



BRIEFING

Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK

AUTHORS: Peter William Walsh
Nuni Jorgensen
PUBLISHED: 01/08/2025

COMPAS
Centre on Migration,
Policy & Society



www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

This briefing examines asylum, refugee resettlement, and bespoke humanitarian schemes in the UK.

Key Points

The number of asylum seekers in the UK reached the highest number on record in 2024 with claims from people from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Bangladesh making up one-third of the total.

The success rate of asylum applications at the initial decision stage rose sharply from 2018, peaking at a record 76% in 2022. It then declined significantly, falling to 47% by 2024.

Asylum refusals are often overturned on appeal. As a result, the share of asylum seekers recognised as refugees by the end of the asylum process is substantially higher than at the initial decision stage.

Between 2014 and 2023, the average waiting time for an initial asylum decision increased significantly, leading to a growing backlog of cases. Despite a decline in 2024, the backlog remained high by historical standards in early 2025.

The number of people receiving refugee family reunion rose sharply after efforts to clear the backlog in 2023 increased the number of refugees with newly granted legal status.

The financial cost of operating the UK’s asylum system rose to £5.4 billion in the financial year 2023/24, driven largely by increased reliance on hotel accommodation.

The value of asylum support payments fell 37% in real terms (that is, accounting for inflation) between 2000 and 2024, despite nominal increases.

People who come to the UK seeking asylum have lower qualifications, employment rates and salary levels than the UK born. While there is some evidence of improved employment outcomes for men over time, significant long-term disparities persist for women.

In 2024, the UK ranked fifth in the absolute number of asylum claims received when compared to EU+ countries. When adjusted for population size, it falls to 17th place.

Understanding the policy

Asylum

Asylum is the protection that is granted by a nation-state to a person who has fled their country to escape a serious threat to their life or liberty. People granted this protection, which arises out of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the “Refugee Convention”), are called refugees. The word refugee is also used more generally to refer to anyone who has fled their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster, even if they have not been granted protection under the Refugee Convention.

The Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”. An *asylum seeker* (or asylum claimant or asylum applicant) is a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee under the Refugee Convention, to which [over 140 nations](#) are signatories.

Asylum seekers are not obliged to make their asylum claim in the first safe country they arrive in after leaving their country of origin. However, governments are also not obliged to assess an asylum claim if another safe country is willing to do so instead (including a country the applicant passed through). Under an EU law known as the [Dublin III Regulation](#), asylum seekers could in theory be transferred to the first EU member state in which they arrived after leaving their origin country. After Brexit, the UK is no longer a part of the Dublin arrangements.

To claim asylum in the UK, a person must be in the UK. It is not possible to apply from outside the country, such as at a UK embassy abroad, and there is no asylum visa to enable people to travel to the UK legally to apply for asylum. This means that people who do not have visa-free travel typically arrive without permission or apply for asylum after arriving on (or overstaying) a visa designed for a different purpose, such as work or study.

Asylum claims have three possible outcomes. First, an applicant can be recognised by the Home Office as a refugee and granted asylum with five years’ permission to stay in the UK, after which they may apply for permanent residence (known as “indefinite leave to remain”), free of charge. Second, the applicant can be judged not to qualify for refugee status but granted permission to stay in the UK for humanitarian or other reasons. These statuses include humanitarian protection (HP); discretionary leave (DL); leave under family or private life rules (article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights [ECHR]); and unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) leave. Third, the asylum claim can be refused. If a claim is refused, the applicant can appeal against the initial Home Office decision.

All applications request protection for a ‘main applicant’, and some include requests for protection for the main applicant’s dependent family members as well, specifically: their spouse, civil partner, or unmarried partner; and any children under 18, but not dependent parents or other relatives. The dependants on an asylum application receive the same outcome as the main applicant ([Immigration Rules, Paragraph 349](#)).

Asylum seekers’ right to work and benefits

Asylum seekers are not generally permitted to work in the UK while their claim is being considered. If they are destitute, they can apply for free accommodation, as well as asylum support, which was set at £49.18 per person per week (around £7 per day), in 2025. Cash support is reduced (to £10 per person per week) if their accommodation provides meals.

The Home Office may grant an asylum applicant permission to work only if both (1) their asylum claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of the applicant, and (2) the job is on the Immigration Salary List (which includes social care and some skilled trades). The [Immigration Salary List](#) was originally designed to regulate work visas, not asylum, and the government’s May 2025 White Paper proposes abolishing it. The future of work rights thus remains unclear. Asylum seekers are permitted to study while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim.

Dispersal

Since 2000, the UK has operated a policy of dispersal across the UK of asylum applicants who require accommodation, to prevent the London and the South East being overburdened. Asylum applicants have no say in where they are sent to live while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. Instead, to determine where asylum seekers are accommodated, negotiations take place between local authorities, the Home Office, and third-party contractors who are responsible for securing private rental accommodation. While asylum accommodation policy has traditionally focused on placing asylum seekers in long-term private rental housing, since 2020 there has been a significant shift toward the use of hotels—a trend driven by a growing backlog of asylum applications and a shortage of long-term housing options. For more details see the Migration Observatory briefing on [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#).

Recent policy developments regarding asylum

The current and previous governments have both focused policy on deterring people from seeking asylum in the UK, particularly those arriving without permission.

The Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) 2022 aimed to do this by granting more restrictive temporary protection status to people arriving without authorisation and requiring all applicants to provide stronger evidence to support their asylum claims.

In April 2022 the government announced that it would send asylum seekers who entered the UK irregularly to Rwanda, which it considered a “safe third country”. However, due to legal challenges the rule was never implemented. See our commentary on the [Rwanda’s policy financial implications](#) and our [Q&A on the Rwanda policy](#).

The Illegal Migration Act 2023 aimed to introduce further restrictions. The legislation would have prevented most asylum claims from people who entered the country without permission to be processed. However, following the government changes in 2024, its key provisions were never implemented. For further information, see our commentary [UK policies to deter people from claiming asylum](#).

In January 2025, the Labour government introduced the Border Security, Asylum, and Immigration Bill to Parliament. The bill proposed a full repeal of the Safety of Rwanda Act 2024 and included provisions for increased penalties for smuggling offences, as well as additional measures related to border enforcement.

Refugee resettlement

Refugee resettlement is separate from the asylum process. In the asylum process, people must apply for asylum whilst in the UK. By contrast, it is not possible to apply for refugee resettlement. Instead, refugees are selected by the United Nations for resettlement, and transferred to the UK with the agreement of the Home Office, where they receive refugee status on arrival. The three main schemes are the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship Scheme and Mandate Scheme. The key distinction between these schemes is how accommodation and integration support are provided. In the UKRS, local authorities lead in providing integration support to resettled refugees upon arrival. In the Mandate Scheme, selected refugees must have family members settled in the UK who are responsible for supporting and accommodating them. In the Community Sponsorship Scheme, community sponsors are responsible for refugees’ integration and accommodation.

Bespoke humanitarian routes

In addition to asylum and refugee resettlement, since 2021 the UK has launched a series of bespoke humanitarian routes for people of specific nationalities. Each of these routes has different eligibility criteria and grants people different rights and pathways to permanent settlement.

The Hong Kong British National (Overseas) or BN(O) visa was introduced in January 2021 following the Chinese government’s imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong and is directed at British National Overseas citizens and their dependents from Hong Kong. For more detail see [Q&A: The new Hong Kong British National \(Overseas\) visa](#).

The Afghan Relocations and Resettlement Schemes (ARAP and ACRS) were launched in April 2021 following the withdrawal from Afghanistan of British and US armed forces and the rise of the Taliban. They were directed at people who worked as staff for the UK in Afghanistan, those who fled to the UK under the evacuation in summer 2021, and other people who are considered to be at risk in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries. The schemes were [closed in July 2025](#). For more detail on the schemes see [Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the UK](#).

The Ukraine Schemes were introduced in March 2022, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The schemes have changed over time, but currently allow Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to come to the UK if they have a named sponsor. For more detail on the Ukraine schemes, see [Ukrainian Migration to the UK](#).

Refugee Family Reunion

Until its suspension in September 2025, the UK’s refugee family reunion policy allowed people with recognised refugee status or humanitarian protection to sponsor close relatives to join them

The route admitted spouses or partners and dependent children under 18 who were not living an independent life (i.e., who did not have a partner and children of their own). Extended relatives could apply only in exceptional circumstances.

Unlike other family migration routes, refugee sponsors did not need to meet income or housing requirements, and applicants were not required to show English proficiency. The main requirement was proof of the family relationship. The relationship had to predate displacement: families formed in transit or after arrival in the UK were not eligible. Children born in the UK to asylum seekers are treated as dependants under their parents’ asylum claim. Children born in the UK to parents who already hold recognised protection status are [registered as refugees](#) and do not go through a family reunion application.

In September 2025, the government temporarily suspended the family reunion route, [announcing](#) that a stricter system would be introduced in spring 2026. In the meantime, refugees must apply under the standard family migration rules for British citizens and settled residents, which require sponsors to earn at least £29,000 per year, and applicants to have a basic level of English (A1).

Understanding the evidence

In this briefing, references to the EU or EU+ exclude the UK, but include Switzerland and the three additional EEA countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.

Data on the number of asylum applicants and grants of asylum-related leave come from administrative databases of the Home Office. In this briefing, where we refer to asylum seekers or asylum applicants (i.e., the number of people who claim asylum), we include both main applicants and dependants. ‘Asylum applications’ refers to main applicants only. When this briefing discusses “grants”, it is typically with respect to grants of “asylum-related protection”, which comprises grants of asylum (refugee status) as well as any other grant of permission to stay, such as humanitarian protection or discretionary leave.

