductions in lower skilled migration including changes to the Skilled Worker Visa, making support for shortage occupations temporary and linking immigration with skills and training, while also doing more to support exceptional global talent to come to the UK.
48. Then over time, as we strengthen UK training and workforce strategies for higher skilled occupations that have also been over-recruiting from abroad, this new approach will allow us to reduce net migration further while boosting productivity, strengthening the UK economy and supporting growth.
49. Employers will be expected to boost domestic talent and skills if they want to recruit from abroad and we will explore new options to incentivise and invest in training and restrict employers who are not committed to increasing skills or following the workforce strategy from sponsoring skilled visas.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

50. The Skilled Work visa was introduced in late 2020, replacing the Tier 2 work visa. The new route included a work visa requirement for EU nationals, and a lowering of the skills threshold for skilled work.
51. The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) is a system used to categorise qualifications based on their level of difficulty and complexity. Occupations which require an RQF 6 or above skill level are deemed highly skilled (jobs that people generally need at least an undergraduate degree to perform) such as architects, and physiotherapists. Occupations that require lower RQF levels of qualification are generally quicker and easier to train people to undertake. The newly introduced Skilled Worker visa lowered the skill threshold on the route from RQF 6 down to RQF 3.
52. In August 2020, the Health and Care Worker route was introduced and expanded in February 2022 to include the social care workforce (within which roles are generally below RQF 6). The proportion of skilled work visas issued for occupations with a skill level below RQF 6 increased from under 10% in Q1 2021 to nearly 60% in Q1 2024 (see figure 4).

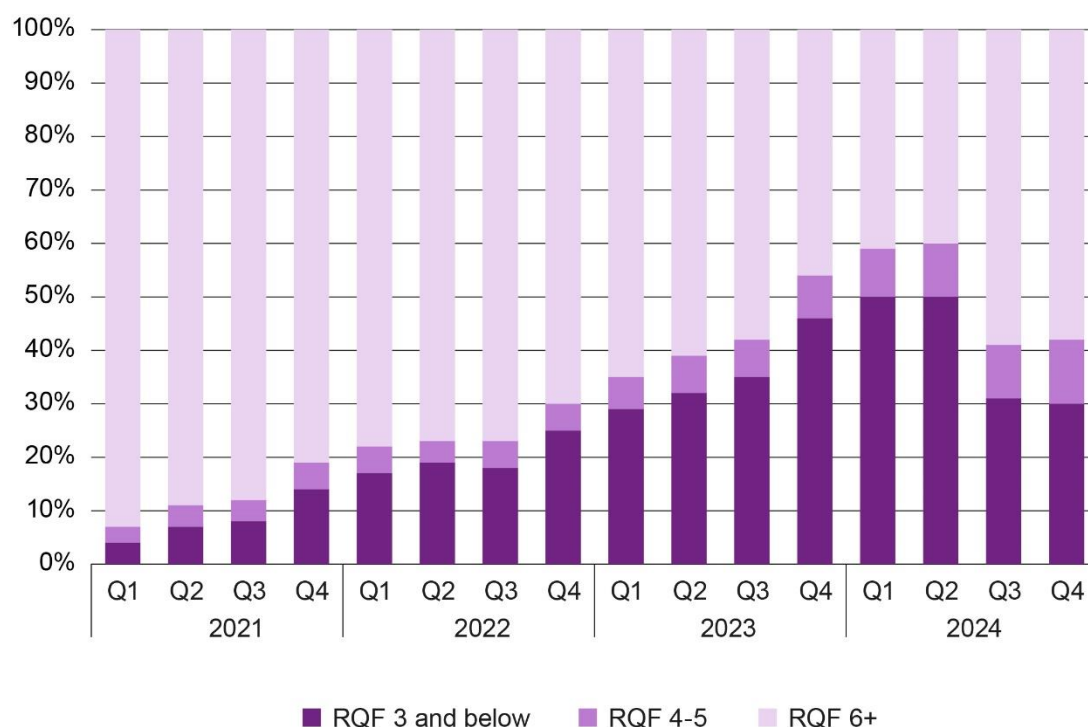


Figure 4: Share of skilled worker visas issued in RQF 3 and below, RQF 4-5 and RQF 6 and above occupations.²⁵

²⁵ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020) year ending December 2024, Table Occ_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc85edba253db298782ce2/occupation-visas-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

53. Following these changes, visas issued for these routes reached record levels, up almost fourfold from 123,000 in 2021 to 465,000 in 2023. In 2023, there were 105,000 visas issued to care workers and senior care workers, representing 73% of Health and Care Worker visas issued to main applicants. The growth in visa demand from main applicants was also accompanied by a large increase in the number of work-related dependant visas granted. The majority (62%) of all work dependants between 2021 and 2024 were on the Health and Care Worker route.
54. Following concerns of exploitation and abuse in the sector and subsequent scrutiny on employers in adult social care, including the stronger application of the genuine vacancy test for the health and social care sector from October 2024, the number of Health and Care Worker visas granted for both main applicants and their dependants fell by 237,000 (68%) in 2024 compared to 2023. More broadly, increased income thresholds and a tightening of the ability to bring dependants, has seen the total number of Skilled Worker visas start to fall.²⁶

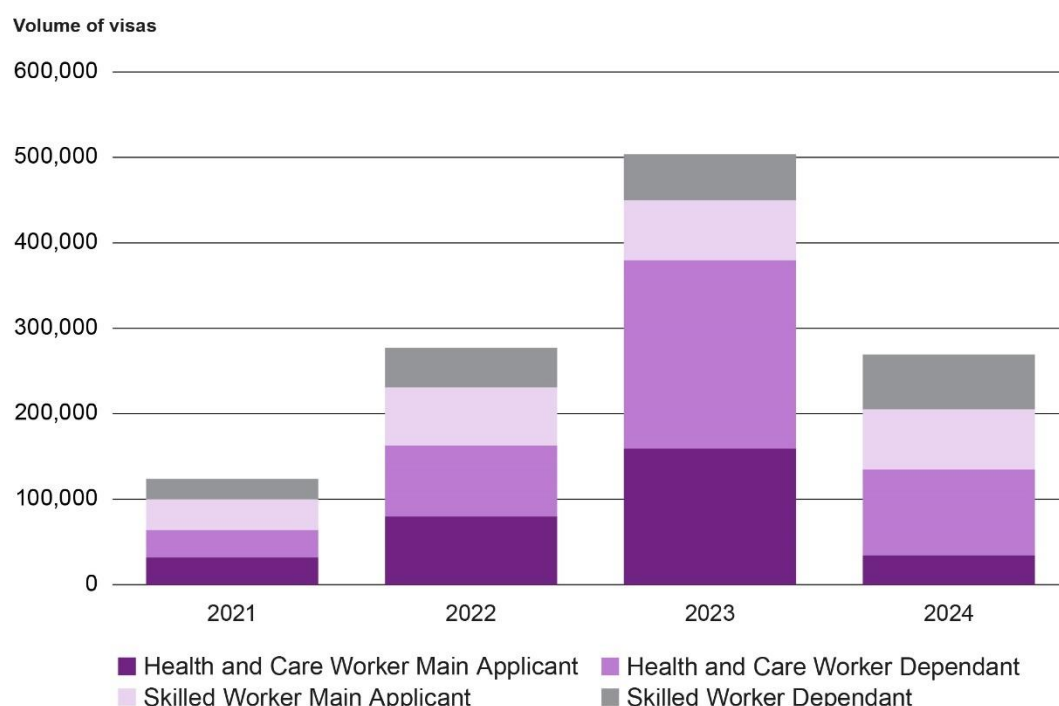


Figure 5: Volumes of work visas by route and SW dependants.²⁷

²⁶ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79add86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

²⁷ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79add86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

55. Increases to salary thresholds in April 2024 have resulted in a decline in visas across all skill levels - but the average skill level is still lower than it was historically. Figure 6 illustrates the volume of entry clearance visas issued to skilled workers below and above RQF 6,²⁸ using data after the changes to salary thresholds in April 2024. In absolute numbers, the larger numbers of visas issued below RQF 6 are to workers in the 'accommodation and food service activities' sector, followed by the 'other service activities' and the 'wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles' sectors.

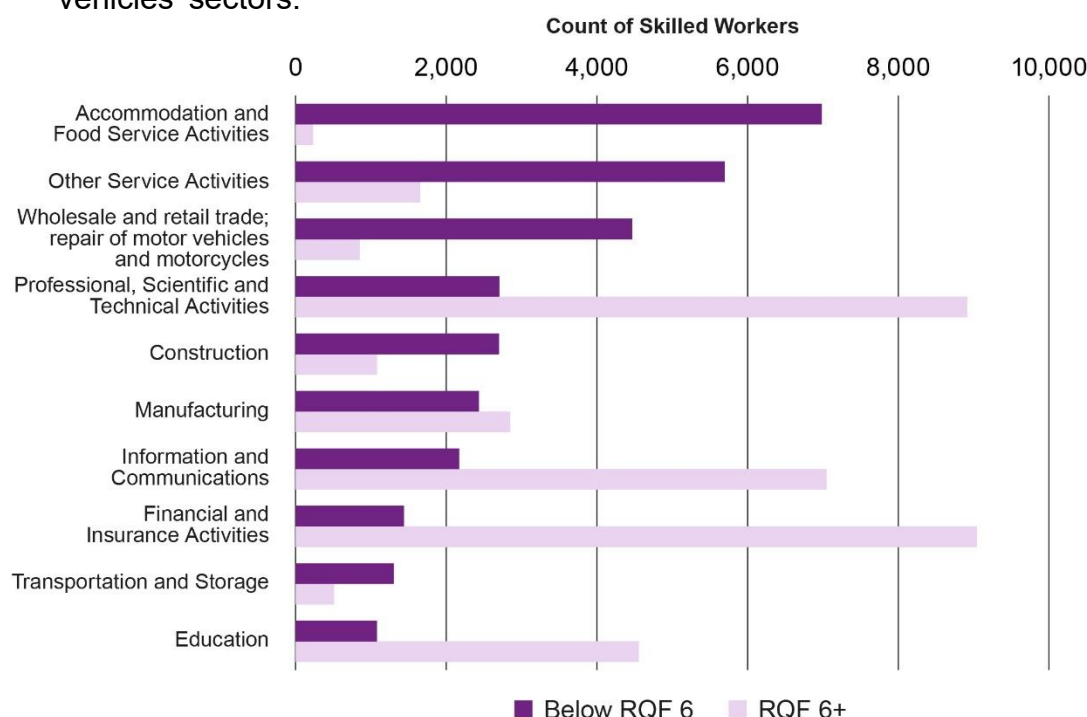


Figure 6 The count of new, post-Spring 2024 Skilled Workers, by RQF level group, top 10 UK industries.^{29 30}

²⁸ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020), year ending December 2024, Table Occ_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc85edba253db298782ce2/occupation-visas-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

²⁹ New joiners to the Skilled Worker route are considered here to be inflows from out of country, and those in country switching to the Skilled Worker route. Individuals currently on the Skilled Worker route who may extend their visa are expected to be exempt from the policy proposals so are excluded from this analysis.

³⁰ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020), year ending December 2024, Table Occ_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc85edba253db298782ce2/occupation-visas-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

56. At the same time as overseas recruitment, including of lower skilled workers, shot up, labour market participation by UK residents has dropped. The UK was the only major economy that saw its employment rate fall over the five years to 2024,³¹ reversing the previous long-run trend of declining rates of economic inactivity. The reasons behind this trend include too many people being excluded from the labour market such as those with poor health or caring responsibilities. As set out in the 'Get Britain Working' White Paper, this Government is committed to tackling the reasons behind the declining rates of labour market participation.
57. A key driver behind this trend has been too many young people without the essential skills or access to high-quality further learning, an apprenticeship or support to work so that they can thrive at the start of their career, and employers not being able to fill vacancies due to the genuine shortage of skilled candidates. This not only leads to overreliance on migration, but it also holds back economic growth and undermines living standards.
58. Underinvestment in training the UK workforce and developing skills has contributed to poor levels of productivity and has hindered economic growth. The Government is already taking action on this and has established Skills England to drive the improvements in skills provision that are needed. Skills England is working to unify the skills landscape across the UK, including working with the Devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and their counterparts, to better ensure the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to power economic growth. But we need for the first time to link together these different sides of labour market policy in a systematic way.

³¹ Get Britain Working White Paper, GOV.UK, Published 26 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper>

LABOUR MARKET EVIDENCE GROUP

59. We intend to reverse the long-term trends set out above whereby increasing overseas recruitment is occurring at the same time as reducing investment in skills and training and increasing levels of unemployment and economic inactivity in the UK. To support this, we need a stronger evidence base and clearer understanding of the underlying causes of these trends, whether it be lack of opportunities, training or poor working conditions.
60. To support this goal, we will draw on the best data available in order to make informed decisions about the state of the labour market and the role that different policies should play, rather than always relying on migration. To gather this data, **we will establish the Labour Market Evidence Group (LME Group).**
61. The LME Group will be comprised of:
- The Industrial Strategy Advisory Council, who are encouraged to focus on domestic recruitment and training
 - The Department for Work and Pensions, tasked with reducing economic inactivity and increasing workforce participation
 - Skills England and equivalent organisations in the Devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which will target training needs
 - The Migration Advisory Committee which will guide immigration policy.
62. The LME Group will have an ongoing standing function to work together to gather and share evidence about the state of the workforce, training levels and participation by the domestic labour market, including at Devolved Government and regional levels. It will focus on sectors / occupations which are central to industrial strategy, which currently have high levels of reliance on migration for their workforce, or which are anticipated to in future and will make recommendations about sectors or occupations where workforce strategies are needed, or where the labour market is currently failing.

WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

63. Recent rises in work-based migration have been driven by high use of the immigration system by particular sectors - forced to rely on overseas recruitment due to shortages linked to skills, training and conditions here in the UK.
64. Yet in too many of those sectors, the lack of a comprehensive workforce plan has limited the ability of the sector to address the underlying drivers of shortages. For that reason, this Government's manifesto committed to "ending the long-term reliance on overseas workers in some parts of the economy by bringing in workforce and training plans for sectors such as health and social care, and construction".

65. Drawing upon the evidence base gathered by the LME Group, **key sectors where there are high levels of recruitment from abroad will need to produce, or update, a workforce strategy which relevant employers will be expected to comply with. This will detail steps to be taken on skills, training, and broader conditions, as well as engagement of the economically inactive domestic labour force**. Working together, the Home Office, HM Treasury, the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Business and Trade, and the Department for Work and Pensions will engage sector bodies as part of this approach.

