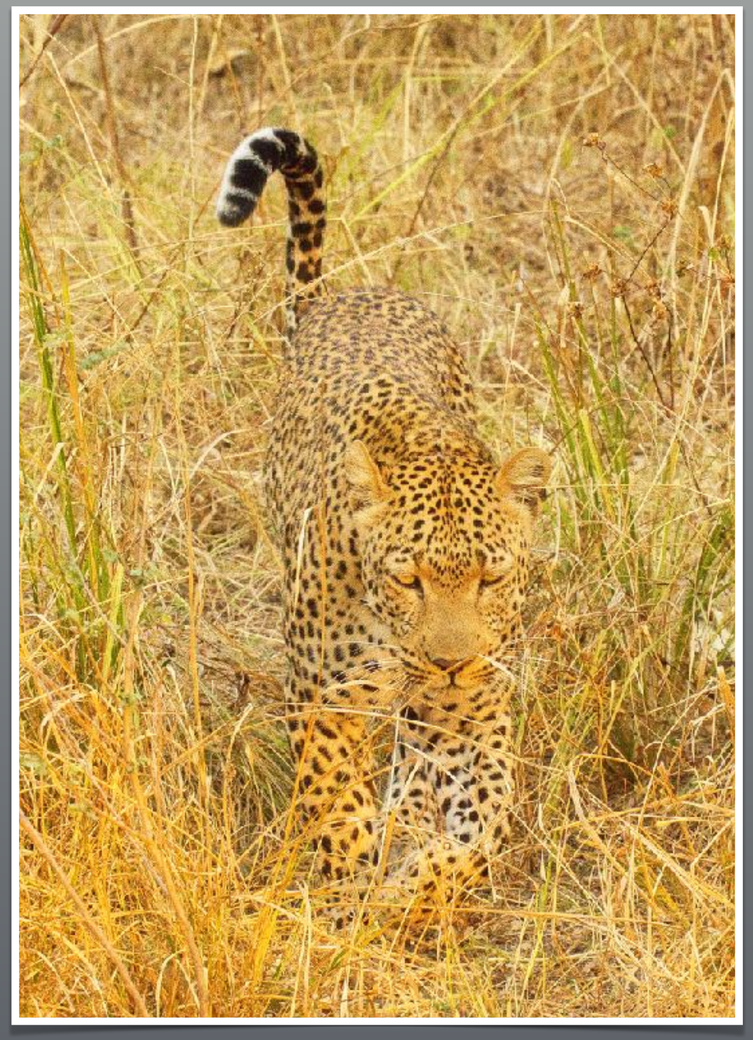
Migration is much more than small boat crossings



Tim Ewbank

Autumn 2026





Popular focus is on the leopard’s tail, whereas, we need to see the whole animal

Migration in the news

2nd November

Sabhana Mahmood (Home Secretary) announced that care workers & some other categories who arrived in the UK before May 2025 and earned at least £25,000 a year would qualify for settlement after five years (reversing previous 15yr rule) Estimate is that policy change could affect 282,000 (source: BBC)

Defined settlement periods of other categories of migrants

Reduces the initial protection period—now normally 30 months for relevant post-March 2026 claims