To calculate the success rate of asylum claims at initial decision, this briefing looks at decisions made in a given year, regardless of when the application was lodged. However, some refusals are successfully appealed. Therefore, to examine the overall success rate of asylum claims, this briefing analyses Home Office data on the ‘final outcomes’ of applications. These data provide the outcomes of a ‘cohort’ of applications (i.e., all those submitted in the same year), taking into account the results of appeals to the First-tier Tribunal. In recognising that initial refusals can be overturned on appeal, these data provide a better indication of success rates than data on initial decisions. These estimates of asylum claim success rates exclude withdrawn applications and those that are still pending, because these applications have not received a decision.

This briefing uses data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on the main reason foreign-born UK residents came to the country to analyse the qualification levels and employment outcomes of refugees and asylum seekers. Only one ‘main’ reason for migration is recorded, though in practice people may have more than one reason for moving. The data reflect self-reported reasons and will not necessarily match people’s legal immigration status.

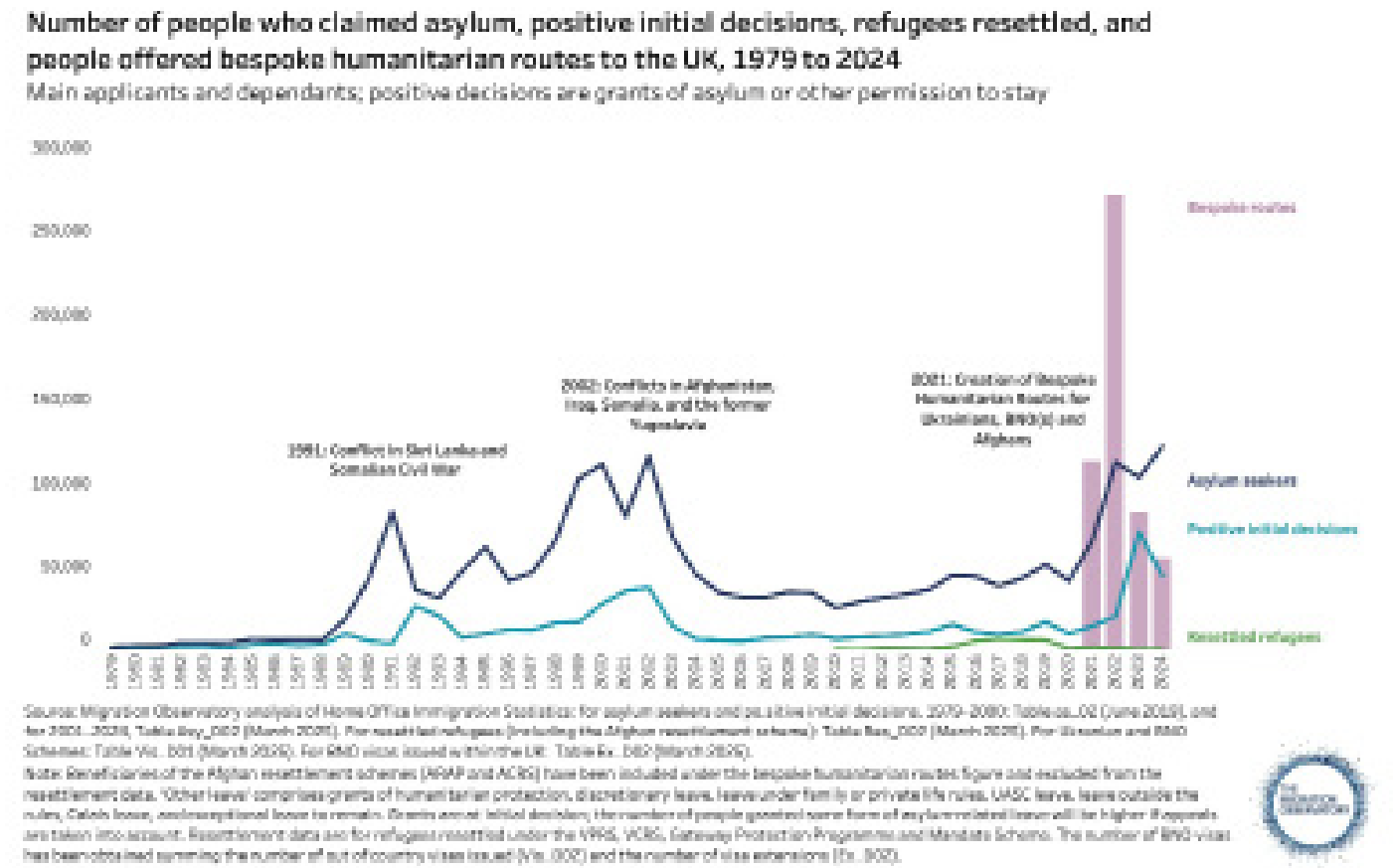
The LFS tends to underrepresent recently arrived migrants and excludes people living in group accommodation, such as asylum seekers in hotels. As a result, we do not provide estimates of the total number or share of the migrant population who arrived for asylum-related reasons, as these figures are likely to have become more unreliable following recent increases in asylum arrivals.

The number of asylum claims hit a record high in 2024

In 2024, around 108,000 people claimed asylum in the UK, the highest since records began in 1979. This surpassed the previous record of around 103,000 people in 2002, driven by wars in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Figure 1).

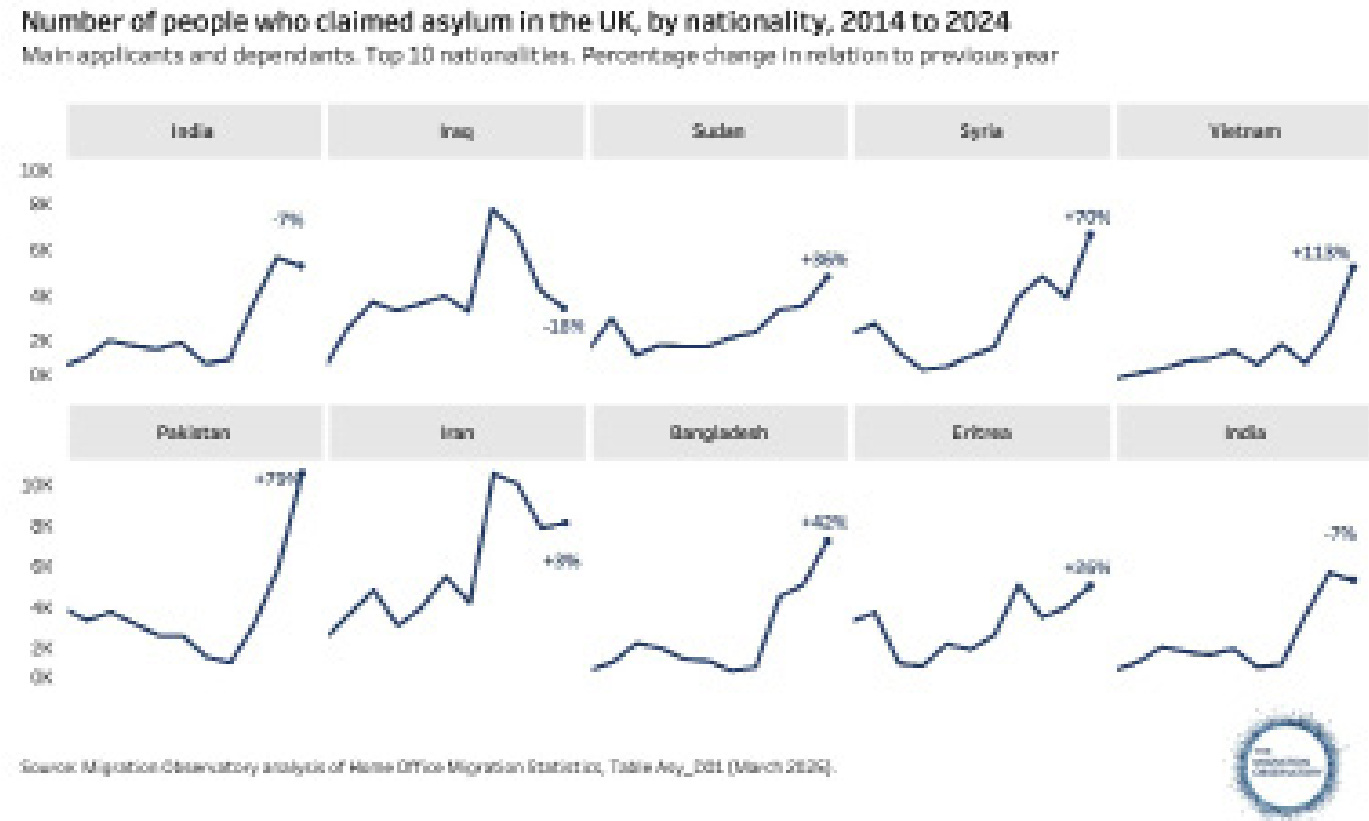
Changes over time in the number of people claiming asylum in the UK are driven in a large part by geopolitical events, since asylum seekers come mainly from countries with political and military conflicts. For example, the spike in people who came to the UK to seek asylum from 1998 to 2002 were mainly nationals of Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia, which were then sites of war (Figure 1).