SKILLED WORKERS: RAISING THE THRESHOLDS

66. The threshold for Skilled Workers was previously set at RQF 6 and above. The previous Government lowered the threshold to RQF 3 (A-level equivalent) and above in 2020. The number of work visas issued are as a result nearly twice as high in 2024 as in 2019 with a far higher proportion of lower skilled workers.
67. The big increase in work visas reflects not just the weakening of controls in 2020, but also a failure over many years to tackle issues with pay, conditions, skills, and training in the UK labour market meaning too many sectors have remained reliant on international recruitment instead of being able to source the talent they need here in the UK.
68. Growth in visa numbers, and concerns about exploitation of overseas recruits, have been particularly seen in occupations below RQF 6 (below Degree level). Therefore, **we will lift the level for skilled workers back to RQF 6 and above. Salary thresholds will rise.**
69. This approach would see the number of eligible occupations reduced by around 180 occupations. It is consistent with our new approach to linking skills and migration and reflects the fact that RQF 6 and above occupations tend to have longer lead-in times for training, meaning that skills and workforce plans are likely to require extra time to be implemented and continue a pathway of growth.
70. The Immigration Salary List which gives people discounts from salary thresholds will be abolished. We will ask the MAC to undertake a thorough review of salary requirements (including discounts) to ensure that international recruitment is never a cheap alternative to fair pay and to ensure they reflect the new changes to our immigration system.
71. In relation to those who are already utilising the Skilled Worker visa, from the point that the skills threshold is raised, existing Skilled Worker visa holders will continue to be able to renew their visa, change employment and take supplementary employment, in currently eligible occupations below RQF 6; however, applicants from overseas, or those applying to switch from other routes, will have to follow the new rules.

TEMPORARY SHORTAGE LIST

- 72. For occupations with a skills requirement of RQF 3-5 (below degree level) where there have been long term shortages, we will only permit use of the Points-Based immigration system on a time limited basis where the MAC has advised it is justified, where there is a workforce strategy in place, and where employers seeking to recruit from abroad are committed to playing their part in increasing recruitment from the domestic workforce.**
73. We will establish a new Temporary Shortage List to provide time limited access to the Points-Based immigration system. Occupations below RQF 6 must be listed on the Temporary Shortage List in order to gain access to the immigration system. Sectors will only be potentially added to the Temporary Shortage list if they are key to the industrial strategy or delivering critical infrastructure and following advice from the MAC.
74. Requirements for being on the Temporary Shortage List will include having a proper workforce strategy which aims to maximise the use of the UK workforce and includes agreed training and broader plans with skills organisations, including Skills England and the Devolved Governments.
75. The MAC will consider the workforce strategy before providing advice to the Home Secretary, looking at issues such as:
- How far the workforce strategy is underpinned by a skills strategy
 - How far it is underpinned by a commitment to work with the Department for Work and Pensions on a domestic labour strategy
 - How the sector will manage the risk of exploitation of workers, particularly migrant workers in the sector and
 - Whether the strategy is sufficiently ambitious.
76. The MAC will assess these factors before making recommendations to the Home Secretary about access to the Temporary Shortage List and appropriate visa terms and conditions, including time limits and caps on the number of visas. These jobs below RQF 6 will also include new restrictions on bringing dependants.
77. The above process will take time to establish. In the interim, the Temporary Shortage List will contain occupations that the MAC has recently considered to be in shortage, or which are crucial to the delivery of the UK's Industrial Strategy.
78. Over time, RQF 6 and above occupations should not necessarily have guaranteed access to the Points-Based immigration system where there is evidence of over-reliance on international workers. The LME Group will also be able to make recommendations about RQF 6 areas where workforce plans and strategies are needed to tackle labour market problems. And over time, the MAC will be able to review progress against those strategies to assess whether further restrictions should be recommended in future – allowing us to go further in bringing net migration down as we improve skills, productivity and growth in the UK.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

79. We recognise that sometimes labour shortages are not due to a lack of skills. For example, vacancies in the social care workforce are largely driven by historic levels of poor pay and poor terms and conditions leading to low domestic recruitment and retention rates. This Government is committed to tackling these issues and has committed to establishing Fair Pay Agreements which will empower worker, employer and other sector representatives to negotiate improvements in the terms of employment. These agreements will move the UK away from a dependence on overseas workers to fulfil our care needs.
80. We have been clear about our concerns about the Adult Social Care visa. The introduction of this visa route has led to significant concerns over abuse and exploitation of individual workers. We have taken steps to address these concerns, restricting access to overseas recruitment unless employers have first tried to recruit from the in-country redeployment pool, but the evidence shows more needs to be done.
81. **We will therefore end overseas recruitment for social care visas.** In line with our wider reforms to skills thresholds, we will close social care visas to new applications from abroad. For a transition period until 2028, we will permit visa extensions and in-country switching for those already in the country with working rights, but this will be kept under review.

REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT

82. Refugees who have had to leave their home country because of persecution often lack the opportunity to apply for jobs and skilled worker visas in the UK, even where they have the talent and training to do so.
83. Drawing from the experience of the Displaced Talent Programme, we will explore reforms to allow a limited pool of UNHCR recognised refugees and displaced people living overseas to apply for employment through our existing sponsored worker routes where they have the skills to do so.

IMMIGRATION SKILLS CHARGE

84. The Immigration Skills Charge (ISC) has not been increased or subject to a comprehensive policy review since its introduction in 2017.
85. With our focus on linking skills, migration and wider labour market policies together, **we will increase the ISC for the first time since its introduction, by 32% to bring the ISC rates in line with inflation.**
86. **ISC funding will be used at the oncoming Spending Review to support skills funding for priority sectors to upskill the domestic workforce and reduce reliance on migration over the medium term.**

GLOBAL TALENT

87. In the global economy, the race to attract the most desirable talent is fierce, with many countries seeking to improve their attractiveness to this highly prized cohort through various measures including their immigration system.

88. The UK's current immigration system includes targeted routes for individuals who promote growth to come to the UK. Including as entrepreneurs, through the Innovator Founder route, and leaders and future leaders in key fields, through routes including Global Talent and the High Potential Individual (HPI).

89. As part of our mission to promote growth, **we will go further in ensuring that the very highly skilled have opportunities to come to the UK and access our targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent by:**

- Increasing the number of people arriving on our very high talent routes, alongside faster routes for bringing people to the UK who have the right skills and experience to supercharge UK growth in strategic industries
- As part of that, increasing places to our scheme for research interns, including those working in the field of Artificial Intelligence, to allow businesses access to additional promising young talent
- Make it simpler and easier for top scientific and design talent to use our Global Talent visa
- Review our Innovator Founder visa to ensure that it supports entrepreneurial talent currently studying at UK universities to move into the visa so that they can build their business and career in the UK
- Double the number of workers that an overseas business can send to the UK with the aim of establishing a presence in the UK
- We will explore a targeted and capped expansion of the HPI route, looking to double the number of qualifying institutions, whilst maintaining the focus of the route on individuals that will have the most benefit to the UK workforce and ensuring that any necessary safeguards are in place

90. We are also streamlining the process for employers and skilled workers to get visas, reducing bureaucracy and supporting growth. The transition to eVisa has been successfully providing a significantly better end-to-end experience for individuals throughout their entire journey – from proving their immigration status, to living, studying or working in the UK. With real-time digital access, people have more control over their documents and data, and in the future, people will no longer need to physically to travel to a Visa Application Centre for a second time to collect their passport with a physical endorsement. This improvement will start from later this summer for main applicants on key routes such as study and skilled work, with other routes to follow, streamlining the journey and promoting easy travel to the UK.

91. We are going further in our vision to revolutionise the UK Border by using technology to make visible changes to security, flow, and the passenger experience. We have already expanded the use of eGates at the border to more nationalities and age groups, processing millions of arrivals through the UK border each year. Later in 2025 we will be piloting new intelligent technologies that facilitate contactless travel through eGates, removing the need for passengers to present their passport, utilising Facial Comparison technology. This state-of-the-art technology is significantly more efficient at identity verification, leading to shorter queues at the border and a much smoother customer experience.

Chapter 3: Skilled Students

92. International students are important to the UK, to our universities and our economy. International students allow the UK to export its world class higher-education sector and make up an important pillar of growth in the UK. In 2022/23, international students contributed over £12 billion in tuition fees to Higher Education Institutions in the UK and contributed to the UK's world leading research sector.³²
93. However, it is essential that opportunities to study in the UK are only given to individuals who are genuinely here to do so, and that the universities who sponsor those individuals to study here are treating that responsibility with the seriousness it deserves. It is also important that those graduates who are allowed to remain in the UK for a temporary period after their studies contribute to our economy at an appropriate level.
94. In recent years, we have seen an increase in students staying in the UK following their studies. Alongside this, we have also seen an increase in sponsored study visas for lower-ranking education institutions.
95. We have also seen a series of problems involving misuse and exploitation of student visas, where visas are used as an entry point for living and working in the UK without any intention to complete the course, and increasing numbers of asylum claims from students at the end of their course, even though nothing substantive has changed in their home country while they have been in the UK.
96. In addition, too many graduates allowed to stay in the UK following the successful completion of their studies are not moving into the graduate level roles for which the Graduate visa route was created.
97. For all these reasons we are setting out reforms which recognise the benefits that international students bring to the UK, help to share out these benefits, but which raise standards and compliance to prevent visa misuse and strengthen the requirements to work and contribute for those graduates who stay on after their courses have been completed.

³² Higher education funding: Trends and challenges, House of Commons Library
www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk, published 16 July 2024. Available at:
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/higher-education-funding-trends-and-challenges/#:~:text=In%202022%2F23%2C%20tuition%20fees%20from%20international%20students%20were,%E2%80%98loss-making%E2%80%99%20activities%20of%20research%20and%20teaching%20home%20>

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

STUDENTS

98. Between 2011 and 2016, sponsored study visa grants to foreign students were relatively stable at around 200,000 per year.³³ After 2016, the numbers steadily increased, reaching 269,000 in 2019.³⁴ Following a fall in numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of visas issued increased sharply from 2021, reaching a peak of 498,000 in the year ending June 2023.³⁵

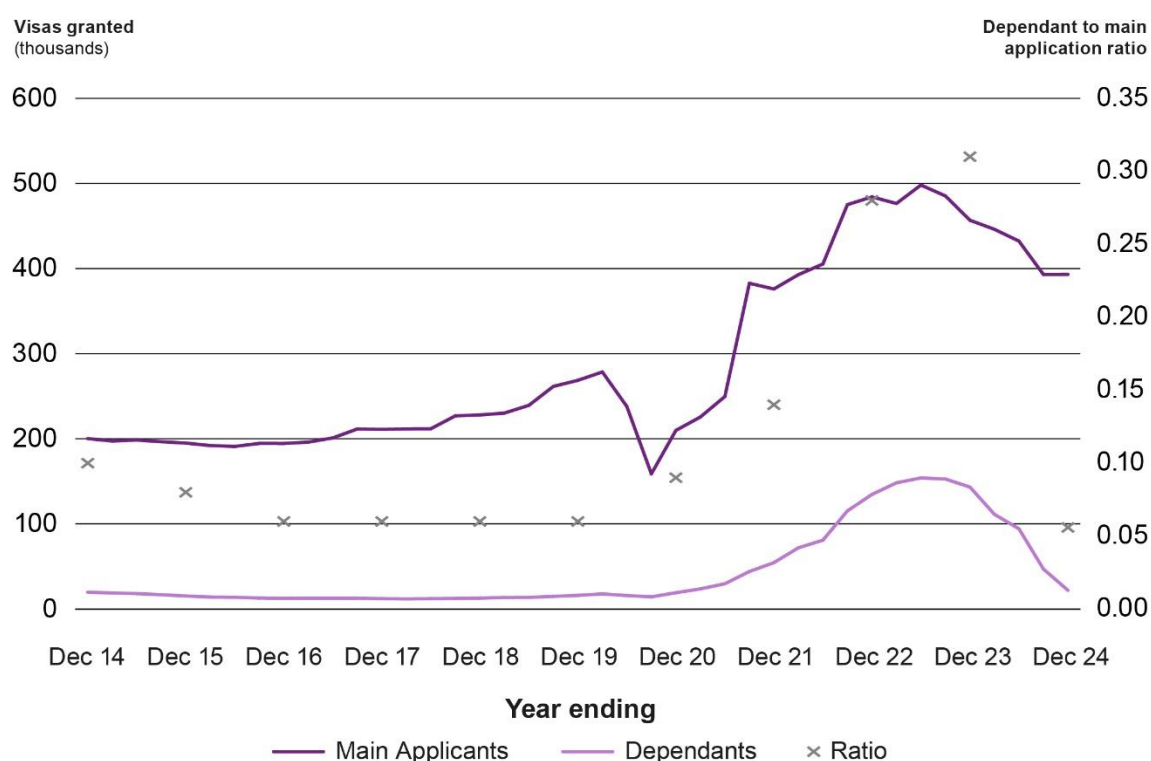


Figure 7: Sponsored study visas granted by applicant type, 2014 to 2024³⁶

³³ Why do people come to the UK? Study, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-study>

³⁴ Why do people come to the UK? Study, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-study>

³⁵ Why do people come to the UK? Study, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-study>

³⁶ Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79addd86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

99. This increase between mid-2020 and mid-2023 was due to a number of factors, including the lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions, along with changes to the immigration system following the UK's departure from the EU, and the introduction of the Graduate route allowing eligible students to remain in the UK for two to three years. At the same time, the then Government's International Education Strategy introduced a target for the UK to reach 600,000 international students per year by 2030.³⁷
100. The post-COVID-19, post-Brexit increase in study visas was mainly driven by those coming to study for a master's (accounting for 65% of study visas over the last four years). The number of grants to students coming to study at master's level increased each year between 2020 and 2022 (up 150% to 315,000). Between 2019 and 2023 there was also a large increase in dependants accompanying students (from 16,000 in 2019 to 143,000 in 2023).³⁸
101. Visas for universities ranked between 601 and 1,200 (according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025³⁹) increased by 49% (77,000 to 115,000) between 2021 and 2023, whereas the number of visas for universities ranked in the Top 100 fell by 7%.⁴⁰ New restrictions have reduced the number of dependant visas.
102. The proportion of students remaining in the visa system following the end of their studies has increased in recent years. Over half of students completing their studies in 2022, 2023 and 2024 had moved onto another visa route, compared to fewer than 20% in 2019 and 2020.⁴¹

³⁷ International Education Strategy: 2023 progress update, GOV.UK, published 26 May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-2023-update/international-education-strategy-2023-progress-update>

³⁸ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Citizenship detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Cit_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf399f16dc9038974dbbbf/citizenship-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

³⁹ World University Rankings 2025, www.timeshighereducation.com, published 22 January 2025. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/latest/world-ranking>