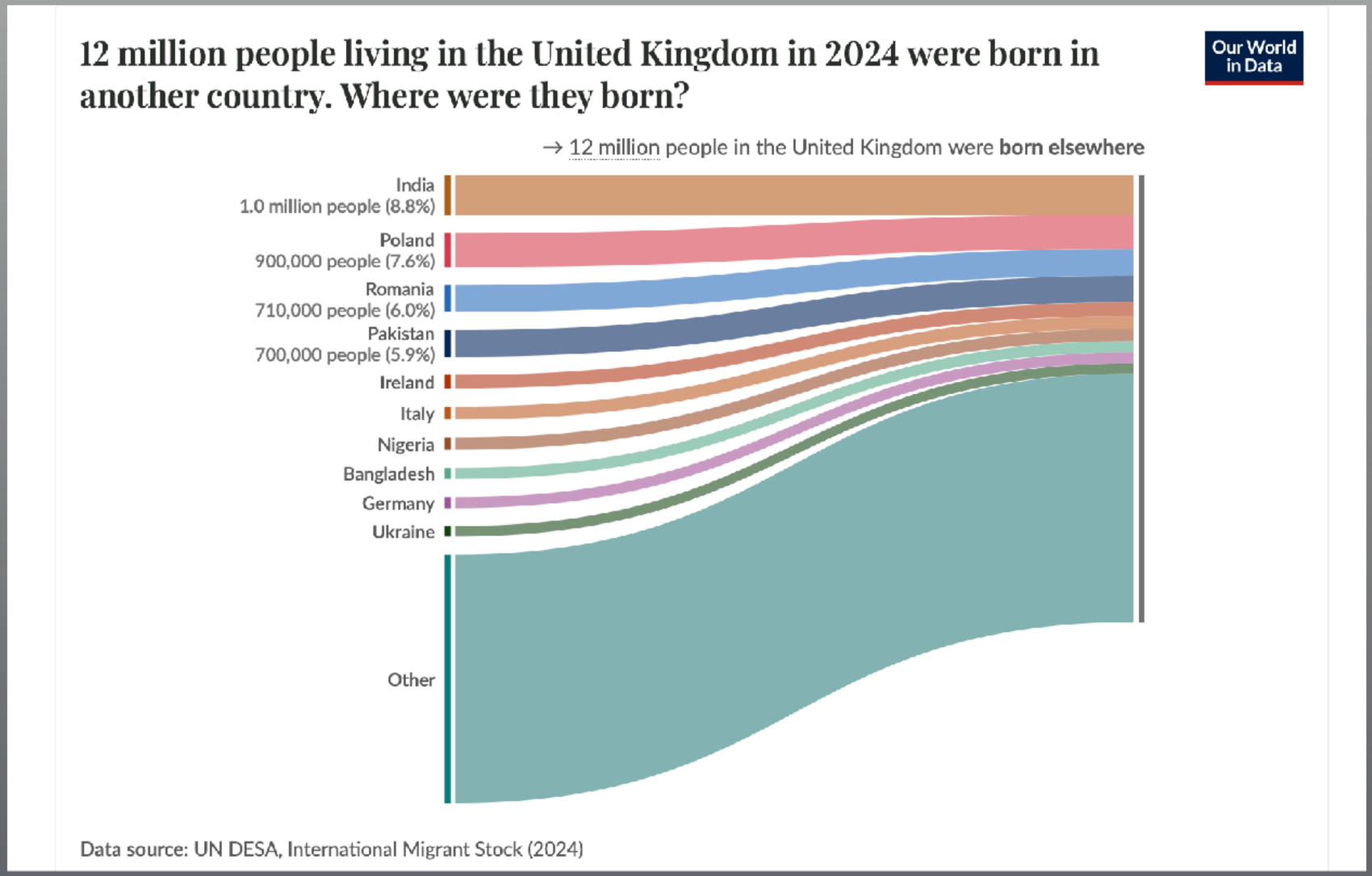
Wk5 Focus on migration in UK

	Historic	Contemporary (Post WWII)
Global		
Regional/ international		
National		✓
Local		✓

Contemporary migration to UK

Current issues:

- Impact of Brexit
- Costs of asylum seeker management
- Border control agreement with France
- Link between migrants & crime



Source:
Our World in Data

UK percentage born elsewhere 17%

Distribution of non-EU residents born abroad

The top ten Local Authority areas are all in London

(Brent, Westminster, Kenninsgton & Chelsea, Newnham, Harrow, Ealing)

six of them over 50%

LA areas with the lowest percentage of non-UK born residents:

4 in Staffordshire, 2 each in Cumbria and the North-East

All less than 4%

For the data nerds:

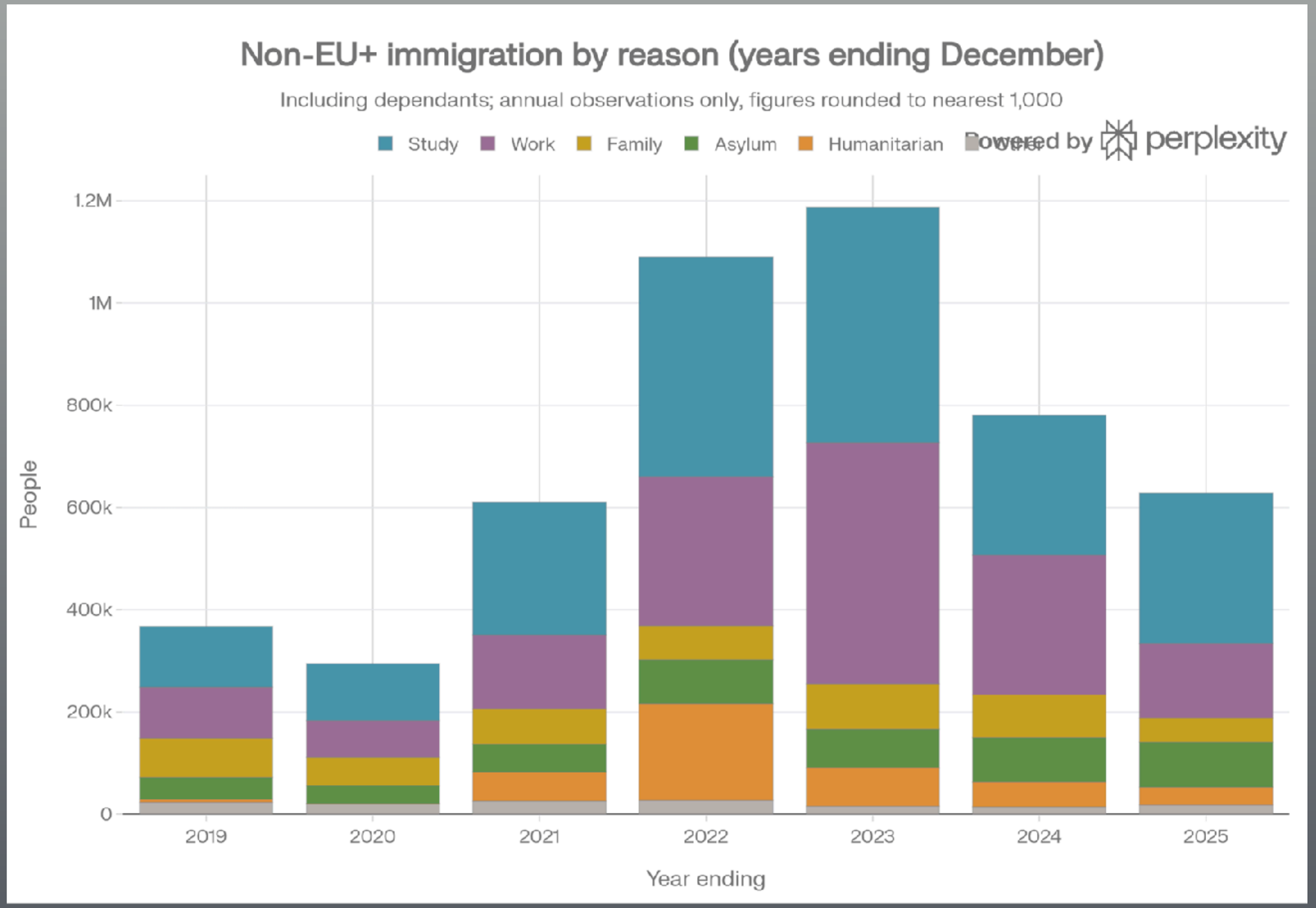
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021