Figure 1



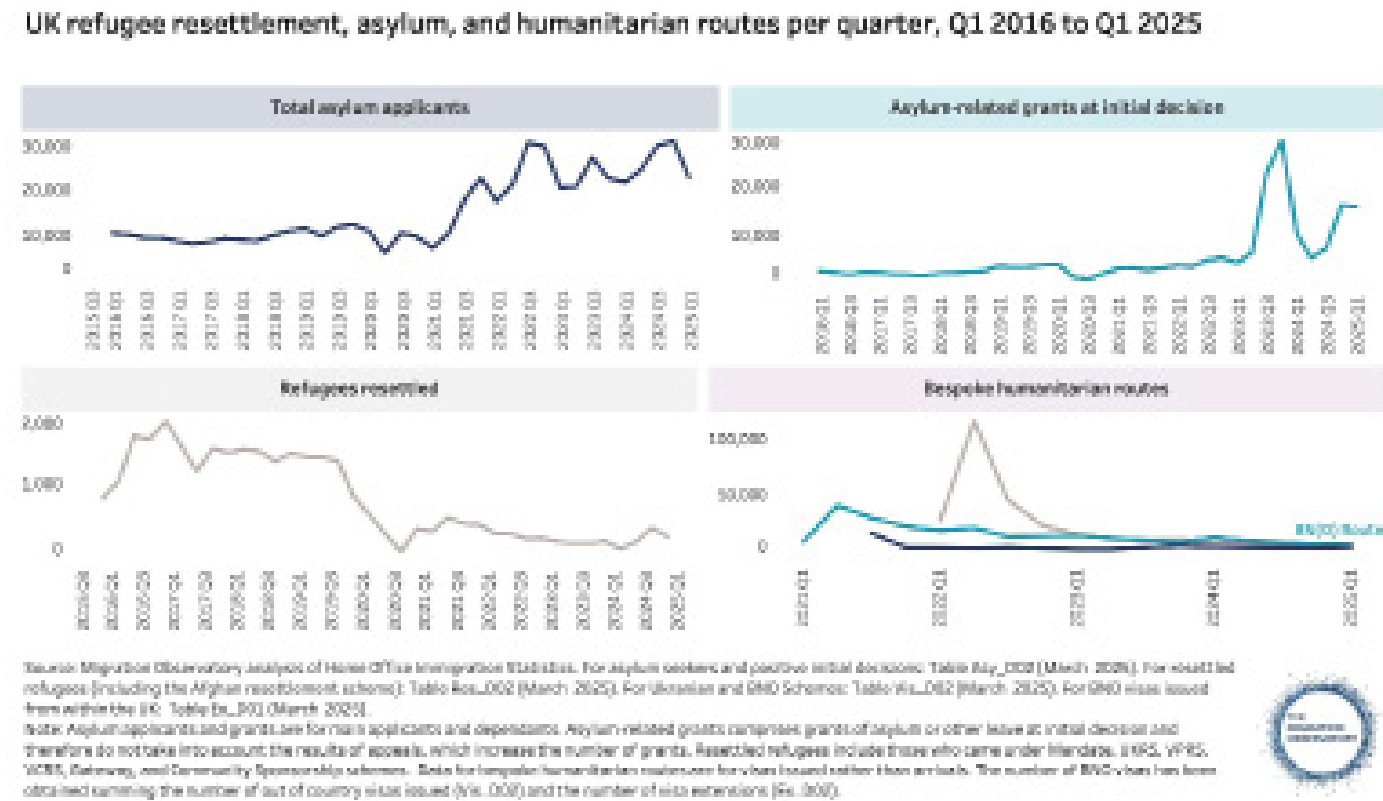
In 2024, five nationalities drove most of the increase in people seeking asylum in the UK: Bangladeshis (+42% on 2023), Pakistanis (+79%), Syrians (+70%), Sudanese (+36%), and Vietnamese (+113%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2



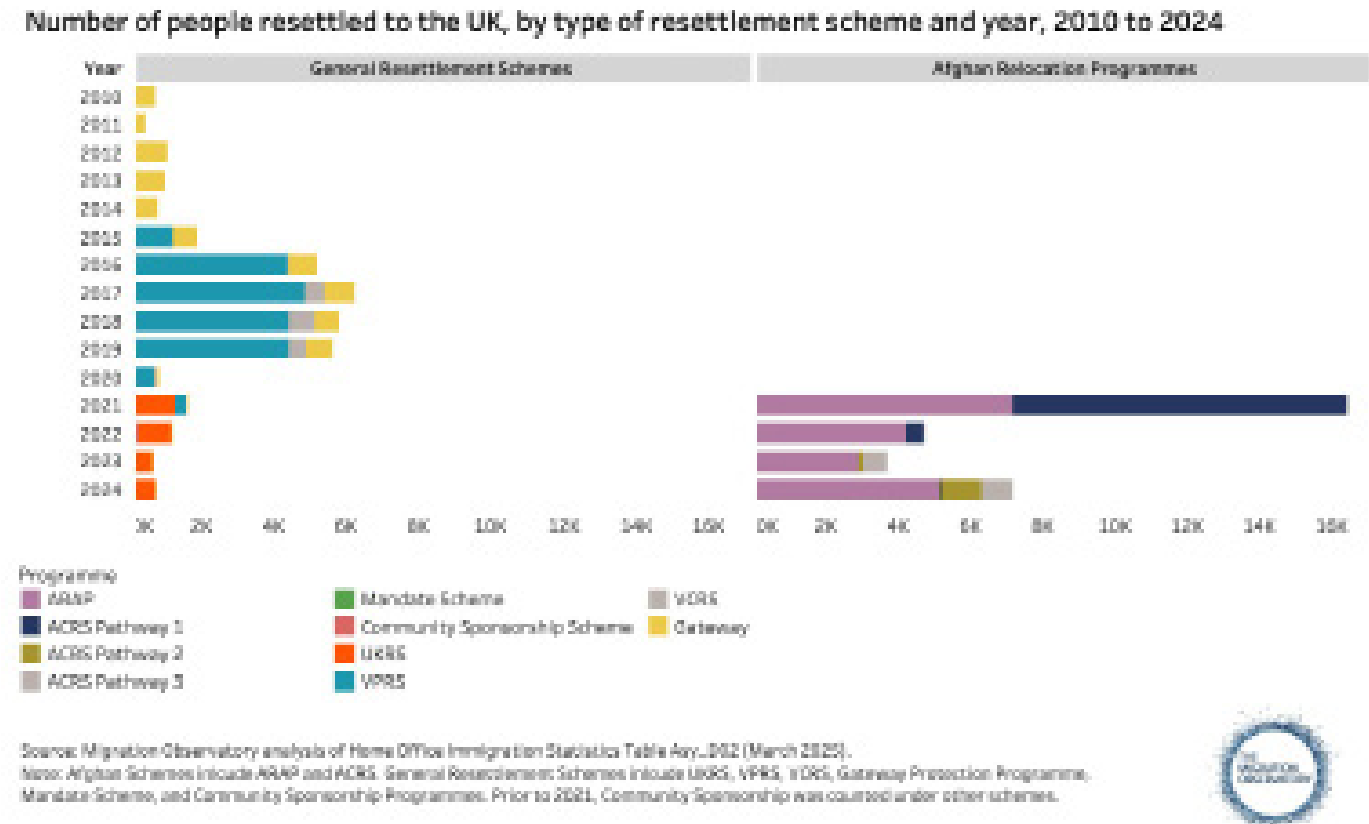
In 2021 and 2022, the UK introduced a series of bespoke humanitarian schemes targeted at specific nationalities: Ukrainians, Afghans and BN(O)s from Hong Kong (see the 'Understanding the Policy' section). In 2022, the number of beneficiaries of the schemes far surpassed the number of resettled refugees and people granted asylum in any year since 1979. Although visa issuances under these programmes declined significantly in 2023, they still remained substantial. In 2024, 55,500 people were granted humanitarian visas—52% of which were BN(O) visas—compared to 40,300 people who were either granted asylum or who came under the UK's general resettlement schemes for all nationalities (Figures 3 and 4). In 2025, the government announced the closure of the Afghan programmes (see the Understanding the Policy section).

Figure 3



Between 2015 and 2024, the UK resettled around 33,000 refugees through non-Afghan schemes—16 times fewer than those granted asylum-related permission. While resettlement peaked during the Syrian crisis, numbers dropped sharply during the pandemic, with only limited arrivals under current programmes since 2021 (Figure 4).

Figure 4



In 2024, Sudanese asylum seekers had the highest initial grant rate among the top nationalities (99%) while Indian nationals had the lowest (2%)

Table 1 shows the ten most common countries of nationality of people (main applicants and dependants) who applied for asylum in the UK in 2023.

The share of applications that ultimately result in a grant of asylum or other permission to stay varies significantly by nationality. For example, looking at applications received across the three-year period 2021 to 2023, the share of Syrian and Eritrean nationals who had received a grant of asylum or other permission by September 2023 was 98% (after appeal), while for Indian nationals, it was 6% (Table 1). In 2024, Sudanese asylum seekers had the highest initial grant rate among the top nationalities, with 99% of applications approved at the first decision stage. In contrast, applicants from India had the lowest initial grant rate, at just 2%.

It is important to note that the difference between the initial decision grant rate in 2024 and the overall grant rates for the 2021–2023 period reflects both the impact of appeals and shifts in grant rates over time. As shown in Figure 6, most nationalities experienced a decline in grant rates from 2022.

Table 1

Nationality of people seeking asylum in the UK: the top 10 most common in 2024

Country	Asylum seekers in 2024	% of people seeking asylum in 2024	Initial decision grant rate in 2024	% of 2015-23 applicants ultimately granted asylum or other leave	Asylum applications, 2009-2024
Pakistan	10,542	10%	51%	57%	
Afghanistan	8,568	8%	59%	96%	
Iran	8,089	7%	67%	87%	
India	5,312	5%	2%	6%	
Bangladesh	7,226	7%	16%	26%	
Iraq	3,469	3%	35%	47%	
Eritrea	5,063	5%	87%	99%	
Syria	6,688	6%	90%	99%	
Sudan	4,833	4%	95%	99%	
Vietnam	5,259	5%	24%	87%	

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Any.D61 (March 2025); Table Any.D62 (March 2025); and Table Any.D64 (March 2025).
Note: 'Asylum seekers' comprises main applicants and dependents. 'Share ultimately granted asylum or other leave' is the share of applications (main applicants) received in 2015 to 2023 inclusive that had resulted in a grant of asylum or other leave as of December 2024, taking into account appeals to the First-tier Tribunal but not higher courts, and excluding applications that were withdrawn or pending.