⁴⁰ Home Office Management Information

⁴¹ Home Office Management Information

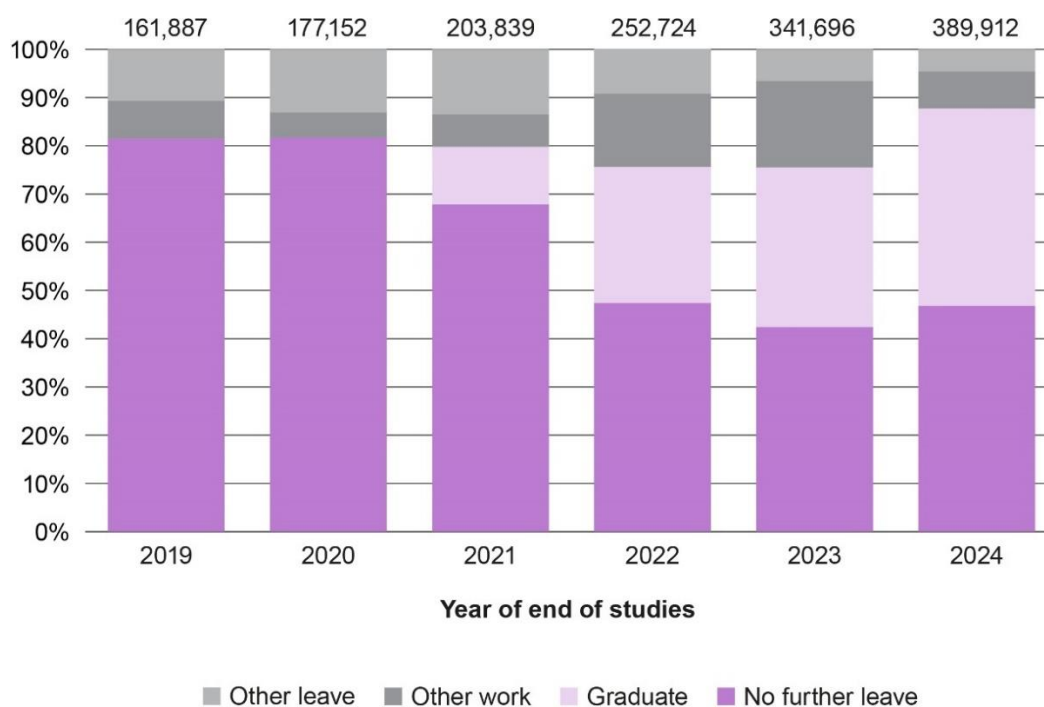


Figure 8: Students coming to the end of their studies, by subsequent leave category 2019-2024⁴²

103. Higher inflow and lower outflows of students over time has led to students representing a higher proportion of net migration in recent years, with student net migration at 262,000 in the year ending June 2024.⁴³

104. The number of asylum claims matched to a visa has increased relatively steadily since mid-2021. Around 30% of asylum claims are from visa holders. Of this, students account for the largest proportion, at almost half (47%) of all asylum claims from visa holders.⁴⁴

105. The majority of the students claiming asylum do so as they approach their visa expiry date. This indicates that some people might therefore be using the student route to make claims for humanitarian protection when circumstances in their country have not changed.

⁴² Analysis of migrants use of the Graduate route, Figure 1, GOV.UK, published 14 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/analysis-of-migrants-use-of-the-graduate-route/analysis-of-migrants-use-of-the-graduate-route>

⁴³ Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2024, Office for National Statistics, published 28 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2024>

⁴⁴ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Asy_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables#asylum-applications-decisions-and-resettlement>

GRADUATES

106. The number of graduates staying on as part of the Graduate route has increased over time to almost 250,000 in 2024, 72% of which were for main applicants, up from under 100,000 in 2022.⁴⁵

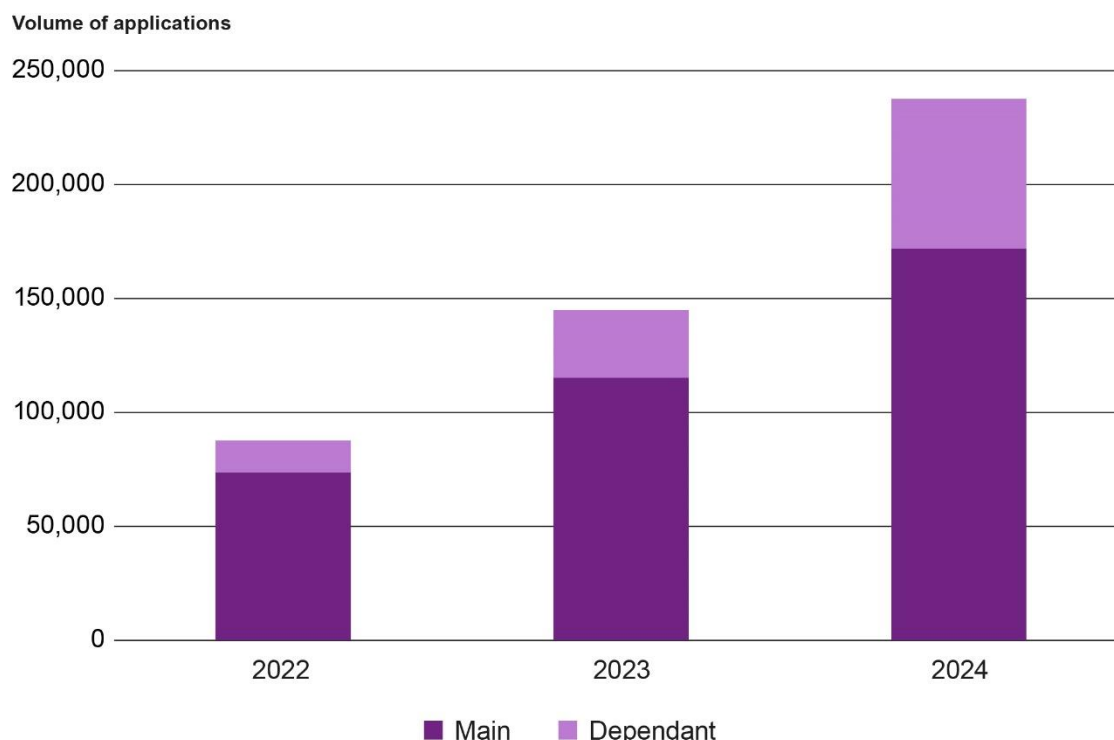


Figure 9 Applications for extensions to stay as part of Graduate route, by applicant type and year⁴⁶

107. Most graduate visa holders start work relatively quickly – with HO-HMRC data showing that 62% were earning in the first month of their visa start date, and 90% within the first six months of their visa start date.

108. The intention behind the Graduate route was to support the economy, and that meant that the vast majority of Graduate visa holders would go into graduate level jobs, at RQF 6 and above, and thereby make the level of contribution to the UK economy that their visa status warrants.

⁴⁵ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Extensions detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Exe_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc84b34ad141d90835346e/extensions-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁴⁶ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Extensions detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Exe_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc84b34ad141d90835346e/extensions-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

109. However, in practice, the evidence suggests that under a third are working in occupations that can confidently be assessed to be RQF6 and above. The survey evidence presented in Figure 10 below shows that:

- 30% of surveyed Graduate visa holders were employed in professional occupations, the significant majority of which are RQF 6 and above
- 31% were employed in occupational groups where the significant majority are RQF level 3 (A-Level equivalent) and below, including administrative and secretarial occupations and
- The remaining cohort were either unable or unwilling to report their occupation or were employed in varying RQF level occupations.

110. This evidence suggests that between 30-70% of surveyed Graduate visa holders in employment might not have been working in RQF level 6 or above occupations. The economic and fiscal contribution to the UK made by those in graduate level jobs is substantially higher than the number in low paid work.

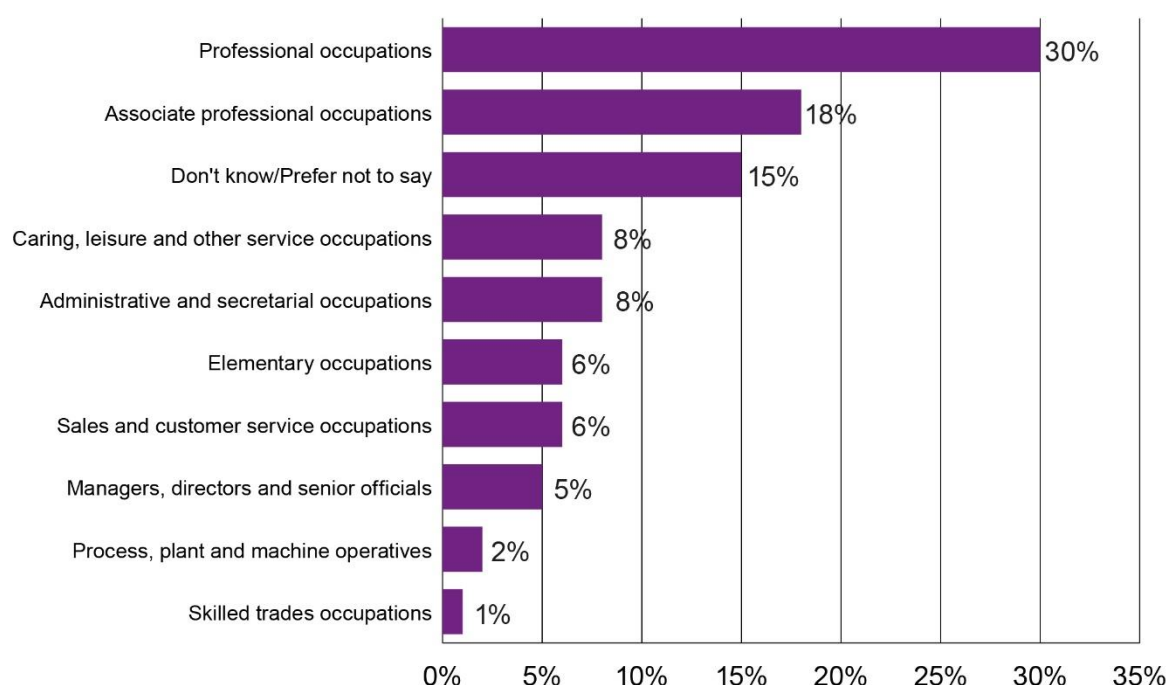


Figure 10: Occupational profile of Graduate route visa holders⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Graduate Route Research - Insights into Graduate route users' experiences, GOV.UK, published 13 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/graduate-route-evaluation>

STUDENTS: RESPONSIBLE RECRUITMENT

111. This Government continues to welcome and value the contribution that is made to our society, our economy and our higher education institutions by those overseas students who want to come to the UK. Our country has some of the best universities in the world, and we want the best young minds in every country to aspire to complete their educations here.
112. International students have a significant positive impact to the UK economy. In 2021, international students at UK universities generated an estimated £20.65 billion in exports through living expenditure and tuition fees, but it is right that these benefits are shared.⁴⁸ The Government will explore introducing a levy on higher education provider income from international students, to be reinvested into the higher education and skills system. Further details will be set out in the Autumn Budget.
113. It is also essential that any individual that our country welcomes here to study is genuinely here to do so and is not using their application for a student visa simply as a vehicle to move themselves and their dependants to a new life in Britain. Equally, the education providers responsible for offering places to these students must treat their roles as recruiting sponsors with the diligence and seriousness that those roles demand.
114. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that at present, in some cases, the integrity of the UK's student visa system is being undermined, both by individuals from overseas seeking to exploit it, and by education providers in this country failing to protect it.
115. With the numbers of students claiming asylum increasing at pace, and the majority claiming as their visas approach expiry, including where circumstances in their home country have not changed, we must take action against those who seek to abuse and misuse the system.
116. The Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) is an annual assessment used to monitor each sponsor's level of compliance and is composed of three metrics with required 'pass' thresholds:
- a visa refusal rate of less than 10%
 - a course enrolment rate of at least 90% and
 - a course completion rate of at least 85%.
117. Sponsors that fail at least one BCA metric can have their sponsorship licence revoked and temporarily be removed from the Register of Student Sponsors for up to two years.

⁴⁸ UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education activity, GOV.UK, published 21 March 2024. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/uk-revenue-from-education-related-exports-and-transnational-education-activity/2021>

118. While the current BCA metrics have contributed towards making the Student route generally compliant, it is clear the current thresholds are too lenient and have left the route open to abuse and exploitation.

119. To prevent the misuse of student visas, we will strengthen the requirements that all sponsoring institutions must meet in order to recruit international students. The following measures will be implemented to this end, we will:

- raise the minimum pass requirement of each BCA metric by five percentage points, so that – for example – a sponsor must maintain a course enrolment rate of at least 95% and a course completion rate of 90% in order to pass the compliance threshold
- simultaneously implement a new Red-Amber-Green banding system to rate the BCA performance of each sponsor, so that it is clear to them, the authorities and the public which institutions are achieving a high rate of compliance, and which are at risk of failing
- introduce new interventions for sponsors who are close to failing their metrics, including placing them on a bespoke action plan designed to improve their compliance, and imposing limits on the number of new international students they can recruit while they are subject to those plans, and
- require all sponsors wishing to use recruitment agents for overseas students to sign up to the Agent Quality Framework, designed to maintain the highest standards of agent management, and ensure that institutions cannot simply outsource their responsibility to ensure that the individuals whose visas they are sponsoring are genuinely coming to the UK to study.

120. Together, these measures will ensure that sponsors are encouraged to recruit their students responsibly, only offering places to genuine students who meet the requirements of the route and ensuring that – where they are failing to do so – there are stronger powers for the Home Office to intervene and ensure greater compliance in the future.

121. At present, educational providers are required to submit an annual request to the Home Office setting out how many students they would like to sponsor and justifying their feasibility. Our guidance currently asks sponsors requesting a significant increase on previous years' allocations to confirm that the institution has the capacity to accommodate the additional students, considering teaching facilities and wider supporting infrastructure such as accommodation.

122. **We will ensure there are arrangements, for future international student recruitment, for sponsoring institutions to demonstrate that they are considering local impacts when taking its decisions on international recruitment.**

SHORT-TERM STUDY

123. The Short-Term Student (English Language) Route (STS) is for a person aged 16 or over who wishes to study an English language course in the UK for between six and 11 months at an accredited institution. The route is unsponsored and solely confined to studying English.⁴⁹
124. Institutions providing English language courses in the UK have to be formally approved to do so by a recognised accreditation body, but - unlike universities - they do not have a duty to report non-compliance in the form of failure to enrol or failure to attend or complete a course.
125. The statistics point to an increasing problem with this route that cannot go unaddressed. In 2024, approximately 4,200 visas were granted on the route and 3,900 applications were refused, making up a refusal rate of approximately 48%, significantly higher than the refusal rate across most immigration routes.⁵⁰
126. The Home Office is having to refuse visa applications at this rate because we believe that too many applicants are seeking to use this route without a genuine intention to study, in order to enter the asylum system once they are in the UK. Stronger processes and checks are needed.
127. We have already strengthened the requirements for individuals applying for this route to provide evidence that they are a genuine student. **We will now conduct a review of the accreditation bodies to ensure that their processes are robust and consider what further checks need to be put in place to ensure the right level of scrutiny is being applied both before an organisation is accredited, and when that accreditation is renewed.**
128. We will continue to monitor the impacts of these interventions on the STS route and we will not hesitate to take further action in future if necessary. This is a valued sector within the UK economy, but it needs to put its house in order, ensure that there are robust checks on all short-term visitors applying for its courses and remove organisations from its ranks which are failing to take their responsibilities seriously.