Net Migration to UK

Year / period	Net migration	What was happening
2016	About 249,000	EU net migration was already falling after the referendum.
2017	About 290,000	Still within the broad pre-pandemic range.
2018	About 260,000	Continued moderate level.
2019	About 310,000	Rise led increasingly by non-EU migration.
2020	About 90,000	Pandemic travel restrictions sharply reduced movement.
2021	About 480,000	Reopening after COVID-19, plus the new post-Brexit system.
2022	About 870,000	Large inflows for work, study and humanitarian routes.
2023	About 944,000 (year ending March)	The highest recorded estimate (calendar-year estimates are lower)
Year ending June 2024	649,000	A substantial decline from the peak.
Year ending June 2025	204,000	About two-thirds below the previous year and broadly comparable with pre-new-system levels.
2025 total	177,000	Latest estimate; below the typical levels of the 2010s.

Boris wave

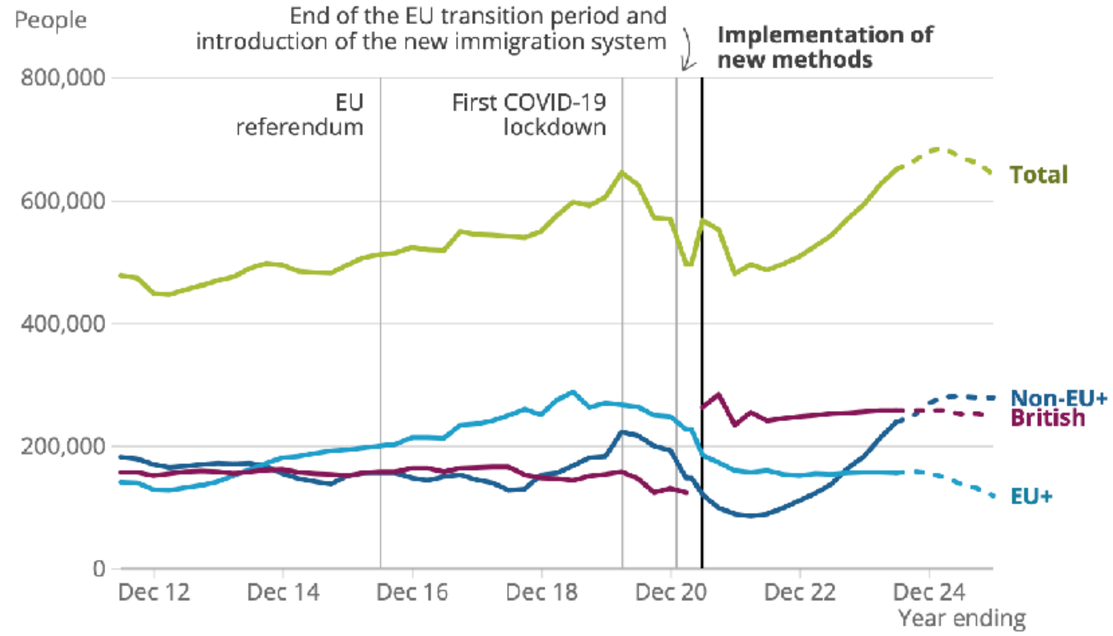
Source: ONS



Source:
Migration Observatory, ONS

Figure 9: Long-term emigration fell in the most recent period

Number of non-EU+, EU+, and British nationals emigrating long-term from the UK, year ending (YE) June 2012 to YE December 2025



Source: Borders and Immigration data from the Home Office, Registration and Population Interactions Database from the Department for Work and Pensions, and International Passenger Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Emigration from UK

642,000 (estimate) left UK in YE 2025

British nationals 246,000 (38%)

Contrary to sensational reporting, emigration from UK is falling

Billionaires are not emigrating *en masse*!

Current questions about migration

Why do we have to take asylum seekers at all?

What difference did Brexit make?

Implications of leaving ECHR?

Implication of EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?

How much does it cost to manage the whole asylum process?

Where are asylum seekers housed while their claims are processed?

Is there a link between migrant populations & crime?

How does our agreement with French Border Enforcement work?

What are the current government policies to manage asylum?

Why do we have to take asylum seekers at all?