The success rate of asylum applications at initial decision increased sharply from 2018 to 2022 before falling in 2023 and 2024

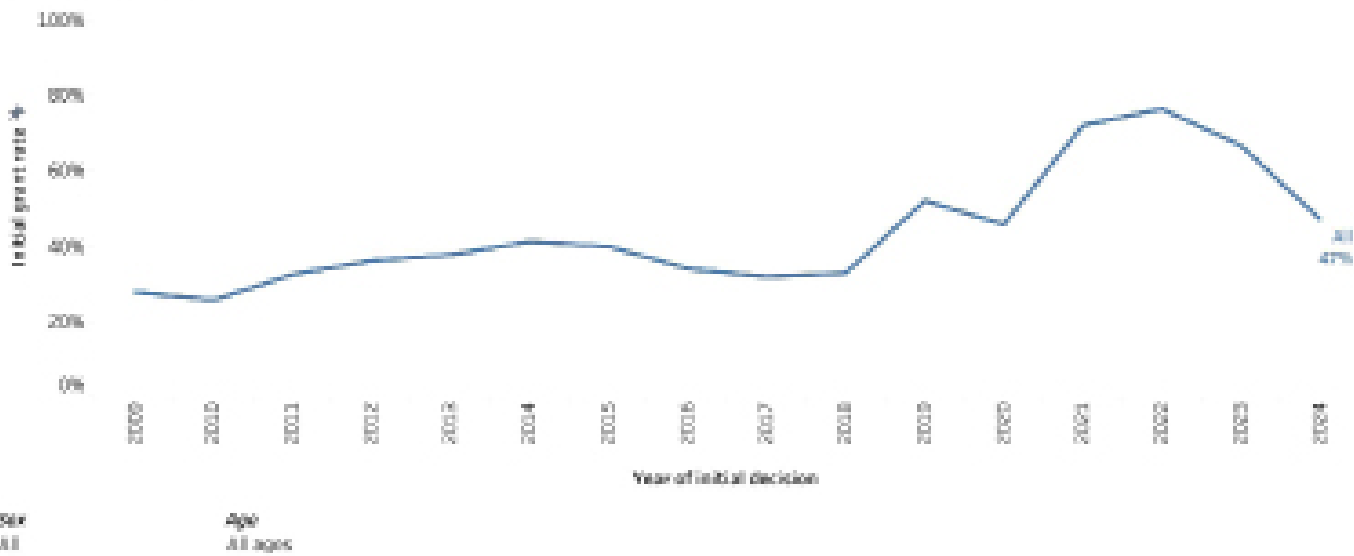
In 2022, the share of asylum applications from main applicants receiving a grant at initial decision rose to a record high of 76%, which was much higher than in previous years. In 2018, the initial decision grant rate had been only 33% (Figure 5). Many factors could have driven the change. While there has been an increase in nationalities whose asylum application success rate is higher than the average, such as Iranians, Syrians and Eritreans (Table 1), this is not the only explanation. From 2018 to 2022, the grant rate increased even for people of the same nationality, in many cases.

However, in 2023, the percentage of successful applications at the initial decision stage dropped to 67%, declining further to 47% in 2024 (Figure 5).

Data from 2024 show that asylum success rates at initial decision were similar among men and women in all age groups except the over-70s (Figure 5). For example, 46% of men aged 18-29 were granted asylum or another legal status, compared to 52% of women aged 18-29.

Figure 5

Share of asylum seekers receiving a grant of asylum-related permission to stay at initial decision, per year, by age and sex, 2009 to 2024
Main applicants only



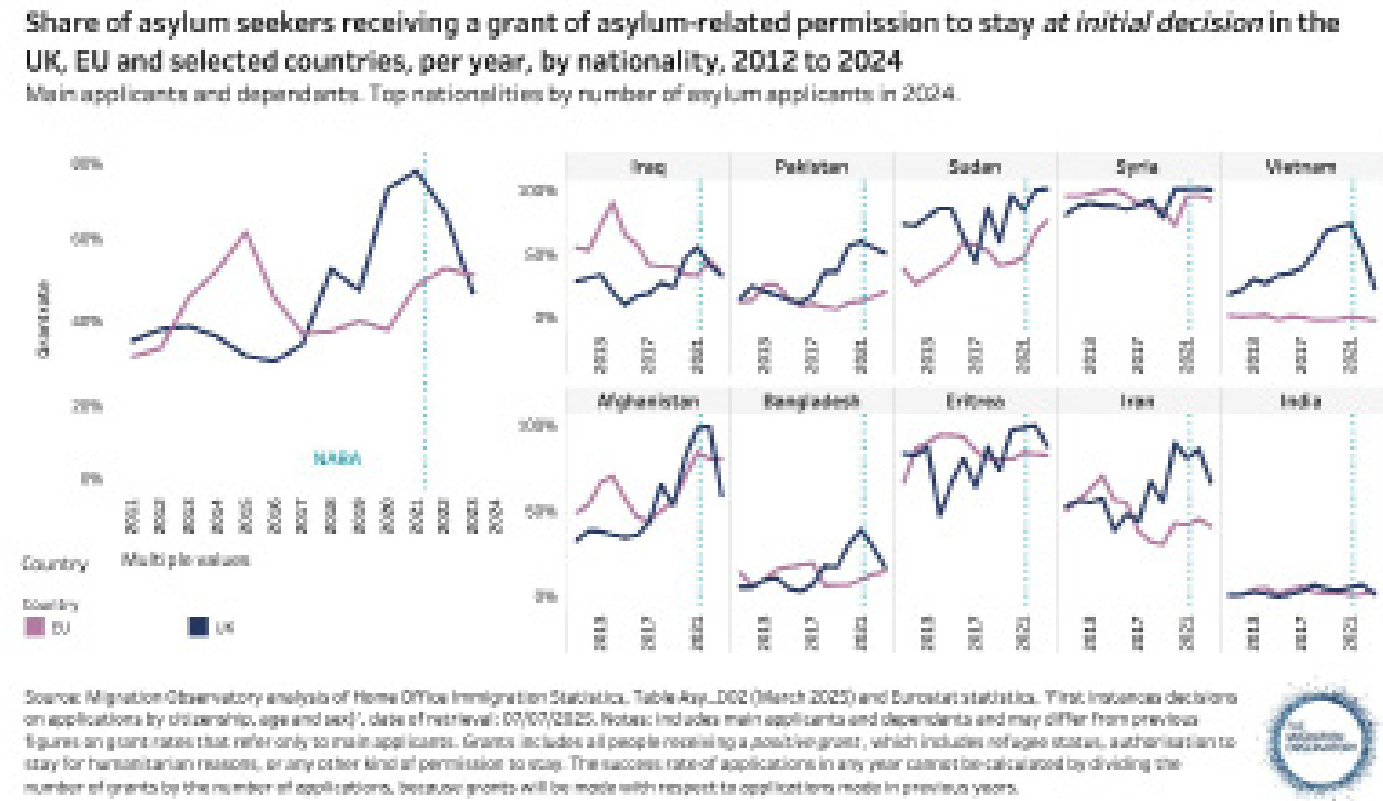
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Any.D62 (March 2025).
Notes: 'All ages' includes a small number of people of 'Unknown' age, and the sex category 'All' includes people of 'Unknown sex'.

The decline in overall success rates may be linked to [policy changes](#) introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) in 2022, which raised the standard of proof required for asylum (see 'Understanding the Policy' above). Among the top 10 nationalities of asylum seekers in 2024, all experienced rising grant rates between 2018 and 2022, followed by a decline in 2023 or 2024—except for Sudanese and Syrian nationals (Figure 6).

Since 2018, the UK has had higher grant rates than the EU for most of the top nationalities seeking protection in the UK. As grant rates have fallen in the UK, the gap between UK and EU outcomes has narrowed—although it remained substantially higher for Iranian, Pakistani, Sudanese, and Vietnamese nationals (Figure 6). The exception are Afghan asylum seekers, who had much lower grant rates in the UK (59%) compared to the EU (81%) in 2024.

Overall, the UK's total grant rate in 2024 (47%) was slightly below the EU average (51%). The total grant rate figure is shaped by the composition of asylum flows—particularly the extent to which people from higher-grant-rate nationalities are more likely to apply in the UK or the EU.