⁴⁹ Immigration Rules Appendix Short-term Student (English language), GOV.UK, published 25 February 2016. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-short-term-student-english-language>

⁵⁰ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79addd86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

GRADUATES

129. The Graduate route was launched in July 2021 as an unsponsored route which allows students to stay in the UK for two years (or three years for PhD students) after graduation. The purpose of the route is for international student graduates to work, or look for work, following the successful completion of an eligible course.
130. We recognise the valuable contributions that graduates make to the UK but it is important that those who stay transition into graduate level jobs and are properly contributing to our economy.
131. Therefore, **we will reduce the ability for Graduates to remain in the UK after their studies to a period of 18 months. The Government will explore introducing a levy on higher education provider income from international students, to be reinvested into the higher education and skills system. Further details will be set out in the Autumn Budget.**

Chapter 4: Fair Controls

132. Proper, fair controls are important right across the immigration system – not just around work and study. Whilst economic migration accounts for the highest numbers of people arriving in the UK, there are other important reasons why people need to travel across borders – including reuniting with close family, visits or humanitarian resettlement.
133. But across the board, the system needs to follow clear rules, and be controlled, managed and fair. We need to support those who abide by the rules and at the same time ensure that the immigration system is not misused - either through illegal immigration where people who have no right to come to the UK, or by those who come legally to our country but then breach their status.
134. Family migration rules are particularly important as British citizens meet and marry people from all over the world, and families seek to visit each other to see grandchildren or other relatives. But the system needs to be managed and controlled to ensure that there are clear rules on who people can bring into the country, on what terms, and also on whether people can stay.
135. Unfortunately, over the years, the system for family migration has become overly complex, developing increasingly around court decisions and case law, including court interpretations of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)). An overly high proportion of family-related immigration cases are now decided on the basis that they are “exceptional” to the normal rules, rather than being in line with the rules set down by Parliament, and that undermines control and confidence.
136. Separately, the UK has rightly done its bit in recent years to help those fleeing persecution and conflict from Ukraine and Hong Kong, as well as resettled Afghans who helped our armed forces before the Taliban took control – and we have always played our part alongside other countries in helping those fleeing persecution. But serious problems with irregular and illegal arrivals (including on dangerous small boat journeys which no one should be making) and the high numbers of people making asylum claims at, and towards the end of their visa, when circumstances in their home country have not changed, has undermined confidence in humanitarian arrangements.
137. The immigration system also needs clear protections in place for those who are vulnerable including victims of trafficking and modern slavery. And there have to be proper standards in place to ensure that everyone is fairly treated by the system, recognising the deep harms that were done as part of the Windrush scandal, and ensuring they are never repeated.
138. This chapter sets out how we plan to strengthen fair controls and management of the immigration system by reforming family rules, addressing the increased complexity in the system, and reforming the response to human rights claims. It also sets out how we will maintain high standards after the Windrush scandal.

139. At the same time, we recognise that confidence in our immigration system will continue to be undermined as long as the British public see organised criminal gangs bringing small boats across the channel, asylum seekers staying in costly hotel accommodation at the taxpayer's expense, and people with no right to work in our country taking jobs that could be done by UK residents.
140. We are already introducing reforms through the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill currently progressing through Parliament, including counter-terrorism style powers against smuggling gangs and new statutory appeal timetables to clear the asylum backlog. We will set out separately to this White Paper further substantial reforms to the asylum system and border security to reduce irregular and illegal migration, including tackling small boats and ending the use of asylum hotels, building on reforms already set out, and taking forward this Government's commitments to smash the smuggling gangs, end the use of asylum hotels by the end of this Parliament, and tackle illegal working in every sector where it is found.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

FAMILY REFORMS

141. Family-related visas apply to persons wishing to live as part of the family of an individual who is already a British citizen or a non-British migrant with settlement in the UK. This is a separate category to dependants who accompany those on other visa routes, including work and study. This would be the normal route, for example, for someone bringing a married partner from abroad to build a life in the UK.
142. There were 86,049 family-related visas granted in 2024, 7% more than in 2023. 65% in 2024 were to bring a partner, 11% children, and 24% were 'other' family visas, including adult dependant visas and refugee family reunion.⁵¹
143. Visas issued to partners have risen considerably in recent years, partly as a result of increased demand, but partly as Home Office operational capability was diverted in 2022 to process visas for Ukraine schemes, resulting in a delay in Family visa decisions, and an artificially lower number of visas issued in 2022, and an artificially higher volume issued in 2023 and 2024. The volume of partner visas has begun to fall, reducing in 2024 by 7% compared to 2023 to 56,221 as they are subject to the Minimum Income Requirement (MIR) that increased to £29,000 in 2024.⁵²
144. Those who arrive on a Family visa are much more likely to eventually go on to get settlement compared to people coming on work and study routes. Of those who started on a Family visa between 2010 and 2018, 9 out of 10 (90%) still held valid or indefinite leave five years later. By comparison, for those who started on a work visa, only 28% held valid leave years later.⁵³
145. For those that come on the Family Partner route, evidence published in Spring 2024 estimated that their average employment rate was around 44% and average earnings were around £27,200 per year.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79addd86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁵² Minimum income requirement: equality impact assessment (accessible), GOV.UK, updated 8 October 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-immigration-rules-impact-assessments/minimum-income-requirement-equality-impact-assessment-accessible-version>

⁵³ Migrant Journey: 2023 report, Table 1, GOV.UK, published 14 May 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrant-journey-2023-report/migrant-journey-2023-report#study>

⁵⁴ 2024 spring Immigration Rules: impact assessment (accessible), GOV.UK, updated 8 October 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-immigration-rules-impact-assessments/2024-spring-immigration-rules-impact-assessment-accessible>

REFORM OF FAMILY MIGRATION

146. The immigration rules provide different routes with varying complex requirements for different cohorts of dependants, from study visas to charity visas. However, the system is not working as intended; it is operationally costly, inefficient and too open to abuse.
147. We will therefore reform the framework for family migration. We will tackle the over complex family and private life immigration arrangements, where too many cases are treated as “exceptional” rather than having a clear framework.
148. Before the end of this year, **we will set out a new family policy that will:**
- cover all UK residents including those who are British, settled, on work routes or refugees seeking to bring family members to the UK
 - have clear relationship requirements, designed to ensure only those in genuine, subsisting relationships qualify, reduce forced marriage and include protections for victims of domestic abuse
 - ensure those coming to the UK have an appropriate level of English language skills, to be able to effectively integrate into local communities
 - ensure the family unit has sufficient money financially to support any migrants without relying on the taxpayer through reviewing and extending the financial requirements to other dependant routes, and
 - ensure that those who serve or have served as members of HM Armed Forces, bravely protecting our country, and their dependants, have their rights to reside in the UK and become British citizens protected in line with this Government's commitment to them, in the Armed Forces Covenant.
149. Whilst this work is undertaken, it is important we take other steps to make the system fairer. We have already commissioned the MAC to look at the financial requirements on family routes and our further asylum reforms will cover family too. **We will also explore tightening our Suitability Rules on the family routes, to ensure people are of the good character we expect.** We will introduce changes to English language requirements for adult family dependants, to align with the broad approach set out at Chapter 6.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

150. There have long been family rules and entitlements within the UK system for close family members to reunite across borders. There have also long been provisions which allow for exceptional circumstances which draw on Article 8 of the Human Rights Act and ECHR, which expresses the right to for a “respect for family and private life”.⁵⁵ However, increasingly in recent years, the number of cases decided by the Home Office and the courts on the basis of ‘exceptional circumstances’ has substantially increased.

⁵⁵ Article 8: Respect for your private and family life, Equity and Human Rights Commission, published 4 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/human-rights-act/article-8-respect-your-private-and-family-life>

151. There will always be exceptional cases, but greater specificity about where the balance is considered to lie in the majority of cases will reduce the volume and clarify the approach for applicants, caseworkers and the courts.
152. In order to ensure that Parliament sets the boundaries within our international obligations, **we will set out a clear framework to be endorsed by Parliament for those seeking to enter or stay in the UK, including on the basis of exceptional circumstances, who do not fall within our family policies.**
153. **This framework will reflect a fair balance between individual circumstances and the UK's economic and social interest and will be flexible enough to ensure that the most vulnerable are not excluded.**
154. This framework will also seek to limit successful claims from those who seek to:
- get round the rules, for example by falsely claiming an intention to come to the UK as a short-term visitor, and then seeking to stay on the basis of family relationships
 - frustrate and delay removal with spurious claims in an attempt to stretch out their stay in the UK, and thereby increase the eventual likelihood of having an Article 8 claim upheld, and
 - make immediate claims for wider family members after arriving in the UK including after making dangerous journeys to get here.
155. The framework will also include foreign national offenders and ensure that decision makers and the courts put appropriate weight on offending by people who have short term visas. As set out in the next chapter, where a person is on a short-term visa and commits an offence, they should expect deportation to follow swiftly. We will also ensure that the Government's priorities on tackling crime and violence against women and girls are properly reflected in the new framework, including our missions to halve violence against women and girls and knife crime over the next decade.
156. To do this **we will bring forward legislation to:**
- **strengthen the public interest test to make it clear that Parliament needs to be able to control our country's borders and take back control over who comes to, and stays in the UK, striking the right balance between individual family rights and the wider public interest**
 - **clarify Article 8 rules and set out how they should apply in different immigration routes so that fewer cases are treated as "exceptional", and**
 - **set out when and how a person can genuinely make a claim on the basis of exceptional circumstances.**
157. This new framework will be underpinned by regular assessment and updates, so that the impact of migration on the country can be properly considered on a regular basis and balanced against individual circumstances when Article 8 immigration decisions are made.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

158. Over the last decade, the UK has used resettlement and relocation schemes in response to particular international crises. The Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), for example, resettled over 20,000 refugees between 2014 and 2021 who were displaced as a result of the Syrian civil war.⁵⁶ More recently, the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Programme (ACRS) have relocated nearly 32,000 people at risk as a result of the Taliban takeover in 2021.⁵⁷

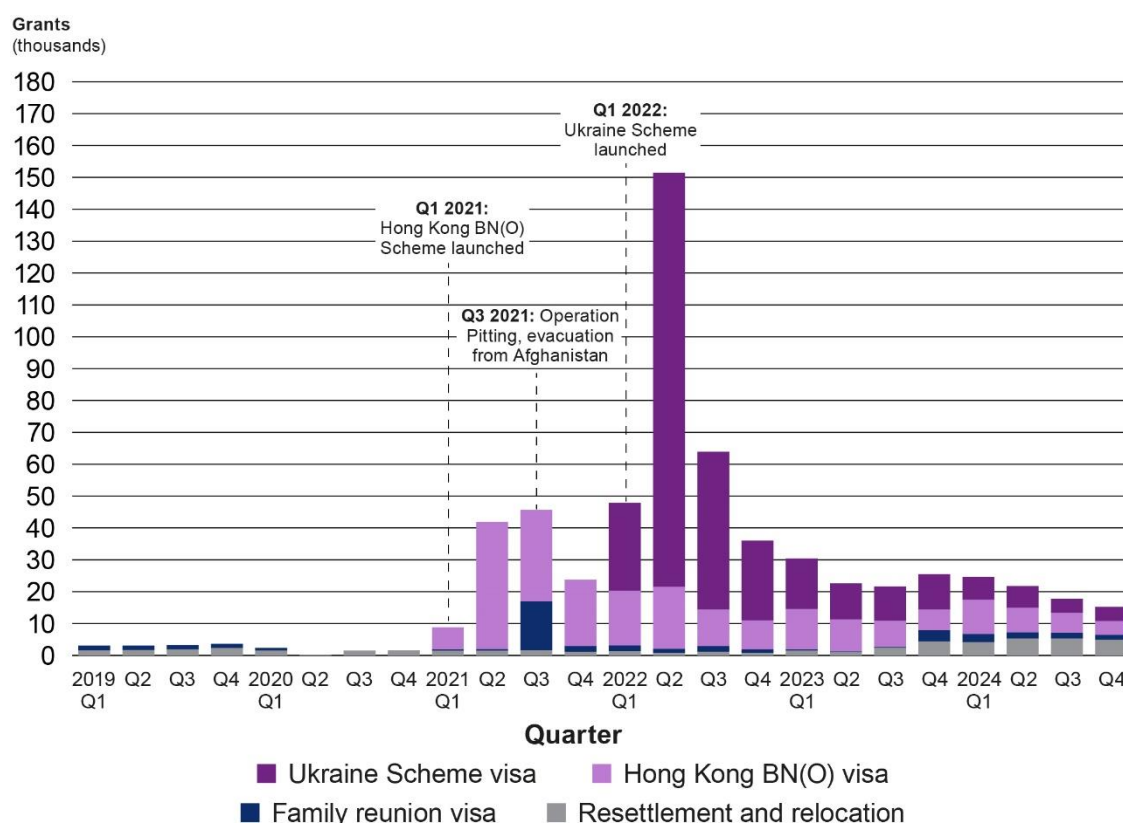


Figure 11: Grants of leave on safe and legal (humanitarian) routes to the UK, by route, each quarter from 2019 to 2024⁵⁸

159. The UK has rightly played its part alongside other countries in response to crises such as Ukraine, Hong Kong and Afghanistan, and we will continue to do so. But it is important that safe and legal routes are sustainable, well managed and in line with the UK's capacity to welcome, accommodate and integrate refugees.

⁵⁶ Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes Factsheet, March 2021, GOV.UK, published 18 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-resettlement-schemes-factsheet-march-2021/vulnerable-persons-and-vulnerable-childrens-resettlement-schemes-factsheet-march-2021>

⁵⁷ Afghan Resettlement Programme: operational data, GOV.UK, updated 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data>

⁵⁸ How many people come to the UK via safe and legal (humanitarian) routes?, Figure 1, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-via-safe-and-legal-humanitarian-routes>

160. Sponsorship, both through the Community Sponsorship and the Homes for Ukraine schemes, puts power into the hands of local communities, fostering community-led and controlled resettlement. **Through a review of our existing refugee sponsorship and resettlement schemes, we will consider the effectiveness of sponsorship arrangements in the UK to ensure that there is a clear sponsorship framework in which businesses, universities, and community groups are involved in sustainable ways of sponsoring refugees to live, work and study in the UK.**

WINDRUSH

161. To deliver a fair and effective system, this Government is determined to put right the appalling injustices caused by the Home Office's treatment of members of the Windrush community and deliver cultural change that is permanently embedded into the fabric of the Home Office.
162. The Windrush scandal saw Windrush and Commonwealth communities, including British citizens and long-standing lawful UK residents with the right to live in this country victimised because they were unable to prove that right through no fault of their own and because of failures in the Home Office response. Furthermore, the justice and change victims deserved has not been delivered and there are some still waiting for the compensation that they are due.
163. As Wendy Williams set out in her Review published in March 2020, "the causes of the Windrush scandal can be traced back through successive rounds of policy and legislation... The 1971 Immigration Act confirmed that the Windrush generation had, and have, the right of abode in the UK. But they were not given any documents to demonstrate this status. Nor were records kept".⁵⁹
164. This Government has announced a major reset of the Home Office's approach to addressing the issues arising from the Windrush scandal. To this end, we have re-established the Windrush Unit to drive systemic, cultural change across the Home Office as well as taking forward a review of the Department's response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review including the 30 recommendations it contained. We are committed to better supporting victims to apply for compensation, with £1.5 million in grant funding announced to increase advocacy support.⁶⁰
165. We are appointing a Windrush Commissioner to be a trusted independent advocate for the Windrush Community, marking a vital step in re-setting the approach and delivering the change that the victims of this scandal want and deserve to see. The Commissioner will ensure the voices of victims and communities are heard and acted on throughout Government.