Guided by principles in Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

Article 14 recognises that people have the right to seek asylum

A state must not expel, return or transfer a person to a territory where their life or freedom would be threatened (non refoulement)

An asylum seeker may be a genuine refugee, so states cannot reject them at the frontier without assessing their protection claim.

States are not obliged to accept asylum seekers,

but all cases must be individualy assessed & not returned to danger

Implications of leaving ECHR?

Based on 1951 Refugee Convention as the principal treaty on refugees' status

UK Human Rights Act contains same principles as ECHR

Determines how countries can detain, exclude, remove, and separate non-nationals from their families, specifically:

- Prevents removal to where there is risk of torture, inhuman treatment or death (Article 3)
- Requires immigration detention to be lawful, justified, non-arbitrary
- Requires a case-by-case assessment before deportations that divide close family members (Article 8)
- Prevents group expulsions; cases must be considered on an individual basis

Articles 3 & 8 are politically contentious in UK

What difference did Brexit make?



Replaced free movement within EU with visa system

Can alter eligibility, salary thresholds & shortage lists

Migrants from EU reduced significantly (-42,000 in 2025)

Non-EU nationals were 86% of immigrants in 2024

Did not, of itself, lower overall migration.

2023 was peak year, net migration 944,000

reduced significantly since (177,000 in 2025)
ended UK participation in the Dublin system and Eurodac

Brexit changed who the UK could regulate and where migrants came from

Effect of EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?

Major item of EU legislation which came into effect 12 June 2026

UK operates a different model from EU which coordinates across Member States, while the UK operates a national system centred on deterrence, temporary protection and bilateral cooperation, since Brexit.

Offers relatively small benefits to UK. More consistent treatment of refugees across Europe.

Limitations:

- not having access to EURODAC biometric registration
- no UK-EU returns agreement
- does not significantly change incentives for small-boat crossings to UK (or EU)
- need to negotiate bi-lateral agreements with EU partners

How does our agreement with French Border Enforcement work?

Channel Tunnel and ferry agreements still in place (Treaty of Le Touquet, 2003)
“One in, one out” arrangement ended June 2026
Replaced by three year deal 2026/7 - 2028/9
Three types of action by French officers:

- inland - waterway checks, equipment seizures, camp clearances
- on the beaches - patrolling & stopping launches
- at sea - taxi-boat interceptions (only before they are loaded or at sea)

Impact :
Since April 2026, stopped 185 “crossing events” involving about 4,300 people
Pushing smugglers to use more dangerous routes & “mega dinghies”

Cost to UK government :
£662million over three years (portion is conditional on results)

Cost of asylum seeker support 2020-2025

Annual expenditure

Financial year	Home Office asylum-support spending	Hotel spending identified separately	Comment
2019-20	£0.739bn	Not separately published in the cited annual series	Baseline before large-scale hotel dependence.[1][6]
2020-21	£0.8bn	Not separately published	Costs increased during Covid-19; Home Office ODA spending rose because of additional accommodation measures.[5][7]
2021-22	£1.5bn	Not separately published	Up from £0.8bn; 84,457 people were receiving support at the end of December 2021.[^5]
2022-23	£3.6bn	£2.2bn–£2.3bn	The small difference reflects rounding and revisions between official publications.[1][8][^2]
2023-24	£4.7bn	£3.0bn	Hotels accounted for roughly two-thirds of asylum-support spending.[8][2]
2024-25	£4.0bn	£2.1bn	Hotel costs fell by about £0.9bn from 2023-24, but still represented just over half of support spending.[3][4]

Costs are going down from 2023-24 due to reduced use of hotels

Home Office 2025-26 asylum budget allocation

2025-26 allocated category	Amount	Share of allocation
Accommodation: initial, dispersed and contingency	£2.232bn	62.2%
Unaccompanied children and leaving care	£0.722bn	20.1%
Cash support	£0.262bn	7.3%
Other grants and support costs, including accommodation-contract fees and Children's Panel	£0.240bn	6.7%
Local-authority dispersal grants	£0.132bn	3.7%
Total	**£3.588bn**	**100%**