Figure 6



Appeals raise the asylum grant rate, from 62% at initial decision in recent years (2019 to 2022) to 70% post-appeal

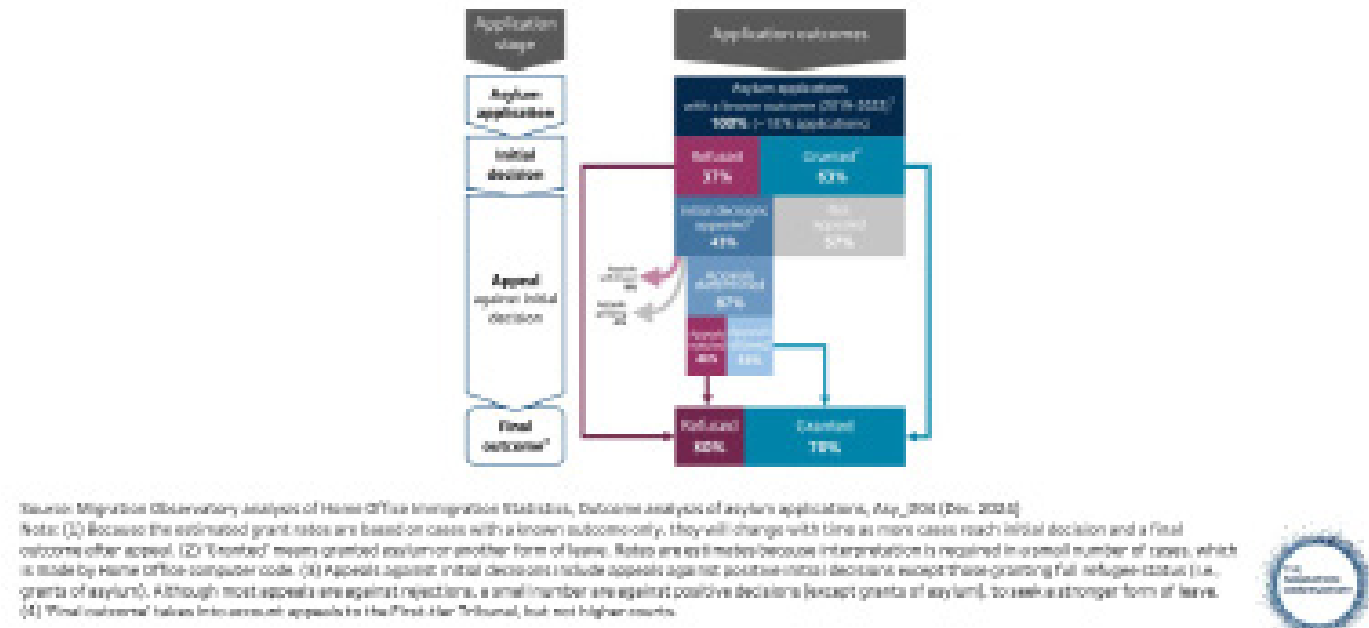
All initial decisions by the Home Office on asylum claims can be appealed against, which ultimately increases the share of successful claims. Of all applications (main applicants) received in the three-year period from 2019 to 2022 with a known outcome as of June 2024 (this excludes withdrawn and pending applications), 63% resulted in a grant of asylum or other permission to stay at initial decision.

Over this period, 43% of initial decisions were appealed. Most appeals are against refusals, but some appeals are against positive decisions to seek a [stronger form](#) of permission to stay, such as refugee status rather than humanitarian protection. Of these appeals with a known outcome (excluding pending and withdrawn appeals), 42% were successful. This increased the grant rate from 62% at initial Home Office decision to 70% after appeal to the First-tier tribunal (Figure 8).

Figure 7

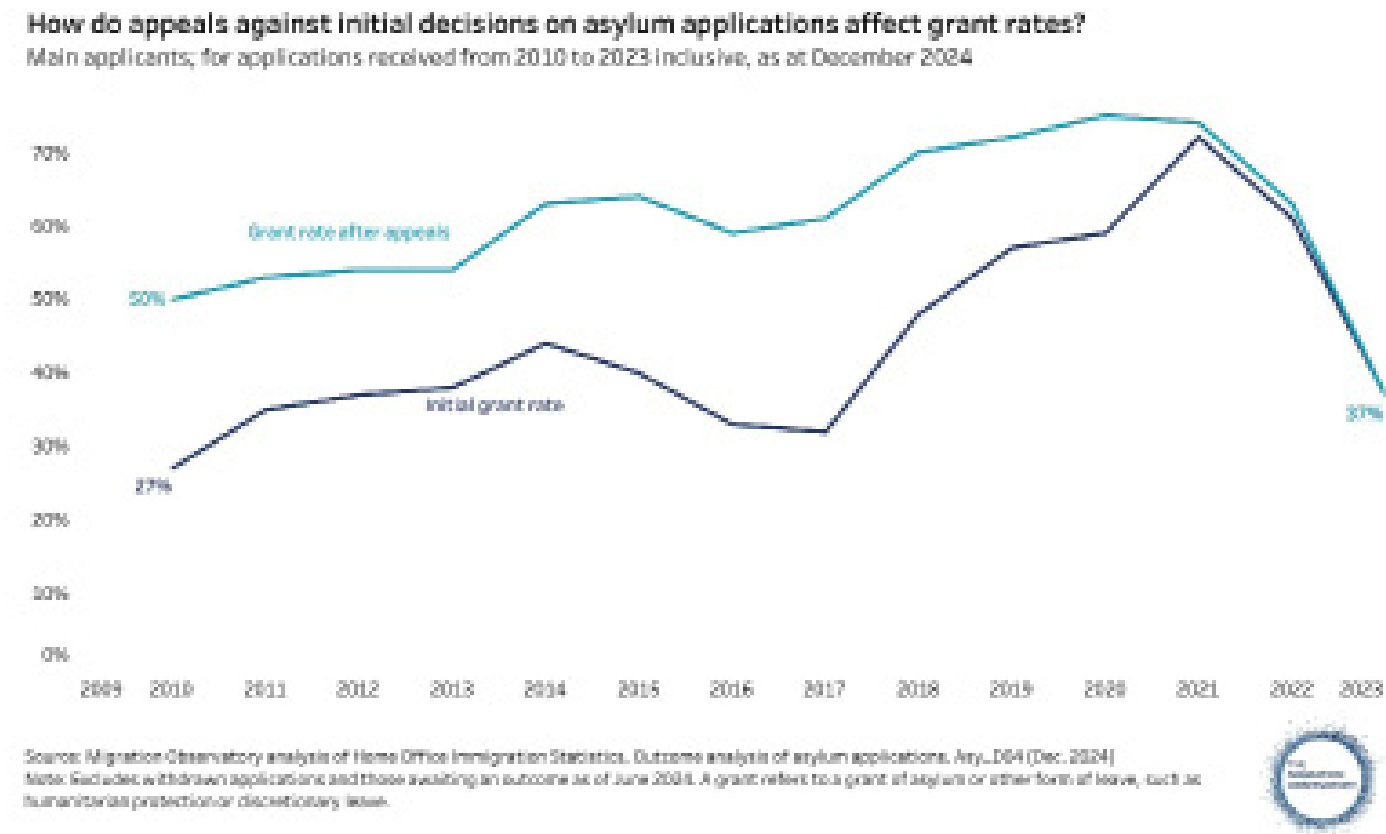
What share of asylum applications are ultimately successful?

Main applicants, excluding dependants; for applications submitted in 2019 to 2022 inclusive with a known outcome as at June 2024, excluding withdrawn applications



For applications received between 2010 to 2022 with known outcomes as of June 2024, successful appeals increased success rates by between 2 and 23 percentage points each year (Figure 9). Since 2019, the gap between initial grant rates and grant rates after appeal has significantly narrowed. Part of this is because initial grant rates were already high so there were fewer appeals being submitted. Another reason is that in 2021 and 2022, more appeals were withdrawn (14% in 2021, compared to 5% in 2010).

Figure 8

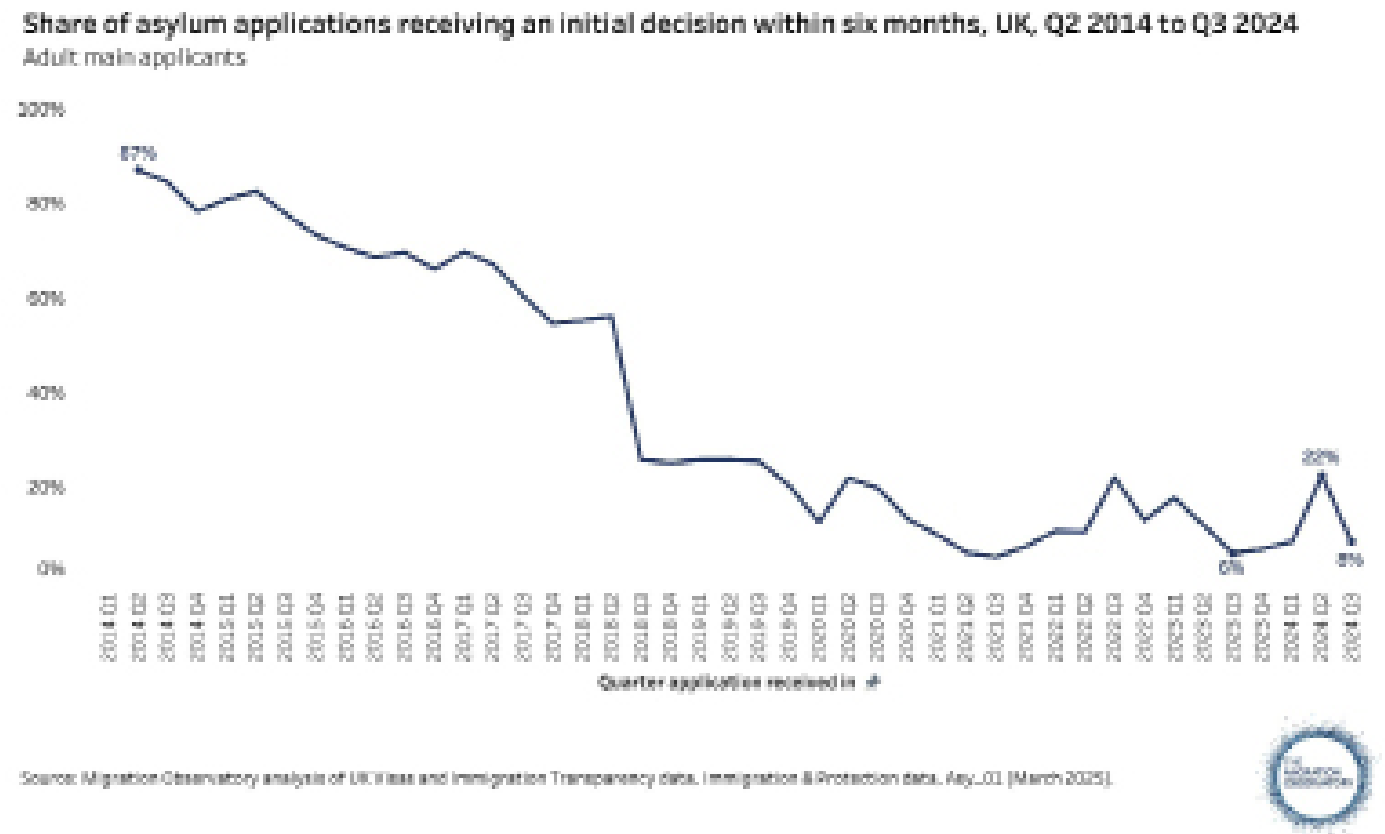


The share of asylum applications decided within six months dropped from 87% in Q2 2014 to 8% in Q3 2024

The time for asylum seekers to receive an initial decision has lengthened significantly in recent years. In Q2 2014, 87% of applications were decided within six months, dropping to just 8% by Q3 2024 (Figure 9).