⁵⁹ Windrush Lessons Learned Review by Wendy Williams, GOV.UK, published 19 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review>

⁶⁰ £1.5 million fund to support Windrush compensation applicants, GOV.UK, published 11 April 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/15-million-fund-to-support-windrush-compensation-applicants>

166. By engaging with communities, driving improvements, and holding Government to account, the Commissioner will help ensure that lasting change is delivered, and the lessons of the past are truly learned, and that we never let such an injustice happen again.
167. Both the findings of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission Action Plan will be embedded within the Home Office to make sure equality and ethical standards are at the forefront of all departmental decisions and that the Department considers the impact of all its work on people from every background and ensures that people who have contributed to the UK are valued and not unfairly discriminated against.

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE FROM EXPLOITATION

168. We receive regular reports of unethical and exploitative recruitment and employment practices affecting some international candidates who are seeking work, or who have taken up employment in the UK in the care sector. We have taken action to identify and remove the licenses of unethical and exploitative sponsors, revoking 1,494 Skilled Worker (including Health and Care) sponsor licenses in 2024, up from 337 in 2023.⁶¹
169. Currently, many victims face long waits in having their status as a victim of modern slavery confirmed through the national referral mechanism. This can lead to prolonged uncertainty and mental health suffering.
170. As can be seen in figure 12, the average number of days taken by the National Referral Mechanism to make a conclusive ground decision has risen from 453 in the first quarter of 2020 to 1,021 in the third quarter of 2024, the last date for which statistics are available.⁶² Additional caseworkers will bring this down.

⁶¹ Immigration: Skilled Worker visas, page 8, National Audit Office, published 17 Mar 2025. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Immigration-Skilled-Worker-visas-Summary.pdf>

⁶² Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, quarter 3 2024 - July to September, Table 39, GOV.UK, published 7 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-july-to-september-2024#documents>

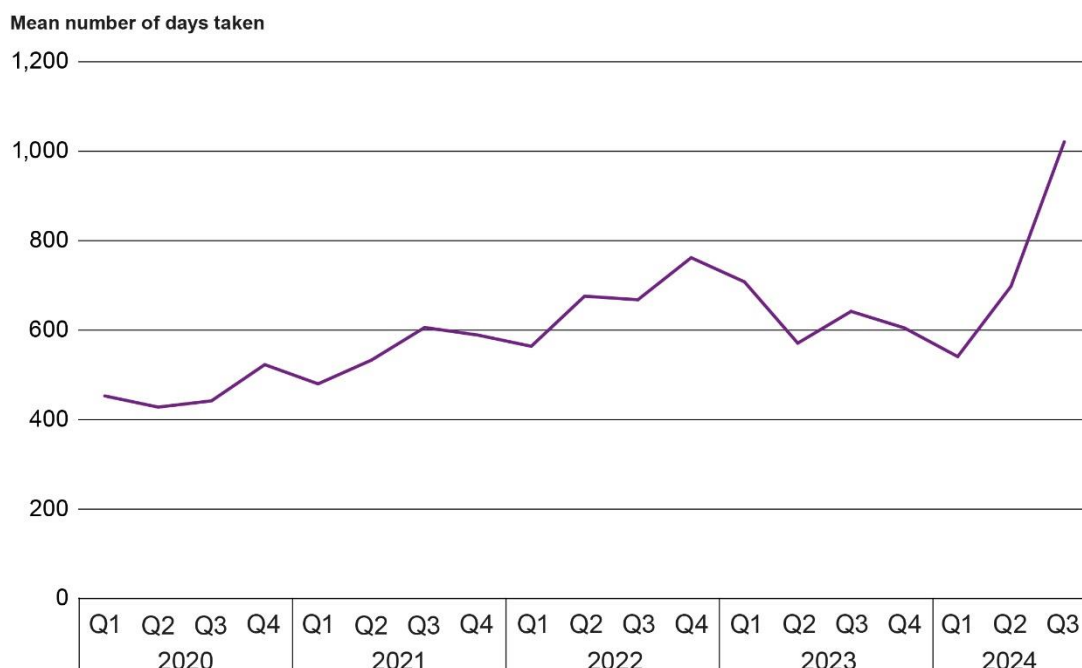


Figure 12: Average number of days taken to make NRM conclusive grounds decisions for decisions made by both competent authorities in each quarter ⁶³

171. It is vital that the immigration system responds to new developments and practices in the world of work and protects the vulnerable from exploitation. We know that unscrupulous employers and workers are always trying to find new ways to avoid the current controls, and that online work and the gig economy, both of which have grown substantially in recent years, leave individuals insufficiently protected from exploitation.
172. We have already exposed unprecedented levels of abuse of the system and exploitation of individuals in sectors such as adult social care. Too many employers have been able to exploit their international recruits.
173. We will ensure workers have access to information about their rights and know where and how to report unethical practices before they even arrive in the UK.
174. Our plans to raise the skills threshold of the Skilled Worker route to RQF 6 will be an important safeguard in preventing future exploitation issues, as the evidence shows that in higher skilled occupations, there are fewer instances of exploitation.
175. Whilst the move will help target exploitation for workers coming to the UK, there will be a sizeable cohort of individuals already in the UK (including those in employment below degree level) who may be experiencing exploitative practices from unscrupulous sponsors.

⁶³ Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, quarter 3 2024 - July to September, Table 39, GOV.UK, published 7 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-july-to-september-2024#documents>

176. **We will therefore explore introducing further reforms to our sponsorship system, putting more responsibility and accountability on effective and responsible sponsors. This will include exploring making it easier for workers to move between licensed sponsors for the duration of their visa, giving them more control over who they work for and reducing the risk of exploitation.**
177. **Instances of modern slavery and labour exploitation continue to be seen amongst those who held visas as domestic workers. We will reconsider the purpose of this route, acting to stop employers exploiting their staff.**
178. We are also introducing a new offence of criminal exploitation of children in the Crime and Policing Bill to go after the gangs who are luring young people into violence and crime. This will increase convictions of exploiters, deter gangs from enlisting children, and improve identification of victims.
179. Under this Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, we will ensure that victims feel confident to report to the police and proceed through the criminal justice system.
180. **We recognise the challenges migrant victims of domestic abuse can face and we will strengthen the protections in place to support them to take action against their abusers, without fear of repercussion on their immigration status.**

Chapter 5: Rules Respected and Enforced

181. Restoring order to the immigration system means we must tackle abuse and misuse of the immigration system and take stronger action against people who do not respect the rules. Everyone who comes to the UK is expected to abide by UK law and our immigration rules.
182. The overwhelming majority of people who come here do so lawfully, respect the law and community, and contribute to our economy and society. But where rules and laws are broken or ignored, for too long enforcement has failed.
183. Already we have taken swift action to substantially increase enforcement against those who break the rules or the law, including a substantial increase in returns of those with no right to be in the UK.
184. Now, we will go further. Alongside the other measures this Government has introduced since the election including counter-terrorism style powers to tackle the organised smuggling gangs bringing small boats across the Channel, and the rest of the Border Security Asylum and Immigration Bill we are currently taking through Parliament, this White Paper sets out the further action we will take to protect our immigration system, including:
- **Tightening up the rules we apply both at the border, and within our immigration system, to make it easier to refuse entry or asylum to those individuals who break the rules or break our laws**
 - **Ensuring that where people do break the rules or break our laws, there are stronger powers and proper enforcement in place to track them down, arrest them, and remove them from our country.**
185. Specifically, we will simplify the rules and processes for deporting foreign national offenders (FNOs) and take further targeted action against any recent arrivals who commit crimes in the UK before their offending can escalate.
186. We are taking concerted action to increase the number of FNOs deported back to their country of origin, and even when there are long-term legal and diplomatic barriers placed in the way of such action, we will continue to explore all options and work through all channels to secure the right outcome.
187. We will also introduce tighter controls, restrictions and scrutiny of those who attempt to abuse and misuse the immigration system, and who arrive with a pre-existing intention to claim asylum on, or after, arrival, even when there has been no material change in their home country to warrant such a claim.
188. We will use the completed rollout of eVisas as a vehicle to encourage compliance with the rules, using the newly gathered intelligence from the eVisa database to remind people when their visas are due to expire, or have already expired, and take action when they fail to do so themselves.

189. We will continue to take steps to tackle illegal working, continuing to surge resource into the key sectors where illegal working is taking place – including in the gig economy – and using eVisas and modern biometric technology to support our Immigration Enforcement raids – facilitated by the 1,000 staff redeployed into enforcement and returns since the election.⁶⁴
190. And we will build on existing banking measures to ensure these reflect advances in technology and work with HMRC and HM Treasury to take action against those who have not respected the rules by failing to pay tax owed.

⁶⁴ Home Office smashes targets with mass surge in migrant removals, GOV.UK, published 10 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-smashes-targets-with-mass-surge-in-migrant-removals>

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

191. 132.3 million passengers arrived in the UK in 2024, and that number is forecast to increase by between 25-40% by 2030.⁶⁵

192. Border Force currently take decisions to stop arriving passengers based on the information that they provide at the border. Passengers can be refused entry because they do not have the necessary immigration permission to carry out the activities they intend to undertake while they are here.

193. 23,009 passengers were refused entry at port and subsequently left the UK ('port returns') in 2024.⁶⁶ The number of people who arrive by air with inadequate travel documents has been between 3,300 and 5,300 each year since 2018, except for 2020 and 2021 when numbers were lower due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.⁶⁷

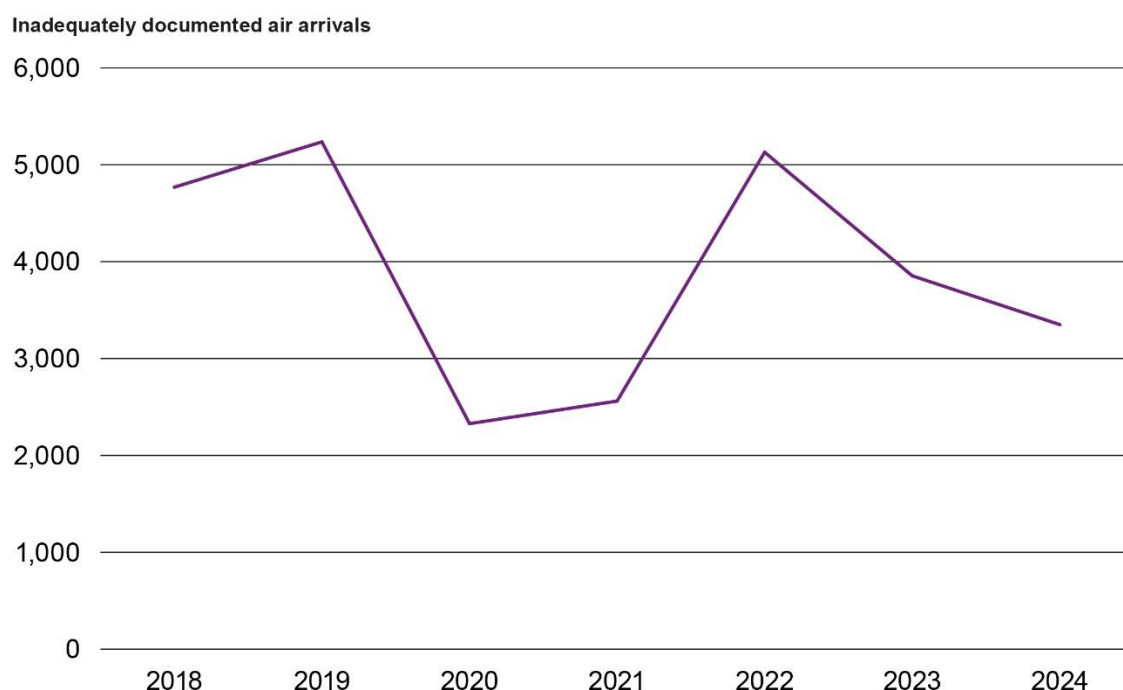


Figure 13: Inadequately document air arrivals, 2018 to 2024⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Home Office Summary of latest statistics, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/summary-of-latest-statistics>

⁶⁶ How many people are returned from the UK?, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-are-returned-from-the-uk>

⁶⁷ How many people come to the UK irregularly?, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-irregularly>

⁶⁸ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Irregular migration to the UK datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Irr_01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc856f4ad141d90835346f/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-summary-dec-2024.ods>

194. The removal and deportation processes are complex. Legal and other issues raised by people in detention can delay and sometimes prevent removal. Home Office analysis shows that issues raised by those in detention have led to a steady reduction in the total administrative return rate for those in detention, from 3 in 5 people in 2010 to just under 1 in 5 in 2022.⁶⁹

195. Figure 14 shows that enforced returns of all types fell steeply between 2012 and 2019 and were then also slow to recover after the drop during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.⁷⁰ Returns are now increasing with the latest yearly total (8,164) now higher than the number of enforced returns observed immediately prior to the pandemic (7,198 in 2019).⁷¹

196. Full 2025 figures are not yet available but the latest available data on returns show continuing improvement. Between 5 July 2024 and 22 March 2025, a total of 24,103 returns were recorded (including both enforced and voluntary returns). This is a 11% increase on the 21,807 returns in the same period 12 months prior. Included in this total, there were:

- 6,339 enforced returns of people with no legal right to remain in the UK. This compares with 5,244 enforced returns in the same period 12 months prior, an increase of 21%
- 3,594 were of FNOs, this is an increase of 16% compared to 3,101 FNO returns in the same period 12 months prior
- 6,781 were asylum related returns, this is an increase of 23% compared to 5,508 asylum returns in the same period 12 months prior.⁷²

⁶⁹ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Immigration detention detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Det_D03, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc81d798ea2db44fadd85/detention-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁷⁰ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Returns detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Ret_05, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc86c2b3a80ad63e782cc9/returns-summary-dec-2024-tables.ods>

⁷¹ How many people are returned from the UK?, GOV.UK, published 27 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-are-returned-from-the-uk>

⁷² Returns from the UK from 5 July 2024 to 22 March 2025, published 31 March 2025, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/returns-from-the-uk-and-illegal-working-activity-since-july-2024/returns-from-the-uk-from-5-july-2024-to-22-march-2025>

