

SUMMARY

Net Migration Update

Tuesday 3 December 2024, House of Commons

The meeting of the APPG Social Science and Policy held on 3rd December discussed migration in the UK. The session, chaired by Yuan Yang, Labour MP for Earley and Woodley, explored recent trends and the implications for policy. Mary Gregory, Director of Population Statistics at the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Migration Observatory at Oxford, shared insights on recent statistics, the drivers of immigration, and what the numbers mean for policymakers.

Key Migration Trends

- **Net migration:** The latest figures show net migration at 728,000 for the year ending June 2024. This is a decline from earlier peaks (down 16% on last year) but still well above historical averages.
- **Non-EU migration dominance:** Non-EU nationals made up 86% of migrants in the year to June 2024. People coming from India (20% of immigrants), Nigeria (10%), and Pakistan (8%) make up a large portion.
- **Work migration:** Work-related migration reached 417,000 in the year to June 2024, rising from 355,000 the previous year. This reflects sustained demand in certain sectors, particularly care, which is a major driver of work-related migration. Liberalised policies introduced in 2022 allowed entry-level care workers to access visas, resulting in a significant increase in numbers. However, concerns about exploitation and scrutiny of sponsorship applications have led to a more recent decline. Other policy

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changes, such as higher salary thresholds for skilled worker visas, have reduced migration in middle-skill roles like chefs and butchers.

Dependents of people arriving on work visas also saw a rise, with 233,000 entering in the same period, up from 166,000 a year earlier. Policy changes and stricter eligibility for dependents means this number may come down in future datasets.

- **Study migration:** International students remain a significant group, comprising 375,000 main applicants and dependents. However, dependents of students following policy restrictions. The graduate visa route has bolstered the UK's attractiveness to international students. Universities, facing financial pressures, have focused efforts on recruiting abroad. While this has succeeded in boosting numbers, dependents of students—once a significant contributor—dropped by a third on the previous year due to new restrictions.
- **Asylum seekers:** Asylum applications accounted for 8% of non-EU migration, around 84,000 people. This includes those arriving via authorised and unauthorised routes, such as small boats. Refugee family reunifications have surged, particularly following the clearance of application backlogs in the asylum system.

How migration is measured – and how it is changing

Historically, estimates of migration relied on the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which asked people about their intentions to stay or leave the UK for 12 months or more. This definition aligned with UN definitions, but as a measure it was often imprecise and subject to substantial revisions, as hit the headlines on 28 November with the latest statistics release.

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Now, the ONS primarily uses administrative data— such as visa records, tax information, and benefits data— providing far greater accuracy. However, the change means significant revisions have to be made to previous years' data, which can cause public concern.

Looking Ahead: Projections and Uncertainties

Rough projections suggest net migration will stabilise at between 300,000 and 350,000 in the medium term, though this remains speculative.

Key factors include:

- The impact of tightened visa rules on student and work-related migration.
- A potential increase in emigration among temporary migrants, such as international students completing their studies.
- The need to recruit overseas in the care sector.

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