There was a modest improvement in Q2 2024, with 22% of applications submitted in Q2 2024 being processed within six months (Figure 9). The subsequent decline in Q3 2024 can be explained by fewer decisions made during the year and to a rise in the number of asylum applications. The government [attributed](#) the smaller number of decisions to a provision in the Illegal Migration Act that prevented people who arrived in the UK without authorisation on or after 7 March 2023 from being granted protection (see ‘Understanding the Policy’ section and our briefing [The UK’s asylum backlog](#)). Data for the period since decision-making resumed are not yet available.

Figure 9

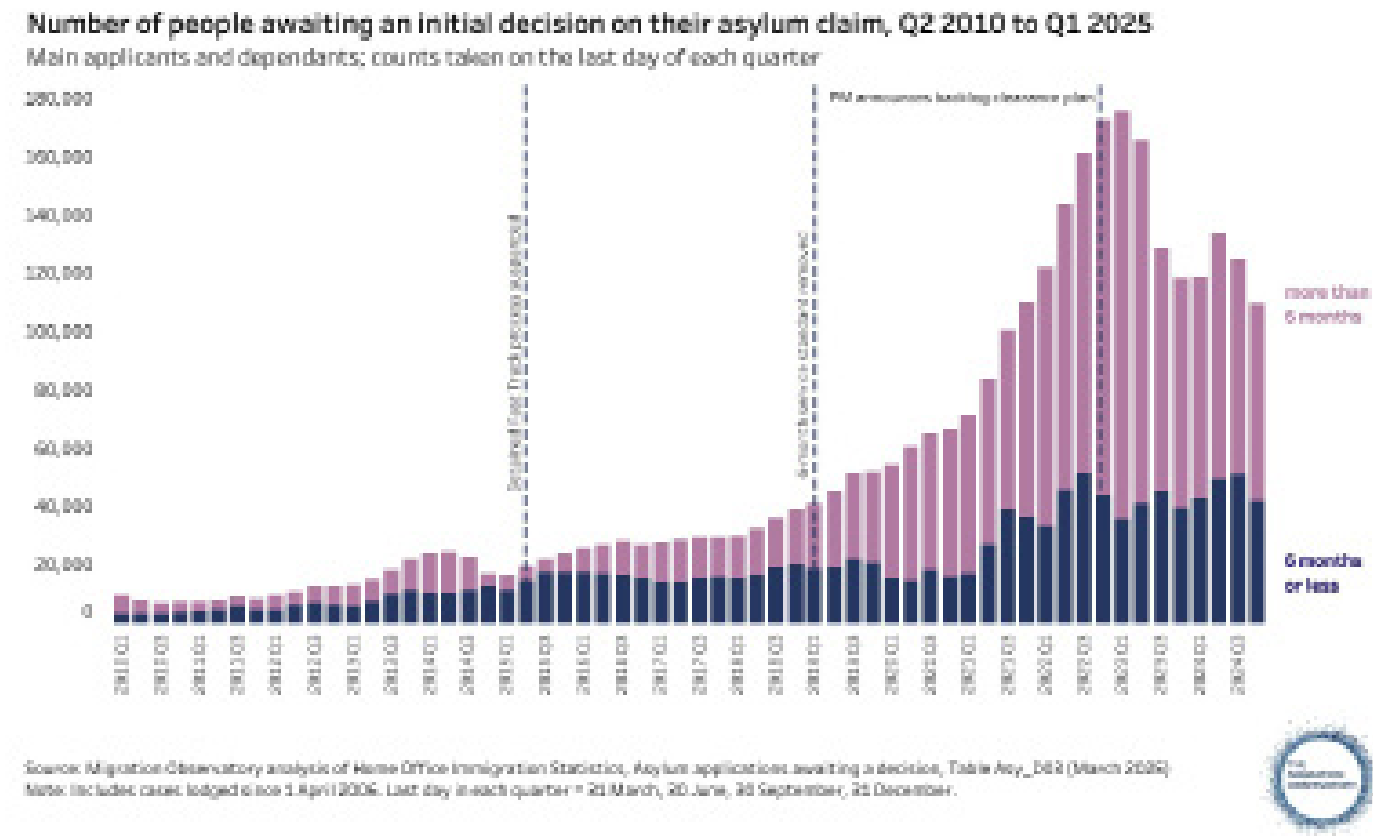


The asylum backlog peaked in 2023 but remained high by historical standards in early 2025

The asylum backlog has increased substantially in recent years, due to an increase in applications, and applications taking longer to process. On 30 June 2023, around 175,500 people were awaiting an *initial decision* on their asylum claim (including main applicants and dependants) – a more than eighteen-fold increase on the number awaiting an initial decision on 30 June 2010 (Figure 10). Of the 175,500 on people awaiting an initial decision from the Home Office on June 2023, 80% had been waiting for more than six months.

Recent data show a change in this trend. As of 31 December 2023, the number of people awaiting an asylum decision had fallen by 22% compared to 30 September 2023. After some stagnation in 2024, the decline resumed slightly in 2025, with 109,500 people awaiting a decision as of 31 March—down from 124,000 at the end of December 2024. This reduction follows Home Office efforts to clear the legacy backlog (see our briefing [The UK’s asylum backlog](#)).

Figure 10

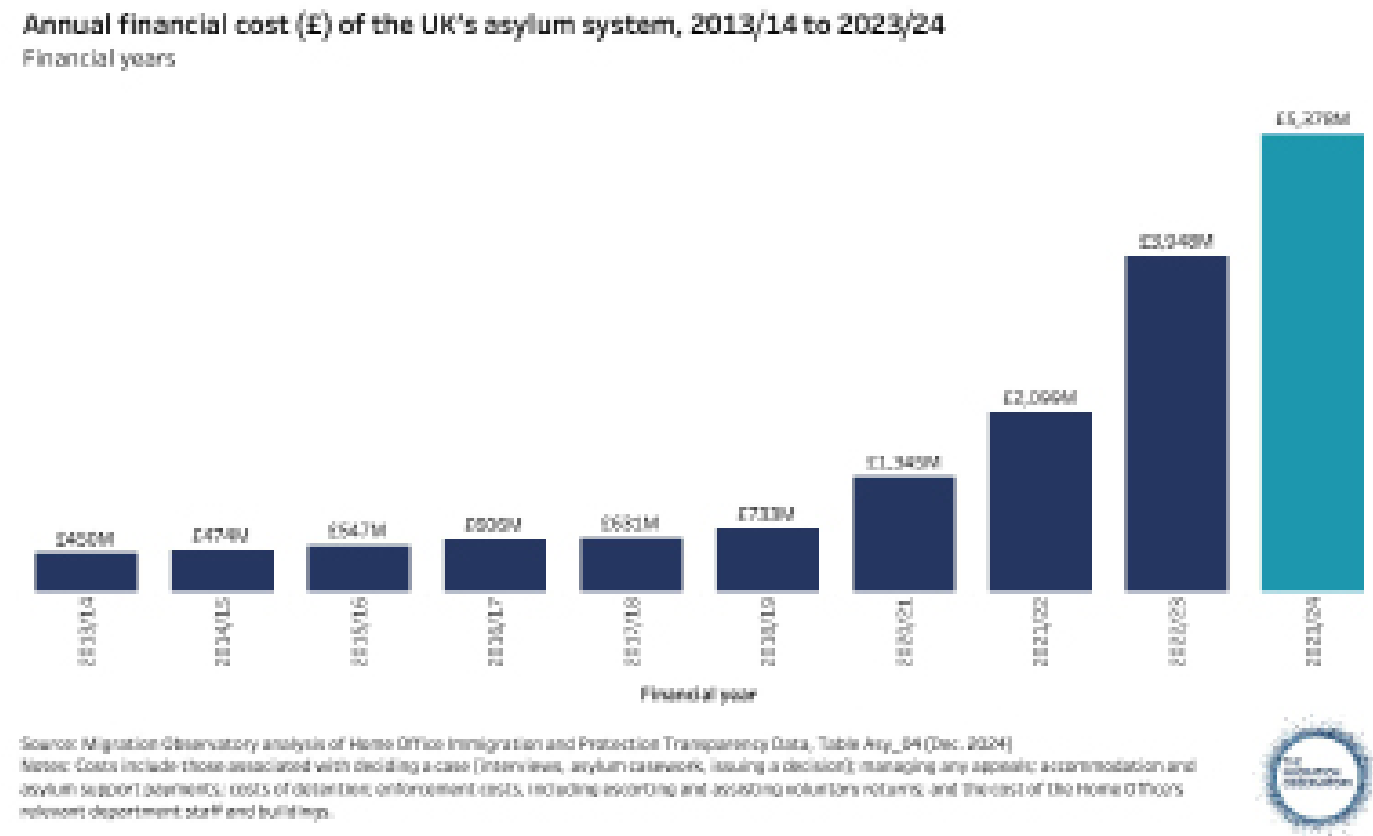


Research shows that longer asylum waiting times have negative impacts on [long-term employment](#) outcomes for asylum seekers, and that being unable to work while waiting for a decision is also likely to hinder [long-term integration](#). It also comes with a considerable financial cost, because people in the asylum backlog usually live in government-funded accommodation.