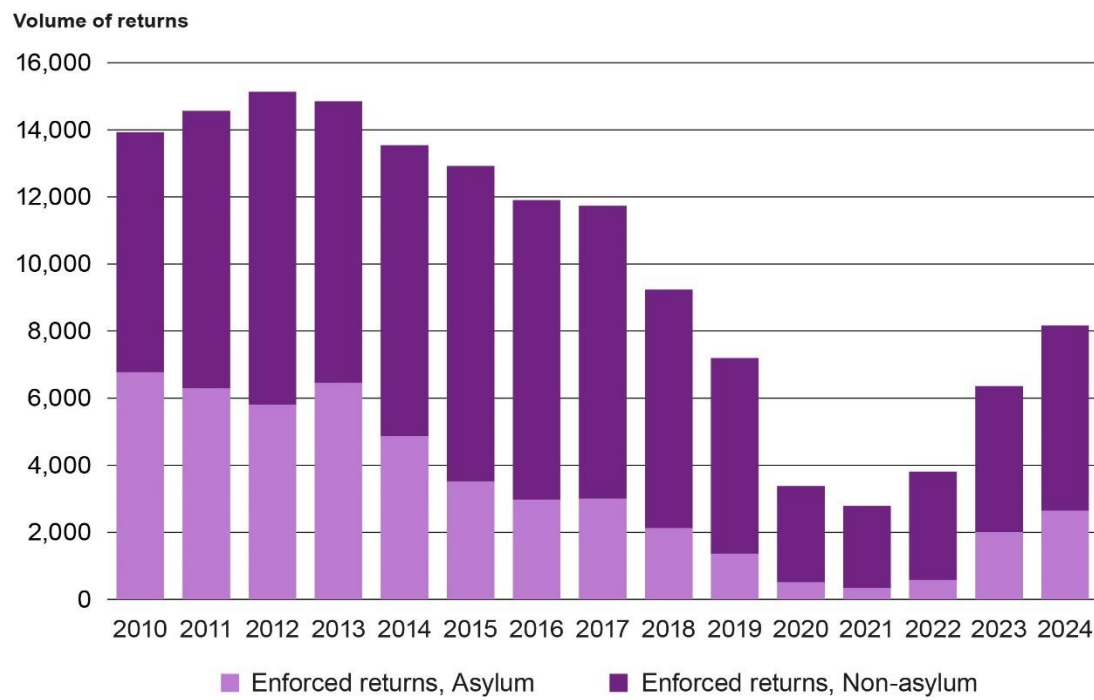


Figure 14: Returns from the UK, by type of return, and asylum and non-asylum, 2010 to 2024⁷³

⁷³ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Returns detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Ret_05, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc86c2b3a80ad63e782cc9/returns-summary-dec-2024-tables.ods>

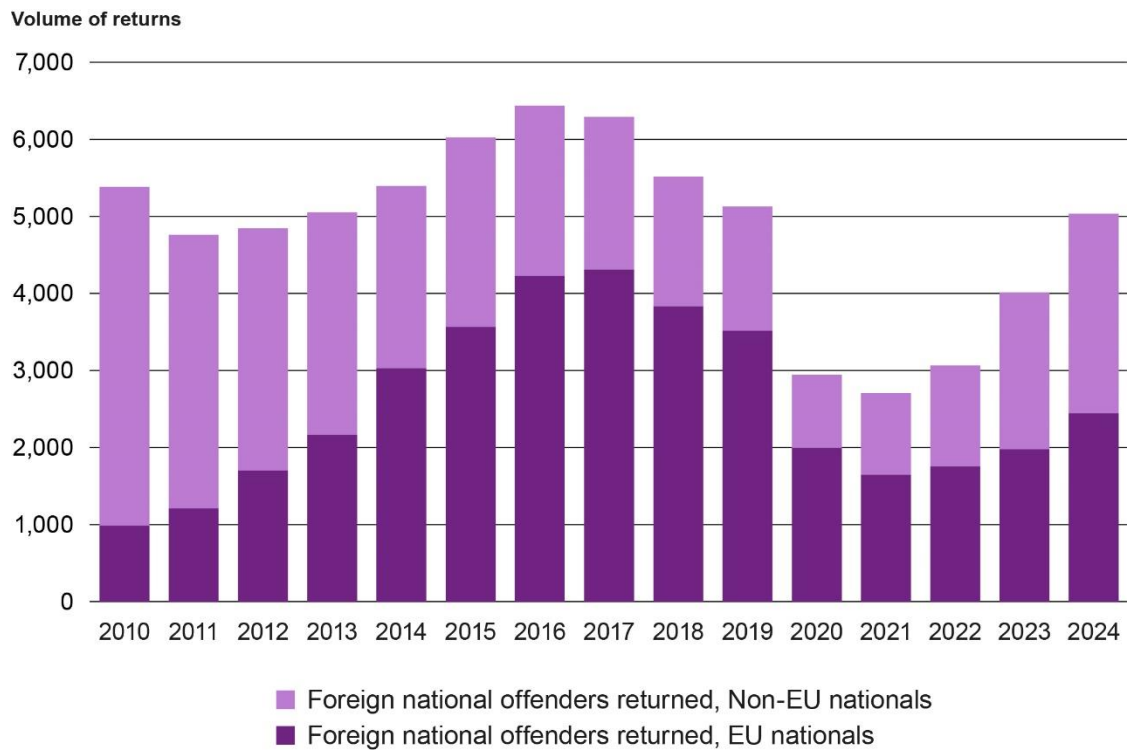


Figure 15 Returns of foreign national offenders from the UK, 2010 to 2024⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Returns detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Ret_02a, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc86c2b3a80ad63e782cc9/returns-summary-dec-2024-tables.ods>

STRONG BORDERS

197. Border security is one of the foundations of the Government's Plan for Change and, in due course, separate from this White Paper we intend to build on the new counter terror style powers in the Border Security Asylum and Immigration Bill currently progressing through Parliament, with additional measures to strengthen our border security and our national security, and increase our efforts to smash the smuggling gangs responsible for bringing small boats across the Channel.
198. But we also need stronger security measures to manage legal migration in order to ensure that legitimate travellers can swiftly and effectively cross our borders whilst increasing our intelligence gathering and identifying those who seek to evade the rules or do us harm.
199. To improve smooth management of the borders, respect for the rules in the immigration system, and enforcement against illegal working and misuse **we will roll out digital identity for all overseas citizens through the implementation of eVisas and new systems for checking visa compliance, replacing the former Biometric Residence Permit cards**. Our ambition is to deliver the systems and capability to determine whether an individual is inside or outside the UK at any given time, and whether they have overstayed their visa.
200. Our introduction of ETA and eVisas means we now know more about everyone coming to the UK. This is already enabling us to maximise the use of upstream interventions to prevent the travel of people known to pose a risk by refusing them permission to travel and ensuring, through our carrier systems, that they do not do so.
201. At the border, we will use what we know about individuals permitted to travel - both what they tell us and what we already know - to determine how we manage their flow through the border and ensure checks are increasingly targeted, using improved intelligence to tackle threats.
202. Historically, challenges with this approach include incomplete or inaccurate data and issues with data matching, such as travel via the Common Travel Area (CTA) or dual nationals using multiple passports. We will continue to improve data on international flights and journeys within the CTA and explore new technologies to help us better manage these processes.
203. Building on the opportunity provided by better matched data, we are developing a new digital service to determine whether an individual has complied with the terms of their visa and is inside or outside the UK at any given time. This will support operational activities and analysis and enhance our ability to share this information with other Government departments ensuring that benefits, services, and employment are accessible only to those who are legally entitled to them. We will also use this data to support further immigration applications in more automated ways. **This is a significant development in how we strengthen our border security.**

204. We have already issued over 10 million digital identities through the roll out of eVisas. For a small number of people living in the UK on legacy immigration documents, we will ensure Windrush lessons are learnt and they are supported on the switch to digital if they choose to adopt it. People are able to print off their share code which are valid for 90 days, for example if they're travelling abroad, or to print out details of their eVisa which can be used to discuss their eVisa account with the Home Office.
205. The eVisa allows all immigration status holders access to their data and to share information about their permissions with employers, landlords and others in a secure way. For employers and landlords, this has simplified the process, enabling one quick and easy digital check rather than having to check myriad physical documents. Information provided is more specific to their needs, simplifying their ability to correctly check a person's status, and supporting them in their legal duties to comply with UK law.
206. The move to digital evidence of immigration status will enable us to update records in real time when status changes, ensuring those who are no longer entitled to access public services, work or rent will have this reflected on their eVisa, rather than continuing to hold physical evidence of status which is no longer up to date. We are continuing to enhance the accuracy and quality of our data, to ensure that status information remains up to date.
207. We will also continue to harness the latest developments in artificial intelligence, facial recognition and age assessment technologies to ensure that we gather the most accurate information available on each individual seeking to enter the UK.
208. **Put together, the comprehensive, intelligence-led and effective roll-out of eVisas to all foreign nationals resident in the UK will have a transformative impact on our immigration controls: telling us when each individual leaves the country and when they have returned; telling us whether they have the right to work, to rent, to claim benefits or use public services and telling us how long they have the right to stay. Importantly, eVisas will make it much easier for Immigration Enforcement to identify those who try to stay and work in the UK illegally, to track them down and take action against them.**

TACKLING ABUSE

209. Whilst most people come to the UK lawfully to contribute to our country and to build a better life, we need stronger action against those who seek to abuse our systems - whether it be individuals trying to get round the rules in a way that is deeply unfair on everyone else, or more damaging and organised threats.
210. At the most serious end, here and across Europe over many years we have seen attempts to exploit any weaknesses in border security, immigration or asylum systems - including by serious organised crime, extremist organisations and growing foreign state threats. It is why the Prime Minister has made clear that border security is part of national security.

211. That is why we have set up the Border Security Command with new counter terrorism style powers being introduced in legislation. It is also why alongside our continued strong support for action by our police and security services who lead against threats as they arise, the Home Office and enforcement partners remain in a constant state of vigilance to monitor and respond to changing national security threats and that is also one of the drivers of the strengthened controls set out in this White Paper. We will set out further steps on border security and asylum reforms later this year.
212. Alongside the risk of organised exploitation, we have also seen an increase in individual misuse of the system in recent years that needs to be tackled so the system is credible and fair.
213. Whilst the vast majority of visa-holders comply, and likely always intend to comply, with their visa conditions, we have seen a significant increase in asylum claims by individuals who entered the UK on other visas and legitimate routes even where conditions in their home country have not changed. The majority of visa-linked asylum claims arise from individuals linked to student and work visas – 69% in 2024.⁷⁵
214. We have already taken decisive action to address abuse of visa-free travel by visitors to the UK by re-introducing visa requirements for Jordan and Colombia, where the withdrawal of those requirements saw a sudden increase in asylum claims from new arrivals whose travel to the UK (in most cases) would previously have been denied. Similar action also had to be taken after the abuse of visa-free travel for tourists from Trinidad and Tobago.
215. Asylum claims from Jordan increased more than 20-fold, from just 43 between July - September 2023 to 866 in the equivalent period in 2024, following the removal of visa requirements in February 2024. However, following the swift reintroduction of visa requirements for Jordanian visitors on 10 September 2024, the number of claims dropped 73% to 232 in the following quarter.⁷⁶
216. For Colombia, the number of asylum claims increased from 192 in 2022 to 2,051 in 2024 while for Trinidad and Tobago, the figure rose from 174 in 2022 to 444 in 2024. Visa requirements were reimposed in November 2024 for Colombia and March 2025 for Trinidad and Tobago, and latest data shows a similar sharp decline to that seen for Jordan.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Home Office Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025, GOV.UK, unreleased due to be released 22 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025>

⁷⁶ Home Office Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025, GOV.UK, unreleased due to be released 22 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025>

⁷⁷ Home Office Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025, GOV.UK, unreleased due to be released 22 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025>

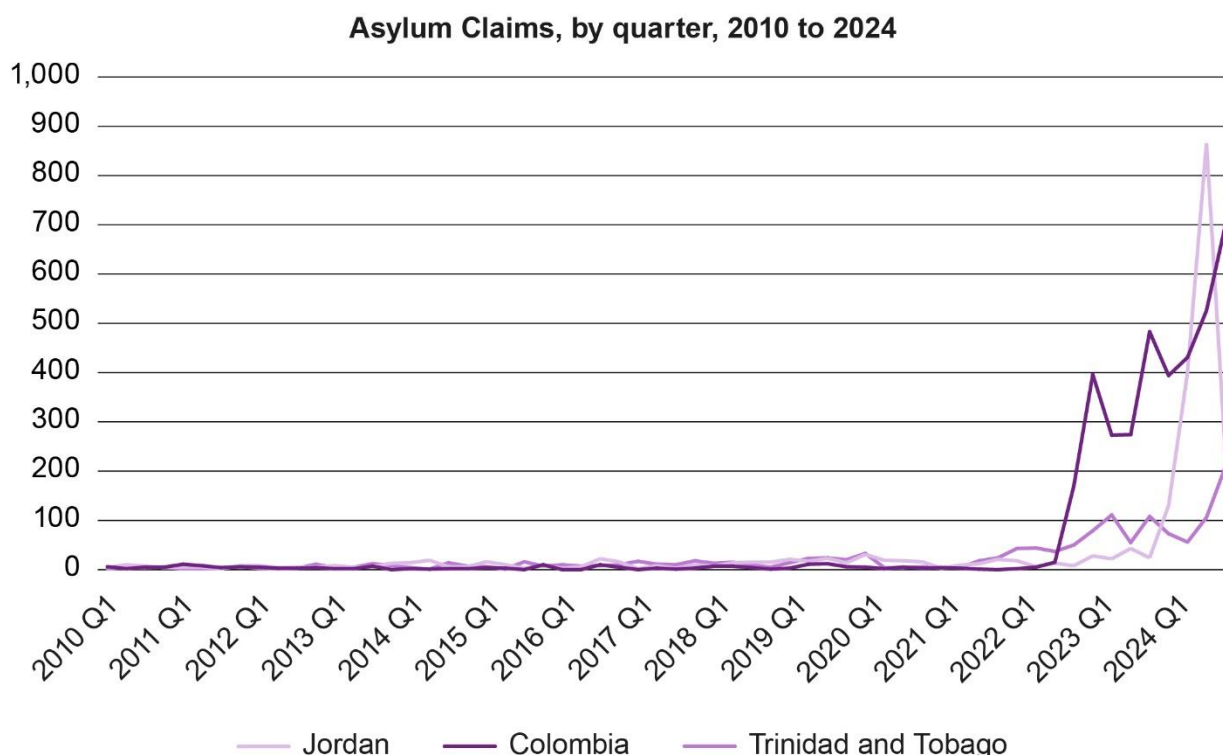


Figure 16: Source: Home Office Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025, GOV.UK, unreleased due to be released 22 May 2025⁷⁸

217. The UK welcomes legitimate travellers from around the world and will make every effort to tackle abuse of visa-free travel where it is facilitated by criminal gangs. We will also not hesitate to take further action on visa requirements where necessary and in the interests of border security.

