

Is Britain the Promised Land?

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The Current State of Asylum in the UK



Britain is a country of inflows and outflows of population. These flows are known as migration. Evidence of migration in the UK can be shown by the racial diversity of British society. However, migration to the UK is restricted and those wishing to permanently remain here have to show evidence of political or social persecution in their country of origin. These people are known as 'asylum seekers'. However, migrants can also stay temporarily in the UK to work in industries where there is a labour shortage. The process by which migrants enter the country is known as immigration.

Britain for most of the past century has operated a strict and selective immigration policy. It was relaxed immediately after the Second World War as there was a labour shortage. This provided an opportunity for people to migrate to the UK from Britain's colonies, providing us with much of the ethnic and cultural diversity we experience today.

The numbers of refugees seeking sanctuary in Britain are currently at record levels. Government figures reveal that the number of migrants applying for asylum in the UK was well over 100,000 in 2002. This has prompted calls by politicians and the media to reduce the numbers of migrants who remain in Britain. It is claimed that many communities cannot cope with the numbers of needy people who arrive in their region.

But what proportion of the population of Great Britain is accounted for by international migration?

UK: population by ethnic group April 2001

	millions	%
White	54.2	92.1
Mixed	0.7	1.2
Asian or Asian British		
Indian	1.1	1.8
Pakistani	0.7	1.3
Bangladeshi	0.3	0.5
Other Asian	0.2	0.4
Black or Black British		
Black Caribbean	0.6	1.0
Black African	0.5	0.8

Black Other	0.1	0.2
Chinese	0.2	0.4
Other	0.2	0.4
<i>All ethnic groups</i>	4.6	7.9
All Population	58.8	100.0
<i>Source: Census, April 2001, ONS</i>		

Contrary to popular opinion, it is just **under 8%**.

However, many perceive asylum seekers to be a problem due to their distribution patterns once they have arrived in the UK. Migrants tend to move to areas in which there are already large numbers of settled migrants of their own nationality. This has tended to be in urban centre in southern Britain as this is close to where migrants usually enter the UK.

What are the factors causing the latest rise in migration to the UK?

The British Government attributes the rise to economic forces, which is occurring across all categories of migrants, from people entering with work permits to asylum seekers. According to the British Home Office, it reflects:

- the current strength of the UK labour market (compared to most other EU countries)
- economic globalisation
- increasing economic integration and labour mobility within the EU
- increased political instability around the world

The majority of refugees coming to the UK originate from these ten countries. What links them?

- Afghanistan
- Iraq
- Somalia
- Sri Lanka
- Turkey
- Iran
- Former Republic of Yugoslavia
- Pakistan
- China
- Zimbabwe

Geography in the News identifies three distinct categories of international migration and the UK:

1. Migration to work in the UK in order to fill job shortages in certain sectors (e.g. IT, education, health, and construction).

Work permits given in 2000	Number
ICT	13,200
Nurses	11,900
Engineers/technologists	6,600
Teaching professionals/researchers	4,400
Main sources	
USA	12,700
India	12,300
Philippines	6,800
<i>Source: Migration Research Unit, UCL</i>	

2. Migrants coming to the UK as refugees or to seek asylum

Asylum applications received	Number
1999	71,160
2000	80,315
2001	71,005
2002	85,865
Main Sources 2002	
Iraq	14,950
Afghanistan	7,695
Somalia	7,380
<i>Source: Home Office</i>	

3. Established migrants leaving the UK to return to their country of origin.

Many of the migrants who return to their country of origin are from the Caribbean. The majority of returnees in this case are pensioners. In 1991 the pensioner category accounted for 11% of the 267,000 Caribbean-born populations. Today it is estimated to account for up to 50%, suggesting that return migration has increased considerably over the decade. However, with over 50% of the Caribbean population born and currently living in Britain, the migrants' desire to remain in the UK with

their relatives is often stronger than the yearning for the alternative life they left behind in the Caribbean.

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