Unaccounted cost items

Health care

Education

Legal system

Enforcement & returns

Police & community safety

Border Force marine operations

Coastal reception

Summary of current situation

Numbers of “small boat” arrivals are reducing (- 41% Jan-June 2025 - 2026)

Costs of migrant support are reducing year-on-year (-£500million 2024-2025)

(mainly through reduction in use of asylum hotels)

Unaccounted elements are partly opportunity costs

Significantly more resources being put into deterrence & enforcement

Re-use of military bases for asylum seekers has become a popular flashpoint

Public perception of government’s handling of migration is generally negative

Where are asylum seekers housed while their claims are processed?

(1) Hotels (c.16,000 in August 2026)

(2) HMOs (Houses in multiple occupation) (c.69,000)

(3) Detention centres

Total of eight; 2 near Heathrow & 2 nr. Gatwick

(4) Former military facilities (1,162)

Manston, Ramsgate, Kent

RAF Withersield, Braintree, Essex

Crowborough Training Centre, Crowborough, Sussex

Three more proposed - Piddington, Barnham, Linton-on-Ouse

Source: Home Office June2026

Current capacity 1,850 + three proposed sites 3,750

Is there a link between migrant populations & crime in UK?

Official data is patchy, disjointed and often not up-to-date. Poorly linked across offender status, immigration category and locality

UK evidence does not establish a causal relationship between immigrant concentrations eg detention centres and violence against local women.

Local deprivation and urban conditions are much more useful predictors of crime than the local share of immigrants; evidence for a general immigration–crime link in Britain is weak.

On the contrary, refugees and people seeking asylum are more likely to be victims of violence, especially women, rather than as perpetrators.

Sources: The Migration Observatory 2026; Gov.uk

Contrary to public preception, there is not a proven link, but fears remain

Current government migration policies

Immigration and Asylum Bill 2026 (passed first reading in Parliament)

- new appeals body to speed up appeals
- narrowed ECHR Article 8 to immediate family only
- asylum seekers who can afford it would pay towards their support
- detention centres to be expanded (Gosport 290 to 1,000)
- Removals - target 45,000 over next decade
- Budget - Immigration Enforcement budget will double by 2028–29,
    - 60% more staff

Previously defined offences for arranging crossings, advertising them online and putting lives at risk at sea.



Migration: a persistent reality, not a series of crises

People have always moved—but their freedom to move has been profoundly unequal.

Migration reflects a combination of “push & pull” factors:
opportunity, conflict, demography, environment and family.

History and geography shape routes: empire, language, proximity and established networks

Countries have been trying to regulate migration for over 150 years

There is no single solution, needs to be adapted to local circumstances

Every immigrant is also an emigrant: migration changes societies at both ends.



Outcomes depend on how migration is managed

Benefits and pressures are uneven: national gains can coexist with local strains

Reception, legal security and public attitudes shape what happens after arrival

Controls can reduce or redirect flows—but do not remove their underlying drivers

Migrants are often used as political scapegoats for country's ills

Policy involves trade-offs between economic needs, public consent and protection

Success means managing mobility fairly and effectively—not simply tougher rules



History explains the present

Britain’s migration story includes emigration, empire, labour and refuge

Colonial connections helped shape who came and their rights on arrival

Economic reliance on migrants has repeatedly coexisted with discrimination and exclusion

Brexit changed the rules and composition of migration; it did not automatically reduce the total

Windrush shows why lawful status and the ability to prove it are different



Looking beyond the boats

Our situation is not unique; shared by many other countries globally

Channel crossings are a serious political issue—but only a small part of migration