218. In 2024, 40,000 asylum claims were from individuals linked to a visa, a higher number than the 35,000 who arrived in the UK in 2024 on a small boat, and more than three times the numbers seen in the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2022 and 2024, 25,000 people who arrived in the UK on valid visas and subsequently claimed asylum then had to be provided with asylum accommodation, adding to the already unacceptably high costs in asylum hotels. These numbers alone demonstrate why we must treat this issue with the same seriousness that we treat the arrival of small boats across the Channel.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Home Office Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2025, GOV.UK, unreleased due to be released 22 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025>

⁷⁹ Source of asylum claims in 2024, GOV.UK, published 30 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/source-of-asylum-claims-in-2024/source-of-asylum-claims-in-2024>

219. It is clearly possible for circumstances to arise where foreign nationals in the UK on regular immigration routes have entirely legitimate reasons for claiming asylum and, in those circumstances, the UK will always provide protection for those who genuinely need it. Material changes in circumstances in their home countries might make return dangerous or impossible. With Russia's unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine, it was right that the UK provided humanitarian routes for Ukrainian nationals. Similarly, the UK provided routes for those British Nationals (Overseas) to come to, or stay in, the UK rather than return to Hong Kong.

220. But individuals misuse the system by, for example, claiming asylum at the end of their existing visa even though there has been no material change in their home country which warrants such a claim, or seeking simply to stay in the UK rather than genuinely seeking or needing protection, or claiming to be a minor to access services. We have an obligation to the British taxpayer and to the integrity of our asylum system and public services to strengthen our response to that abuse.

221. Alongside continual efforts to strengthen and improve visa decision making, and taking action where sponsors are falling short of their responsibilities, **we will also be exploring a series of further measures to address this challenge:**

- **Drawing up new policies which will apply to individuals who claim asylum where conditions in their home country have not materially changed, particularly where they have claimed asylum after arrival**
- **Tighter visa controls, restrictions, requirements or scrutiny where we have evidence of abuse, based on a clear assessment of the risks (from exploitation of charity visas to abuse of visa-free travel)**
- **Measures to ensure that other Governments play their part in supporting the integrity of the UK immigration system – particularly where there are currently barriers in the way of us returning their nationals**
- **Innovative financial measures, penalties or sanctions, including for sponsors of migrant workers or students, which will incentivise them to show greater responsibility in their sponsorship practices, as well as measures which will support compliance with visa conditions by migrants**
- **Improving the robustness of the age assessment process, which includes exploring scientific and technological methods to ensure adults are not wrongly identified as children.**

ENFORCEMENT

222. The Government's approach to irregular and illegal migration is clear - robust enforcement against those who do not respect the rules, those who facilitate and exploit that rule-breaking and the foreign criminals who present a danger to the public.

223. Wherever possible we will take steps to prevent those seeking to come to the UK illegally, and those who aim to come to the UK lawfully but do not intend to observe the conditions of their visa, or to depart when it expires. We will make good use of the intelligence provided by our new eVisa and ETA regimes to tackle visa abuse and maintain and increase contact with individuals as they move through the immigration system. This includes setting clear expectations for individuals as they approach the end of their permitted leave on what they need to do next to regularise their continued stay or depart the UK.
224. But we have also taken immediate action to strengthen enforcement activity and drive up the speedy and successful return of individuals with no right to be in the UK and foreign criminals.
225. We are making sure that our frontline Immigration Enforcement teams have the tools they need to do their job. In the next few months, we will be rolling out body-worn video cameras to these teams, together with an advanced data management system and improved mobile biometric kits, improving identity verification, transparency, accountability and officer safety. Enforcement officers have access to information on digital identities and immigration statuses for overseas nationals. Taken together these improvements will provide an objective record of interactions, strengthen evidence gathering and increase public confidence in enforcement activity while supporting the professional standards of our staff.
226. We want to disrupt any attempt to act unlawfully in the UK, whether that be working illegally, accessing bank accounts without rights and making sure that people who do not abide by our rules are paying taxes they owe.
227. We support the establishment of the Fair Work Agency to co-ordinate stronger action against employers who are exploiting workers, and we will build on the tougher rules on sponsors flouting employment law introduced by the Home Office in November 2024.⁸⁰
228. As set out in the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill currently progressing through Parliament, we are strengthening the civil penalty regime to ensure that any employer who facilitates illegal working, undermining legitimate businesses and denying employment to British citizens and others who do have the right to be here and work, faces immediate penalties for doing so.
229. Alongside this, we will continue to surge resource into illegal working, using eVisas and modern biometric technology to support raids – facilitated by the 1,000 staff redeployed into enforcement and returns since the election.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Visa sponsorship, UK Parliament, statement made on 28 November 2024. Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-11-28/hlws260>

⁸¹ Home Office smashes targets with mass surge in migrant removals, GOV.UK, published 10 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-smashes-targets-with-mass-surge-in-migrant-removals>

230. **We will extend the rules that apply to major banks to prevent illegal working to other financial institutions. We will review these controls to ensure they are appropriate and reflect recent advances in technology across the sector.**
231. **We will work with HMRC and HM Treasury on applying immigration enforcement measures to those applying for visas, or here on visas, who have not paid taxes that they owe in the UK.**

FOREIGN NATIONAL OFFENDERS

232. Those who come to the UK should respect and abide by our laws and respect our criminal justice system. In far too many cases where foreign national offenders break our laws, insufficient action is taken, and the rules are not enforced. That needs to change.
233. Since the election we have increased the number of returns of foreign national offenders by 16% compared to last year, by expanding returns and enforcement teams.⁸² But we are determined to go much further to uphold and enforce our laws and immigration rules.
234. In April 2025, the Home Office announced that it would – for the first time – categorise as a ‘serious crime’ for the purpose of the refugee convention any conviction that would result in someone being placed on the Sex Offenders Register, regardless of the length of sentence they receive, thereby allowing the UK to exclude those individuals from any right to claim asylum protections in the UK.
235. We will build on these reforms across the immigration system, as well as the asylum system, amending our policies and guidance to ensure we are upholding UK laws - taking action to prevent individuals who pose a danger to the British public from being allowed to stay in the UK, and taking much earlier action on a wider range of crimes.
236. **Later this year we will set out more detailed reforms and stronger measures to ensure our laws are upheld, including streamlining and speeding up the removals process. That will include establishing new procedures so that the Home Office can more easily take enforcement and removal action and revoke visas in a much wider range of crimes where non-custodial sentences have been given, not just cases which are sent to prison.**

⁸² In the 12 months to 22 March 2025. Available at: [Returns from the UK from 5 July 2024 to 22 March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

237. It is right that we take action against foreign national offenders in the UK before they get the opportunity to put down roots in the UK, **and that we do what is necessary to protect the British public against criminals before their offending escalates.**

Chapter 6: Fostering Integration and Cohesion

238. Successful integration support helps people to realise their full potential and benefits local communities. Being well integrated means individuals can access services, overcome educational and health inequalities, find jobs and contribute to social cohesion and community empowerment.
239. To be able to navigate life in the UK and integrate into UK society, those coming to the UK need to be familiar with UK culture, law and customs. They need to understand their rights and legal status to ensure they are not exploited and can access the right support or access the services they may need.
240. For too long, integration within the immigration system has focused only on those seeking refuge and asylum in the UK. This Government is clear that we must go further and consider integration across the totality of the immigration system, to foster the integration of all individuals coming to, and staying in the UK, to improve their experience and increase overall community cohesion and societal contribution.
241. We want to see vibrant communities in which everyone, from all backgrounds, is able to play a part. We want those who are building their lives in the UK to integrate and take advantage of the opportunities that living here offers, while recognising and valuing their relationship with, and responsibility to, other groups and our wider society.
242. But this can only be achieved when communities feel empowered to offer those opportunities, and people feel they can contribute to their neighbourhoods and society. To do this, we will support the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's upcoming Community Cohesion strategy and work closely with local authorities and partners to help individuals benefit from community cohesion.
243. To achieve integration and make the most of the opportunities on offer, individuals need to be able to mix and become active participants in the communities in which they live – crucially that means being able to speak English.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

244. The ability for individuals to communicate is essential to perform civic duties, and for all social connections including, crucially, with the communities in which they live and with state and other agencies such as local authorities and non-government services. Without adequate language skills, there is a risk of isolation as well as poor integration.
245. Analysis of the Office for National Statistics' Longitudinal Study, which looks across generations of migrants to the UK, shows that people with better English language skills were more likely to have worked at any time, be economically active or in full-time employment at present.⁸³
246. People who could not speak English are less likely to be employed. In the 2021 Census,⁸⁴ just under 70% of migrants who were proficient in English were either employed or self-employed, compared to 50% of those who could not speak English well or at all.⁸⁵ In addition to having higher employment rates, migrants with good English language skills tend to work in jobs requiring a higher level of skills. For example, 9% of migrants who spoke English as a main language worked in lower skilled roles in 2021, compared to 40% of migrants who could not speak English well or at all.⁸⁶

⁸³ ONS Longitudinal Study, Office for National Statistics (www.ons.gov.uk), published 2016. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/paidservices/longitudinalstudy>

⁸⁴ Census, Office for National Statistics (www.ons.gov.uk), published 28 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>

⁸⁵ English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK, Figure 4, The Migration Observatory, published 12 March 2024. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/english-language-use-and-proficiency-of-migrants-in-the-uk/>

⁸⁶ English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK, Figure 5, The Migration Observatory, published 12 March 2024. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/english-language-use-and-proficiency-of-migrants-in-the-uk/>

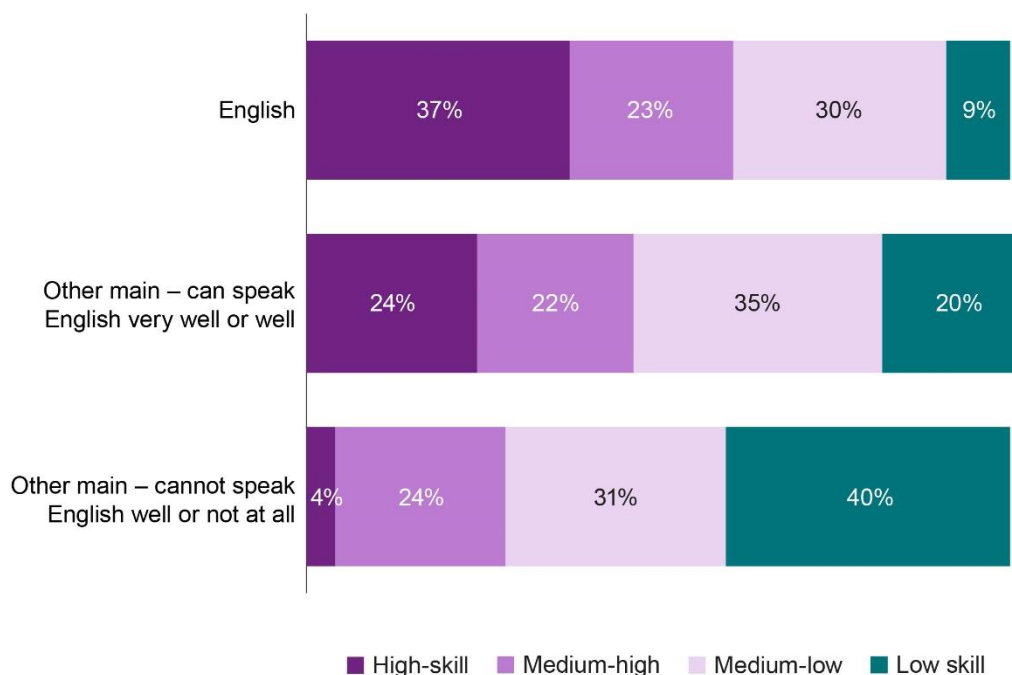


Figure 17 Skill level of migrant workers' job by English language proficiency.⁸⁷

247. The UK currently requires a level of English proficiency for many migrants to come to the UK, however this currently applies to the main applicant only, and no further test is applied to dependants.
248. The level of test needed, known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level, depends on the route being applied for, with the Skilled Worker route, for example, requiring at least level B1 (intermediate level). A further test applies at the point of applying to settle in the UK or apply for citizenship for those ages 18 and over.
249. This standard can be met by being a national of an English speaking country or having a degree that was taught or researched in English. The remaining cohort require a recognised English test qualification from an approved test centre.
250. Self-reported English language proficiency on the Graduate route is generally high. This is unsurprising as those on the Graduate route will have recently completed studying at a higher level at a UK University. In a survey of nearly 3,000 Graduate visa holders, 83% felt they could speak English very well or fluently. However, this fell to only 73% for Graduate dependant partners.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK, Figure 5, The Migration Observatory, published 12 March 2024. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/english-language-use-and-proficiency-of-migrants-in-the-uk/>

⁸⁸ Graduate Route Research - Insights into Graduate route users' experiences, Figure 20, GOV.UK, published 13 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/graduate-route-evaluation>

251. There are currently no requirements on English proficiency for adult dependants arriving on many of our work and student routes. Using published immigration statistics, in year ending December 2024, there were over 190,000 entry clearance visas issued to dependants.⁸⁹ While those that choose to come to the UK are likely to have a better standard of English than the average level in their home country, 51% of visas issued to dependants are from countries with an overall low proficiency in English when applying the Education First, English Proficiency Index 16 as a proxy for a nation's English proficiency.⁹⁰

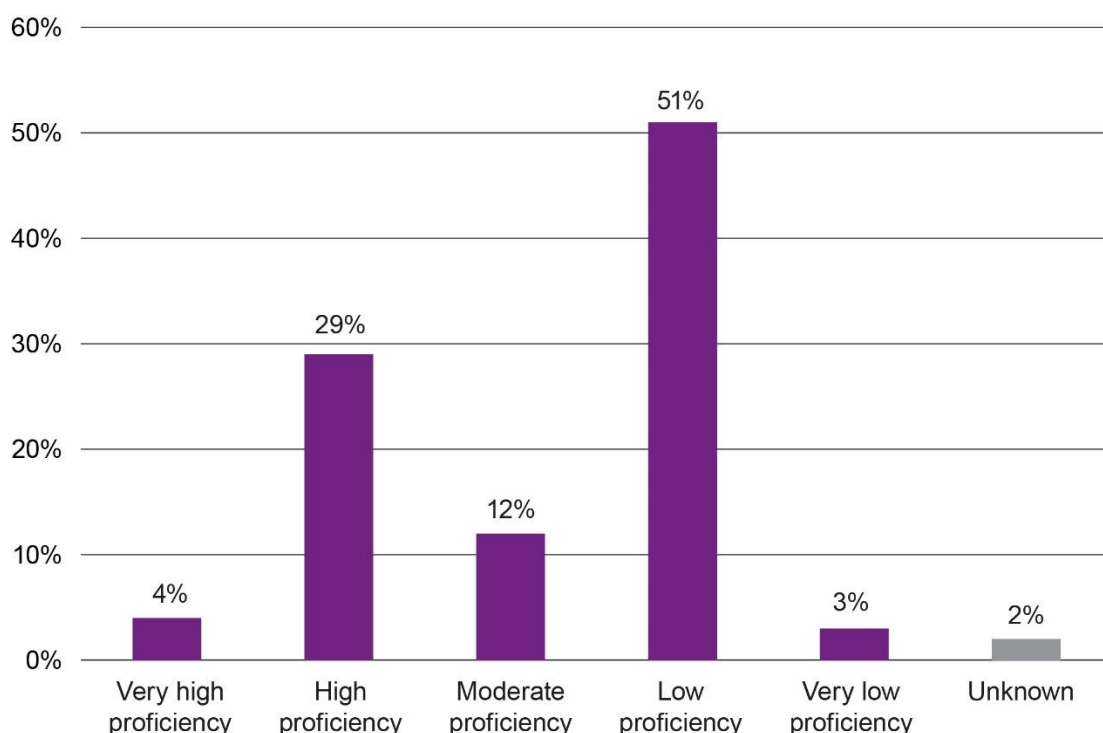


Figure 18: Illustrative proficiency levels of dependants, based on nationality profile and EPI data.⁹¹

252. Those who wish to build their lives in the UK need to learn to speak and understand English so they can integrate into life in this country by getting a job or improving their prospects at work, accessing and making good use of local services, becoming part of community life and contributing to society.