The financial cost of operating the UK’s asylum system reached around £5.4 billion in the financial year 2023/24

The financial cost of the UK’s asylum system increased ten-fold from £538 million in the financial year 2011/12 to £5.38 billion million ten years later in 2023/24 (Figure 11). A significant driver of this rise is the growing reliance on hotels to accommodate asylum seekers (see our briefing on [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#)).

Figure 11



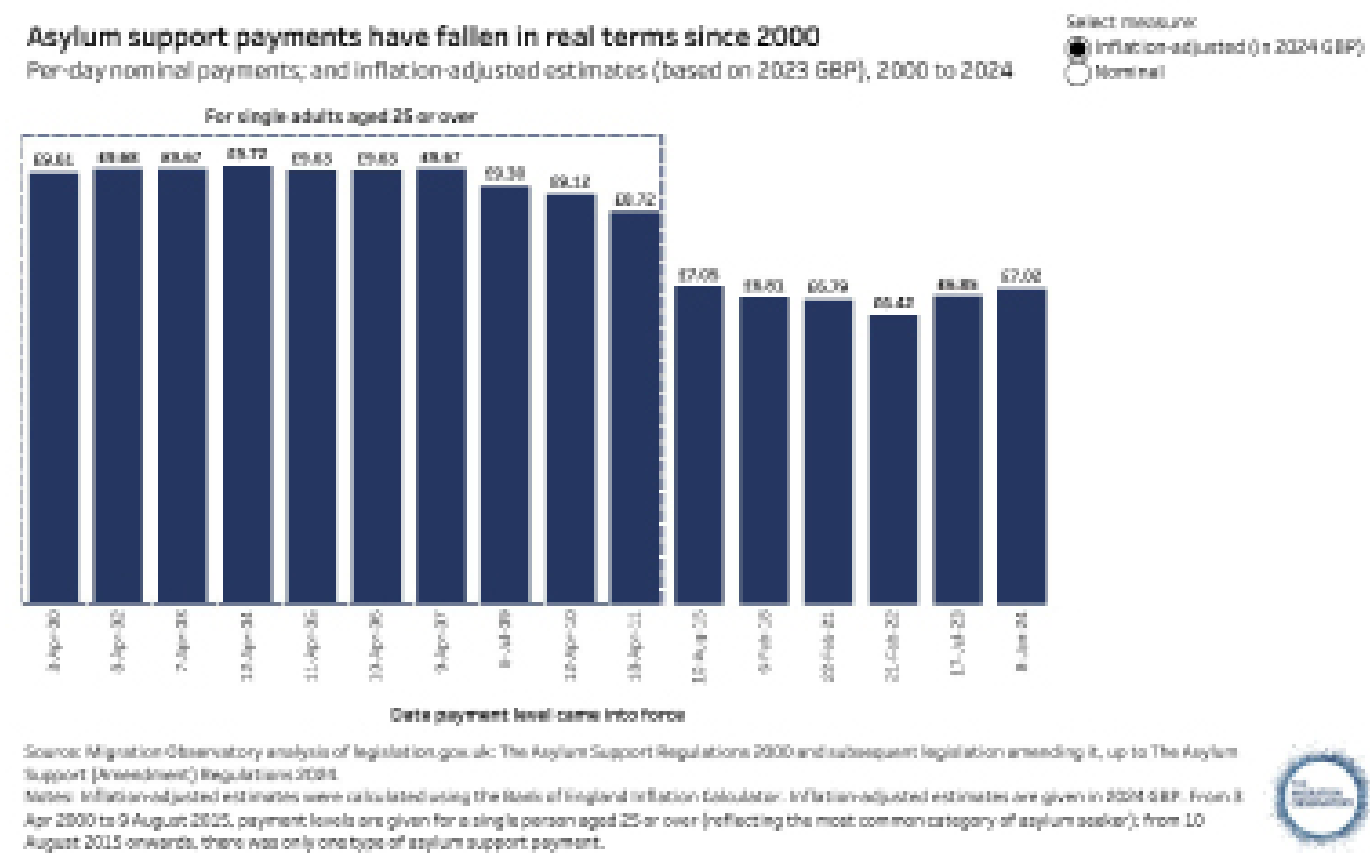
Despite nominal increases, in real terms asylum support payments in 2024 were 37% lower than in 2000

Under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, destitute asylum seekers are entitled to free accommodation and a weekly cash allowance to cover their essential living needs (if not in full-board accommodation). The Home Office regularly reviews the level of the weekly cash allowance and has changed it 14 times since 2000 (Figure 12: Nominal payment).

When introduced in 2000, asylum seekers were entitled to one of a variety of different payments, depending on their age and whether they were a lone parent or part of a couple. In 2015, the government replaced these different payments by a single payment level for all destitute asylum seekers.

The value of support payments has fallen with inflation since the single asylum support payment was introduced in 2015 (Figure 12: Inflation-adjusted). In real terms, the payment level in 2024 of £7.02 per day was 37% lower than in 2000. The daily rate paid to a single adult in 2000, £5.22, bought goods and services that would today cost £9.61.

Figure 12

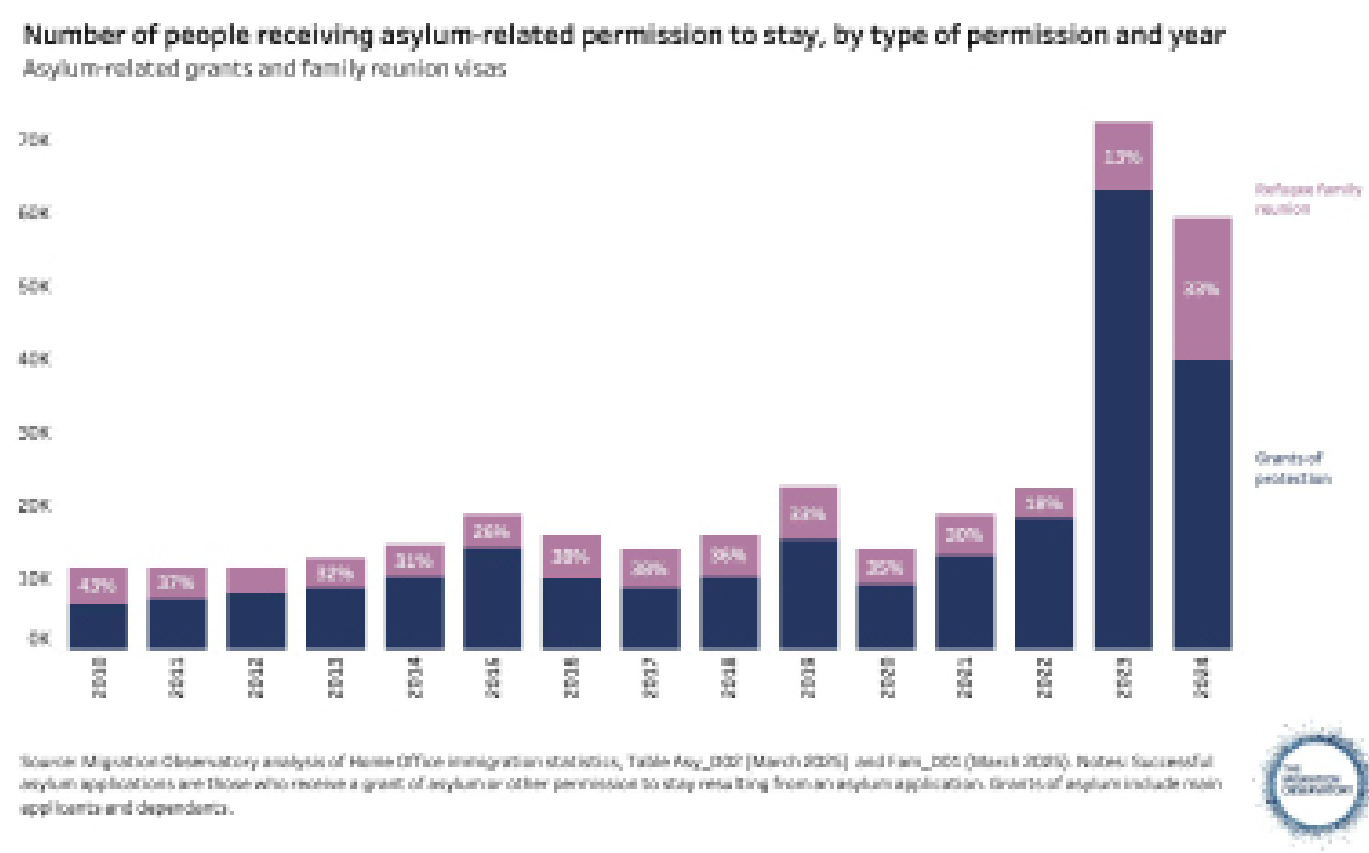


The number of people receiving refugee family reunion visas rose sharply after efforts to clear the backlog in 2023 led to an increase in refugees with newly granted legal status

Once someone is granted asylum in the UK, their close family members can apply to join them in the UK through the refugee family reunion route (see ‘Understanding the Policy’, above). From 2010 to 2020, the number of people granted asylum-related permission to stay (including grants, and family reunion visa holders) remained relatively stable, ranging between 10,000 and 20,000 annually. Refugee family reunion consistently accounted for 30% to 40% of the total (Figure 13).

In 2023, asylum-related grants increased to 63,000—a 250% rise compared to the previous year (Figure 13). This was mostly driven by an increase in asylum applications but partly by a rise in family reunion grants. In 2024, family reunion grants rose further, with 19,700 people issued with family reunion visas (Figure 13). This was likely a knock-on effect of the increase in in-country asylum grants in the previous year, as there is often a delay between an asylum applicant being granted protection and being joined by their families under the refugee family reunion route. In-country asylum grants remained high in 2024.

