

IMMIGRATION AND ^{THE} BRITISH ECONOMY

KEY FIGURES

- Britain's non-EU foreign workers = 3,2M = more than double its pre-pandemic size
- Average migrant on a skilled-worker visa contributed 16,300 £ to the public purse in 2022 vs 800 £ for the average Brit.
- More than half of all skilled visas workers since 2021 went to medical professionals, nurses and care staff
- A net migration drop in 2025 would have meant a 0.94% fall in GDP
- Over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the scientific staff at top institutes are from overseas, and Britain's immigration system is among the world's costliest

A PARADOX

- Britain's economic needs point toward requiring more migrant workers for critical sectors: healthcare, social care, healthcare + technical job shortages.

BUT

- Political decisions and anti-immigration sentiment are driving policies to restrict migration.

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- ⇒ This means the changes meant to increase self-sufficiency (by training more home-grown workers and tightening visa access) could actually undermine economic productivity and Britain's global competitiveness, since employers still need foreign workers to fill major gaps

COVID?

- Post Covid, Britain ramped up skilled visa issuance to fill severe healthcare + technical job shortages.

UNDER B. JOHNSON

- Vacancies in care and construction sectors increased sharply → overseas workers began to fill those roles more.
- Policies allowed more immigrant students to work after graduation, but fees kept rising
- ⇒ Despite these economic needs, recent government plans now seek to reduce visas and prioritize British workers, intensifying the paradox as actual gaps remain acute.

Housing: long-term migration was 28% higher in 2023 than 2019
⇒ over the years, migrants tend to stay longer

Key figures

(2024) Jobs held by migrant employees across economic sectors
⇒ non European immigration would seem to be more qualified than European immigration:
→ Administration and support services: 21% non EU; when 12% of EU
→ Manufacturing: 7% non EU; 11% EU

IMMIGRATION IN THE BRITISH ECONOMY

Paradox highlighted

Economic need

- Needs: medical professionals, nurses, care staff
- Migrants raise the productivity of companies
- Institute of Physics, the Royal Society, Cancer Research UK: immigration enables Britain's global competitiveness
- Foreigners fill the gaps
- More than 1/5 working-age Britons are not employed / don't seek work
- Contribution in 2022: £16.300 for the average migrant on a skilled worker visa
- £800 for the average Briton
- Zero net migration: 0.94% drop in GDP in 2025

Post-Covid & Boris Johnson

- ⇒ both have contributed to drastically reduce immigration
- Boris Johnson & Brexit:
 - shutdown of immigration
 - European arrivals have become immigration
 - Care and construction sectors crank up under B.J.'s premiership
 - Covid
 - Brexit & pandemic ⇒ economic recession
 - Rising of the question automation & remote working

Social & political obstacles

- Social obstacles
 - Prejudices: reactions to sudden change,
 - Question of unemployment.
 - Losses of societal-wide benefits: downward pressure on wages at the bottom of the income distribution (NHS pattern to delivery men)
- Political obstacles
 - British Labour untrusting on the topic of immigration
 - Plans to tighten access to work visas ⇒ care workers will no longer be eligible, duration of graduate visas reduced from 2 years to 18 months

Immigration in the British Economy :

1. Immigration Needs

- The UK economy needs foreign workers in sectors such as the medical field: “medical professionals, nurse and care staff” (Text 5, l. 7).
- Some sectors face strong labour shortages, particularly construction and medical care / 25% of jobs in health and care / 30% in hospitality / 33% in administration and support services are held by non-UK workers (graphs)
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- The « rich world » faces a lack of workers due to longer life expectancy and lower birth rates (Text 6, l. 1-3) : immigration helps fill these labour gaps.
- Automation is sometimes considered a potential solution to the labour gap, but it is very limited in social-care sectors (Text 5, l. 40-41).

2. Immigration Policies

- Boris Johnson (2019-2022) = expansion of humanitarian routes for people from Hong Kong and Ukraine (Text 6, l. 17-18).
- Despite economic needs, the Keir Starmer government (2024-) has reduced access to work visas: shorter duration, longer waiting times, higher salary thresholds (Text 5, l. 14). These measures reflect a more restrictive immigration policy, which further worsens labour shortages.

Ex : The hospitality sector shows a clear decline: 15% employment thresholds compared to 25% before COVID (Text 5, l. 34).

3. Economic and Political Debate

- cf. David Bull (chair of Reform UK) = immigration is the « lifeblood of the country » (Text 6, l. 24-25).
- However, opposition remains strong, even though immigration fills labour market holes and helps keep inflation low (Text 6, l. 52).
- Reasons for this opposition = hostility to ethnic diversity and fear of social change (Text 6, l. 57).
- This leads to a “doom loop”: tighter restrictions → more economic pressure → growing opposition → stronger political pressure (Text 6, l. 85).
- question of integration = not only work but social :
 - Bradford’s Pakistani community, where people often marry close cousins (Text 6, l. 162-163) = bad integration
 - areas with mainly solitary male immigrants that face social isolation (Text 5, l. 171)