253. **To support this, we will introduce new English language requirements across a broader range of immigration routes, for both main applicants and their dependants, to ensure better knowledge of English, including an assessment of improvements over time.**

⁸⁹ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Entry clearance visas applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Vis_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bc8251d157fd4b79add86/entry-clearance-visa-outcomes-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁹⁰ Data are a subset of those found in EF EPI - EF English Proficiency Index 2024 report, www.ef.com, published 13 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>

⁹¹ Data are a subset of those found in EF EPI - EF English Proficiency Index 2024 report, www.ef.com, published 13 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>

254. **We will increase language requirements for Skilled Workers and workers where a language requirement already applies from B1 to B2 (Independent User) levels, in accordance with the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR).**
255. It is important that we ensure better integration and consistency in our requirements of family members across the immigration system so **we will introduce a new English language requirement for all adult dependants of workers and students at level A1 (Basic User) to align to spousal and partner routes and will work towards increasing this requirement over time.**
256. **We want individuals to improve their English language skills over time as they continue their stay in the UK. We will introduce requirements to demonstrate progression to level A2 (Basic User) for any visa extension, and B2 (Independent User) for settlement.**
257. **We will increase our existing requirements for settlement across the majority of immigration routes from B1 to B2 (Independent User).**
258. Across Government, we will also make it easier for those already in the UK, working with partners in the Department for Education, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to access classes for English language lessons for those who need additional help.

EARNED SETTLEMENT

259. Settlement in the UK is a prerequisite for becoming a British citizen and brings lifelong benefits. Settlement is also an important step in integrating and contributing to local communities and the wider country.
260. There were 162,000 grants of settlement in 2024, up 35% from 2023.⁹² This rise reflects the increase in individuals coming to the UK between 2015 and 2019 on entry clearance visas who have since become eligible for settlement and citizenship. As things stand, more people are likely to become eligible for settlement and then citizenship over the next few years as a result of the extremely high level of net migration between 2019 and 2024.
261. The share of people who go on to claim settlement varies considerably by the type of visa people were initially granted to enter the UK, 18% of those coming on work visas between 2010 and 2018 secured settlement by 2023, compared to 75% on the Family route.⁹³

⁹² Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Settlement detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Se_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf39c4750837d7604dbbca/settlement-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

⁹³ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Settlement detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Se_D01, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf39c4750837d7604dbbca/settlement-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

262. It has been a long-standing principle that settlement in the UK is a privilege and not a right. Under the current system settlement is primarily qualified for on the basis of length of time spent in the UK alongside a knowledge of life test which is used to verify knowledge of British customs, history, traditions, laws and political system.
263. These criteria alone do not reflect our strongly held belief that people should contribute to the economy and society before gaining settled status in our country and they fail to promote integration, which limits the wider benefit from long term migration into the UK and increases pressure on public services. **We will therefore reform the current rules around settlement through an expansion of the principle behind the Points-Based System, that individuals should earn their right to privileged immigration status in the UK through the long-term contribution they bring to our country.**
264. **This expansion of the Point-Based System will increase the standard qualifying period for settlement to ten years.**
265. **We will continue to offer a shorter pathway to settlement for non-UK dependants of British citizens to five years, provided they have remained compliant with their requirements, and we will retain existing safeguards to protect the vulnerable, including settlement rights for victims of domestic violence and abuse.**
266. **Through the expansion of the Point-Based System, individuals will also have the opportunity to reduce the qualifying period based on Points-Based contributions to the UK economy and society. We will consult on these changes later this year.**
267. Whilst we develop and implement the new 'Earned Settlement' model we will make further changes to settlement rules in the near term. These include:
- **The creation of a new bereaved parent route, allowing those in the UK on the route of a parent of a British or settled child, but who have tragically lost their child, to settle immediately.**
 - **Ensuring children who have been in the UK for some time, turn 18 and discover they do not have status, are fully supported and able to regularise their status and settle. This will also include a clear pathway for those children in care and care leavers.**

EARNED CITIZENSHIP

268. It has been a longstanding principle that citizenship in the UK, like settlement, is a privilege and not a right. We are creating a system that benefits people who respect the rules and make their contribution to the UK and take action against those who do not.

269. In 2024, 269,621 people were granted British citizenship, 30% more than 2023.⁹⁴ We do not want to offer citizenship and the life-long benefits it brings to those who have circumvented our rules or those who have not demonstrated that they have contributed to the UK.

270. **We will introduce reforms to citizenship to align to earned settlement reforms, building on the expansion of the Points-Based System to settlement and citizenship.**

271. **Similar to Earned Settlement, we will increase the standard qualifying period and expand the Points-Based System to allow those with greater contributions to qualify sooner. We will also conduct a refresh of the Life in the UK test and how it operates. Finally, we will consider measures to reduce the financial barriers to young adults, who have lived here through their childhood, from accessing British nationality.**

⁹⁴ Home Office Immigration system statistics data tables, Citizenship detailed datasets, year ending December 2024, Table Cit_D02, Home Office Immigration Statistics, GOV.UK, published 24 August 2023. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf399f16dc9038974dbbbf/citizenship-datasets-dec-2024.xlsx>

Chapter 7: Conclusion - A System Fit for the Future

272. In his landmark Downing Street speech on net migration on 28 November 2024, the Prime Minister explained the reasons why “nearly one million people came to Britain in the year ending June 2023...four times the migration levels compared with 2019.”⁹⁵
273. He told the British people candidly: “This happened by design, not accident. Policies were reformed deliberately to liberalise immigration. Brexit was used for that purpose to turn Britain into a one-nation experiment in open borders.”
274. And the Prime Minister committed his Government to turn the page on that failed experiment through an Immigration White Paper, which would reduce net migration and deliver reform in all the key areas that have been the driver of increases and abuses in recent years.
275. He pledged to strengthen the Points-Based System and insist on new training requirements for certain sectors, so that we can reduce the over-reliance on overseas workers to fill gaps in labour and skills that should be addressed by people already here in our country.
276. He pledged to crack down on any abuse of UK visa routes and ban employers from hiring overseas workers where they refuse to play by the rules, so that we can send a clear signal around the world that Britain is no longer a soft touch when it comes to illegal working.
277. And he pledged to take further action to safeguard our border security and remove people with no right to be in the UK, so that decisions over who comes to our country and stays in our country are made according to the will of our sovereign Parliament, and no-one else.
278. **This White Paper delivers the action we need to meet all of those pledges.**
279. Many of these measures will take time to deliver their effects: some will require new legislation; others will require a change in approach across government, industry and society as a whole.
280. As the Prime Minister said in his 28 November speech. “It won’t be quick or easy – but we are going to turn things around, not with gimmicks, but with graft. A Government that will not rest until the foundations are fixed, our borders are secure, and Britain is rebuilt.”

^[95] PM speech on migration: 28 November 2024, GOV.UK, published 28 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-migration-28-november-2024>

281. “Mark my words”, the Prime Minister concluded, “this Government will turn the page.”. This Immigration White Paper delivers on that promise and starts a new chapter for Britain: one of higher skills, lower migration, and tougher controls over who is allowed to come into our country, and who is permitted to stay.

282. Outlined below are the reforms that this White Paper introduces to restore control and order. We will set out further measures around asylum and border security later this year. Underpinning this radical, and ambitious package, is the core principle that net migration must come down so the system is properly managed and controlled. **This is how this Government is restoring control over the immigration system.**

The immigration system must be linked to skills and training requirements here in the UK, so that no industry is allowed to rely solely on immigration to fill its skills shortages.

Work Reforms

- We will **lift the level for skilled workers back to RQF 6** and above. **Salary thresholds will rise.**
- We will **increase the Immigration Skills Charge** for the first time since its introduction in 2017, by 32% in line with inflation.
- We will **close social care visas** to new applications from abroad. For a transition period **until 2028**, we will **permit visa extensions and in-country switching** for those already in the country with working rights, but this will be kept **under review**.
- We will **establish the Labour Market Evidence Group** to draw on the best data available in order to make informed decisions about the state of the labour market and the role that different policies should play, rather than always relying on migration.
- We will **launch new requirements for workforce strategies** for key sectors where there are high levels of recruitment from abroad.
- We will establish a **new Temporary Shortage List** to provide **time limited access** to the Points-Based immigration system. Occupations **below RQF 6 must be listed** on the Temporary Shortage List in order to gain **access to the immigration system**.
- **Access to the Points-Based immigration system will be limited to** occupations where there have been **long term shortages**, on a **time limited basis**, where the **MAC has advised it is justified**, where there is a **workforce strategy** in place, and where employers seeking to recruit from abroad are committed to playing their part in **increasing recruitment from the domestic workforce**.
- We will explore how to ensure that **employers**, using the immigration system, are **incentivised to invest in boosting domestic talent**, including options to **restrict employers** sponsoring skilled visas if they are **not committed to increasing skills training**.
- We will introduce reforms to **allow a limited pool of UNHCR recognised refugees and displaced people to apply for employment** through our existing **skilled worker routes**, where they have the skills to do so.
- We will go further in **ensuring that the very highly skilled have opportunities to come to the UK** and access our targeted routes for the brightest and best global talent.

The immigration system must be linked to skills and training requirements here in the UK, so that no industry is allowed to rely solely on immigration to fill its skills shortages.

Study Reforms

- We will **strengthen the requirements that all sponsoring institutions must meet in order to recruit international students.**
- We will **raise the minimum pass requirement** of each Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) **metric by five percentage points**, so that – for example – a sponsor must maintain a course enrolment rate of at least 95% and a course completion rate of 90% in order to pass the compliance threshold.
- We will implement a new **Red-Amber-Green banding system to rate the BCA performance of each sponsor**, so that it is clear to them, the authorities and the public which institutions are achieving a high rate of compliance, and which are at risk of failing.
- We will introduce **new interventions for sponsors who are close to failing their metrics**, including placing them on a bespoke action plan designed to improve their compliance, and imposing limits on the number of new international students they can recruit while they are subject to those plans.
- We will require **all sponsors wishing to use recruitment agents for overseas students to sign up to the Agent Quality Framework**, designed to maintain the highest standards of agent management, and ensure that institutions cannot simply outsource their responsibility to ensure that the individuals whose visas they are sponsoring are genuinely coming to the UK to study.
- We will ensure there are arrangements, for **future international student recruitment**, for sponsoring institutions to demonstrate that they are considering local impacts when taking its decisions on international recruitment.
- We will conduct **a review of the Short-Term Study accreditation** bodies to ensure that their processes are robust and consider what further checks need to be put in place to ensure the right level of scrutiny is being applied both before an organisation is accredited, and when that accreditation is renewed.
- We will **reduce the ability for Graduates to remain in the UK** after their studies to **a period of 18 months.**
- We will explore **introducing a levy on higher education provider income** from international students, to be **reinvested into skills.**

The rules must be respected and enforced - from our crackdown on illegal working to the deportation of foreign criminals.

- We will **tighten up the rules** we apply both at the border, and within our immigration system, to **make it easier to refuse entry or asylum** to those individuals **who break the rules or break our laws**.
- We are **introducing measures** so that **where people do break the rules or break our laws**, there are **stronger powers and proper enforcement** in place **to track them down, arrest them, and remove them from our country**.
- We will **simplify the rules and processes** for **removing foreign national offenders** and take **further targeted action against any recent arrivals** who commit crimes in the UK **before their offending can escalate**.
- We will **strengthen border security** by rolling out **digital identity for all overseas citizens** through the implementation of eVisas and new systems for checking visa compliance, replacing the former Biometric Residence Permit cards.
- We will **introduce tighter controls, restrictions and scrutiny** of those who attempt to **abuse and misuse the immigration system**, and who arrive with a **pre-existing intention to claim asylum on, or after, arrival**, when there has been no material change in their home country to warrant such a claim.
- We will **continue to take steps to tackle illegal working**, continuing to **surge resource** into the key sectors where illegal working is taking place – including in the gig economy – and **using eVisas and modern biometric technology to support our Immigration Enforcement raids** – facilitated by the 1,000 staff redeployed into enforcement and returns since the election.
- We will **build on existing banking** measures to ensure these **reflect advances in technology** and work across Government to **take action** against those who have not respected the rules by **failing to pay tax owed**.
- Later this year, we will set out more **detailed reforms and stronger measures to ensure our laws are upheld**, including **streamlining and speeding up the removals** process.
- It is right that **we take action against foreign national offenders** in the UK **before they get the opportunity to put down roots in the UK**, and that we do what is necessary to **protect local communities and prevent crime**.

The system must support integration and community cohesion, including new rules on the ability to speak English and the contribution that people bring to the UK.

- We will **increase language requirements for Skilled Workers and workers** where a language requirement already applies **from B1 to B2** (Independent User) levels, in accordance with the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- We will introduce **a new English language requirement for all adult dependants of workers and students at level A1** (Basic User) to align to spousal and partner routes and will work towards increasing this requirement over time.
- We will **introduce requirements to demonstrate progression to level A2** (Basic User) for any **visa extension**, and **B2** (Independent User) for **settlement**.
- We will **increase our existing requirements for settlement** across the majority of immigration routes from **B1 to B2** (Independent User).
- We will **reform our settlement and citizenship rules** by expanding the Points-Based System and **increasing the standard qualifying period for settlement to ten years**.
- Individuals will **have the opportunity to reduce the qualifying period to settlement and citizenship** based on **contributions to the UK economy and society**.
- We will **continue to offer a shorter pathway to settlement for non-UK dependants of British citizens to five years**, and we will **retain existing safeguards to protect the vulnerable**, including settlement rights for victims of domestic violence and abuse.
- We will **create a new bereaved parent route**, allowing those in the UK on the **route of a parent of a British or settled child**, but who have tragically lost their child, to **settle immediately**.
- We will also conduct a **refresh of the Life in the UK test** and how it operates and consider measures to **reduce the financial barriers** to young adults, who have lived here through their childhood, from accessing British nationality.
- We will ensure **children who have been in the UK for some time**, turn 18 and discover they do not have status, are fully supported and able to regularise their status and settle. This will also include a clear pathway for those **children in care and care leavers**.

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