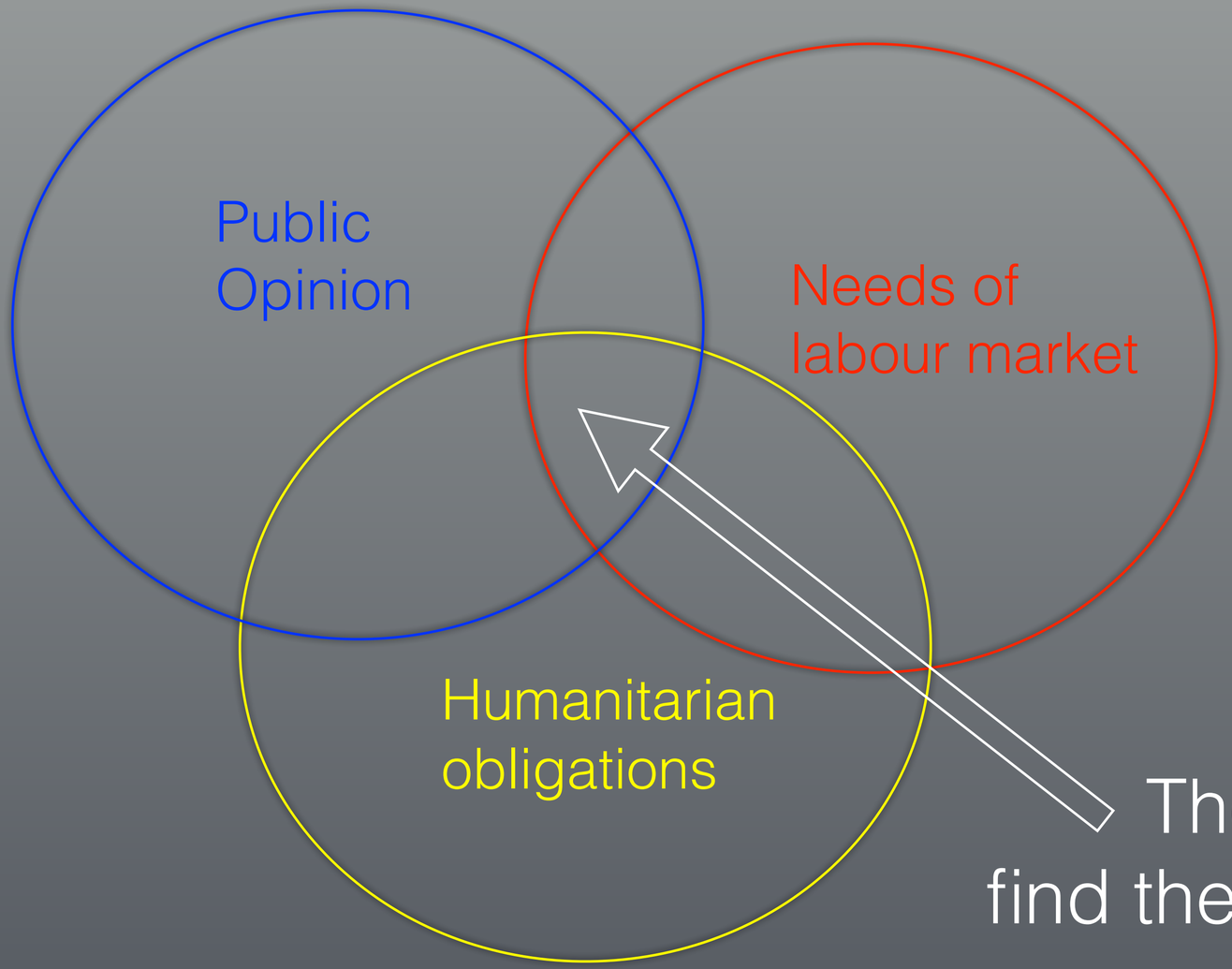
Separate work, study, family and protection: each requires a different policy response

Match national decisions with local housing, services and integration capacity

Judge asylum management by fairness, speed, safety and cost—not just deterrence

Seek a workable balance between labour needs, humanitarian obligations and public confidence.

A thought to leave you with….



The challenge is to find the policy "*sweet spot*"?



I’d really appreciate feedback on how to tweak the course for its repeat next term

(I’ll be sending out a short questionnaire, asking for your comments)