

UK IMMIGRATION POLICIES SINCE BREXIT



POST BREXIT CONTEXT : END OF FREE MOVEMENT

- With Brexit (1st January 2021) : the UK regained full control over its borders
- end of the EU principle of free movement for EU citizens.
- Immigration had been a major driver of anti-EU sentiment.
- Slogan of the Leave campaign: "Take back control."
- Vote Leave promised "a fairer immigration system that stops discriminating on the basis of where you come from."
- Concerns about national sovereignty and democratic control

JANUARY 2021 : INTRODUCTION OF THE POINT BASED SYSTEM (PBS)

Replaced EU free movement with a single immigration system for EU and non-EU nationals based on points awarded for:

Job offer
Salary level
Skill level

English proficiency
Education
Shortage-occupation status

A LIBERAL SYSTEM

- Rather low standard salary threshold: £25,600 (some allowed at £20,480)
- "Skilled work" definition was broadened, making it easier to qualify
- Shortage Occupation List was extended.
- Employers no longer had to prove they had looked for UK workers first.
- Despite "control" rhetoric, more open than the old EU system for non-EU migrants.
- Work permits were uncapped
- Visa holders (workers and students) could bring dependants.
- Lower thresholds for priority sectors: healthcare, social care, and agriculture.

Many argue the PBS made entry too easy
"if you get the points, you can get in."

SKILLED WORKER VISA

= main legal migration route. Concentrated in:

- Health and social care,
- Information & Communication Technology (ICT)
- Engineering and scientific fields.



CARE WORKER VISAS:

Introduced in response to severe staff shortages after the end of EU free movement.
Eventually opened to all care roles regardless of skill level.

KEY VISA ROUTES

Hong Kong BN(O) route
Ukraine schemes
Afghanistan resettlement programmes.

GRADUATE / POST-STUDY WORK VISA

Allows international students to stay and work up to 2 years after studies.
Compensates for the loss of EU students post-Brexit (universities rely on international fees).

Illegal border crossing

ORIGIN OF MIGRANTS:

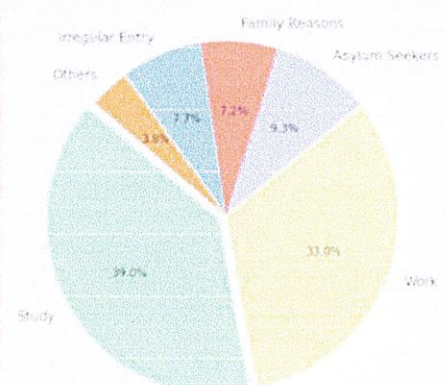
India, top source country (students and health workers)
Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe.

Decline in EU migration: about 386 000 EU nationals left between 2020–2022.
However, 5.5 million EU citizens allowed to stay without visa under the EU Settlement Scheme

SINCE BREXIT NET MIGRATION REACHED RECORD LEVELS

+ 682 000 (2022–2023)
+ 745 000 (2021–2022)

Purpose of Entry (2023)





ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

Migrants fill critical labour gaps worsened by Brexit and COVID-19.

- o Sectors : healthcare, hospitality, construction, and logistics.
- o UK economy remains highly dependent on migrant labour due to chronic underinvestment in domestic vocational training.

2018 WHITE PAPER

Promised “a single system that welcomes talent, hard work, and skills we need.”

Asserted democratic control: “Elected representatives will choose who comes.”

Aimed to reduce immigration — but post-Brexit numbers rose dramatically.



2023 REFORMS

Illegal Migration Act 2023

- Aimed to deter irregular arrivals via the English Channel.
- Allowed detention of people entering without permission.
- Restricted access to asylum
- Rwanda deportation plan

Legal Immigration

- Raised salary thresholds for Skilled Worker visas.
- Banned some health and social-care workers from bringing dependants.
- Announced increase of income threshold from £18,600 to £38,700
- Rewriting of Shortage Occupation List planned.



CRITIQUES OF HYPOCRISY:

Elites “pay lip service to control,” yet maintain an open, “employer-driven” system.

The PBS, while framed as restrictive, often functions as a liberalised labour-supply mechanism.

2025 WHITE PAPER

Claimed the economy became dependent on “importing workers” rather than “investing in skills.”
Noted that in sectors like engineering apprenticeships halved while visas doubled.



"TAKE BACK CONTROL":

- control of national borders
- get over with free movement of European citizens
- "a fairer immigration system"

LAW'S:

- EU Dublin regulation
- "One in one out"

CONSEQUENCES ON MIGRATION:

- flows of refugees from Ukraine and Hong-Kong
- increase of asylum seekers, mostly from Africa and Asia
- migration: part of Britain's story, essential for its economy

"POST-STUDY WORK VISA":

- students graduating from UK universities can extend their stay → *smooth the Brexit transition*

THE POST-BREXIT POINT-BASED SYSTEM

ECONOMIC NEEDS:

- lack of technical and vocational education and training
- further liberalisation for Indian workers
- shortage of doctors
- temporary recruitment of foreign workers (salary 20% < minimum salary in the sector)

"GLOBAL BRITAIN":

- Churchill's speech in 1948, and Sir Three Orders theory
- organisation of British politics around Europe, Atlantic, and "New Commonwealth"
- ⇒ **AMBITION**

The post-Brexit point-based system

- difference expectations after Brexit / reality
 - Brexit was supposed to reduce immigration.
 - Brexit was supposed to restore the UK's control over its national borders. → "For the first time in decades, it will be the democratically elected representatives of the British people who choose who comes into our country." (Text 3a)
 - reality → immigration from the EU decreased
→ immigration increased (from India especially)
- the new immigration system post-Brexit
 - point-based system for work visas → Main entry route (salary threshold, points for jobs that have a shortage in the UK, skills)
 - students have the right to stay after their studies and work in the UK
- criticism of the point-based system → it "surrenders the very principle of control. When migrants want to come to Britain, if they have the requisite number of points they simply win the right to come." (Text 2)
- considered to disadvantage local employment → More interesting to hire immigrants
- "Too much pressure" on "public services and housing access" (Text 3b)
- This immigration is also an answer to the job shortages in different sectors (health, education, Information and Communication Technology, financial services...)
- the requirements have been changed several times → mostly lowered

Card n° 1 : The post-Brexit point-based system

Introduction :

Since the Brexit referendum, the immigration system has been changed. Immigration was the main consideration of the population who wanted it reduced to help them getting jobs. But today ^{one} ~~we~~ can see that this reform has not been a success because it has had the opposite effect. Immigration has grown, creating tensions between the population and the government. Was this system beneficial? As ^(we can) ~~can be seen~~ see with the articles, not really.

Definitions :

- Point-based system : Immigration system based on criteria to get a visa in the UK. If the demanding worker reaches 50 points, ^{they are} ~~he is~~ eligible. It depends on the kind of job he is applying, the salary, the PhD ... This system has been set post-Brexit.
- Skilled Work Visa : It corresponds to a visa for qualified people with high competences or jobs in need of workers like health and social care. It's the main route of immigrants to ^{to} come ~~work~~.
- White Paper : Engagement's promise from the government about a subject in the name of the Prime Minister.