Figure 13



Not all refugees are eligible to bring their families to the UK. For example, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) cannot apply for family reunion (see the ‘Understanding the Policy’ above). Between 2006 and 2024, an average of 3,000 unaccompanied children sought protection in the UK each year (Home Office Immigration Statistics, December 2024).

Family reunion increases the share of female refugees in the UK

Most asylum seekers are men (76% of adult applicants from 2014 to 2024). Young male refugees who receive asylum often go on to be joined by their female partners through refugee family reunion. From 2014 to 2024, 82% of adults receiving refugee family reunion visas were women. As a result, after accounting for family reunion, the gender balance of those granted protection becomes more even over time. Taken together, women made up 35% of adults granted asylum-related status or refugee family reunion between 2014 and 2024 (Table 2), while men made up 65%. Note that these figures exclude asylum applicants who are initially refused but are successful on appeal, as the immigration statistics do not include a gender breakdown for this group.

Table 2

Adult asylum grants, resettlement and refugee family reunion by sex, 2014-2024, annual average

	Men	Women	% Men
Successful asylum applicants (initial decision only)	10,502	3,227	76%
Refugee family reunion visas granted	580	2,636	18%
Successful asylum applicants (initial decision) + refugee family reunion	10,682	5,864	65%
Resettled refugees	668	756	47%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office immigration statistics, Table Aq_002 (March 2025) and Fam_011 (March 2025). Note: Excludes people under age 18. Successful asylum applicants are those who receive a grant of asylum or other permission to stay resulting from an asylum application. Grants of asylum include main applicants and dependants.

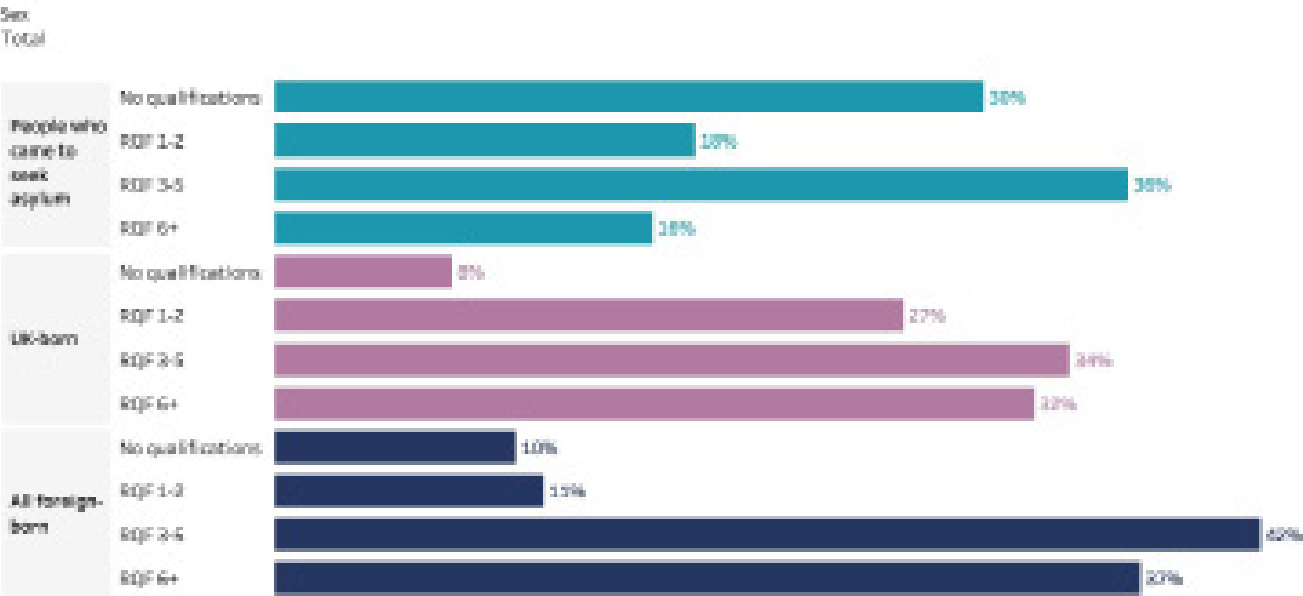


Refugees have lower qualifications and employment rates than the UK born

The data show that people who come to the UK to seek asylum tend to have lower levels of education compared to other migrants and the UK-born population (Figure 14). While around 16% hold high-level qualifications (NQF Level 6 and above), such as university degrees, a significant 30% have no formal qualifications - compared to just 8% among the UK born.

Figure 14

Highest qualification obtained among people aged 16-64, by sex and immigration group
Includes those who came to the UK to seek asylum, all foreign-born and UK-born, 2020-2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Annual Population Survey Three-Year Pooled Dataset (2020-2022). Secure Lab data. Note: These data refer to people who said that their main reason for migrating was to seek asylum, with only one main reason recorded. The data exclude people with "other qualifications".

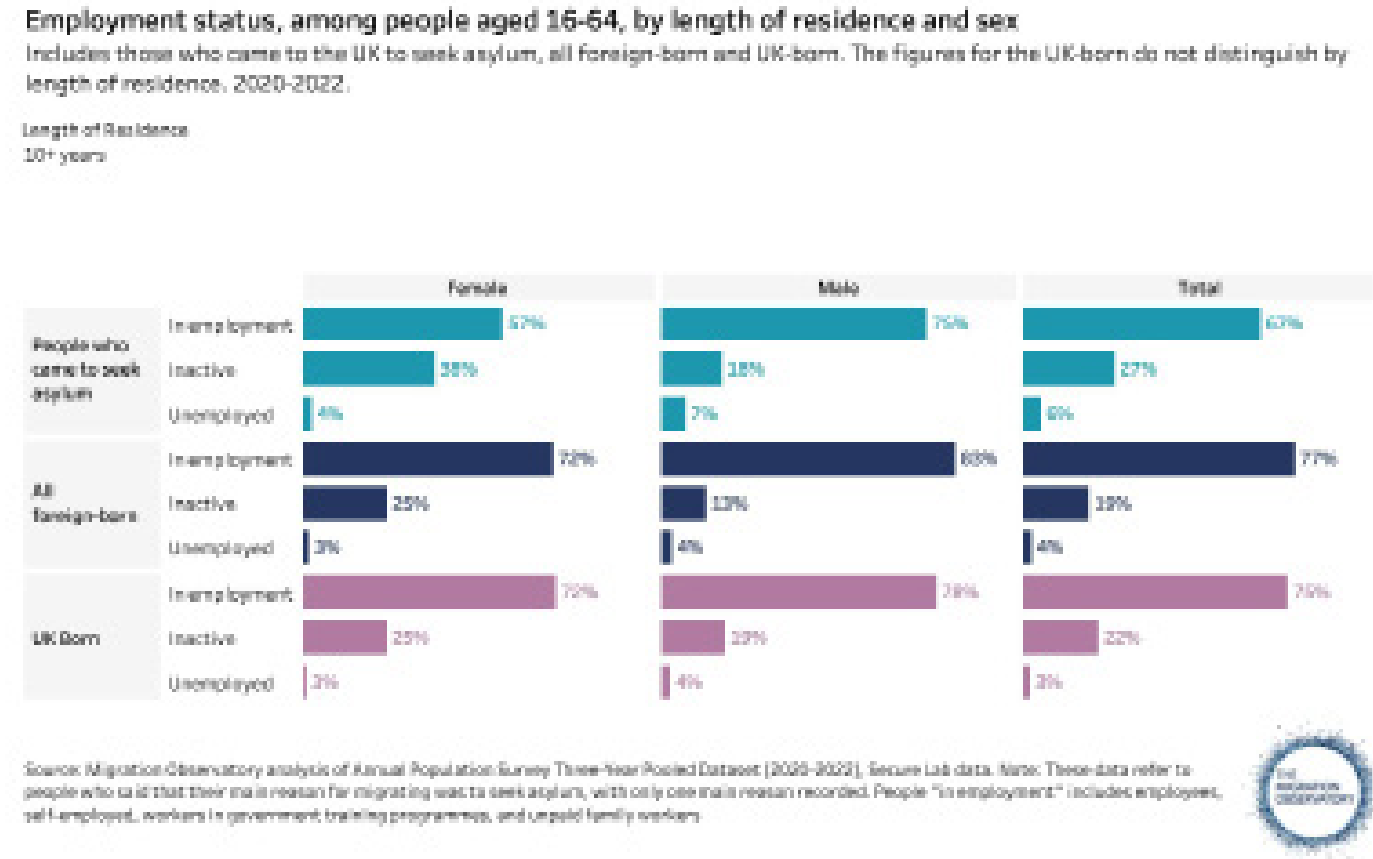


[Research on resettled refugees](#) indicates that employment rates are low. Similarly, labour market data on people who report arriving in the UK seeking protection find lower employment rates than among the UK born, with a particularly large gap among women (Figure 14). Several factors contribute to this trend, including low English proficiency and chronic health conditions. For those who arrive in the UK spontaneously (i.e., not through resettlement programmes), there is evidence that [prolonged waiting periods](#) during the asylum process can also hinder career progression.

Between 2020 and 2022, men who came to seek asylum at least ten years previously had much higher employment rates than recent arrivals, narrowing the gap with the UK born (Figure 15).

For women, however, disparities in employment persisted even after long periods of residence. [Studies](#) suggest that limited English proficiency and cultural norms around childcare—particularly common in regions such as North Africa and the Middle East, where many refugees originate—play a major role in women’s continued economic inactivity. Additionally, [difficulties](#) attending English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, including due to childcare responsibilities, can further hinder refugee women’s integration into the labour market.

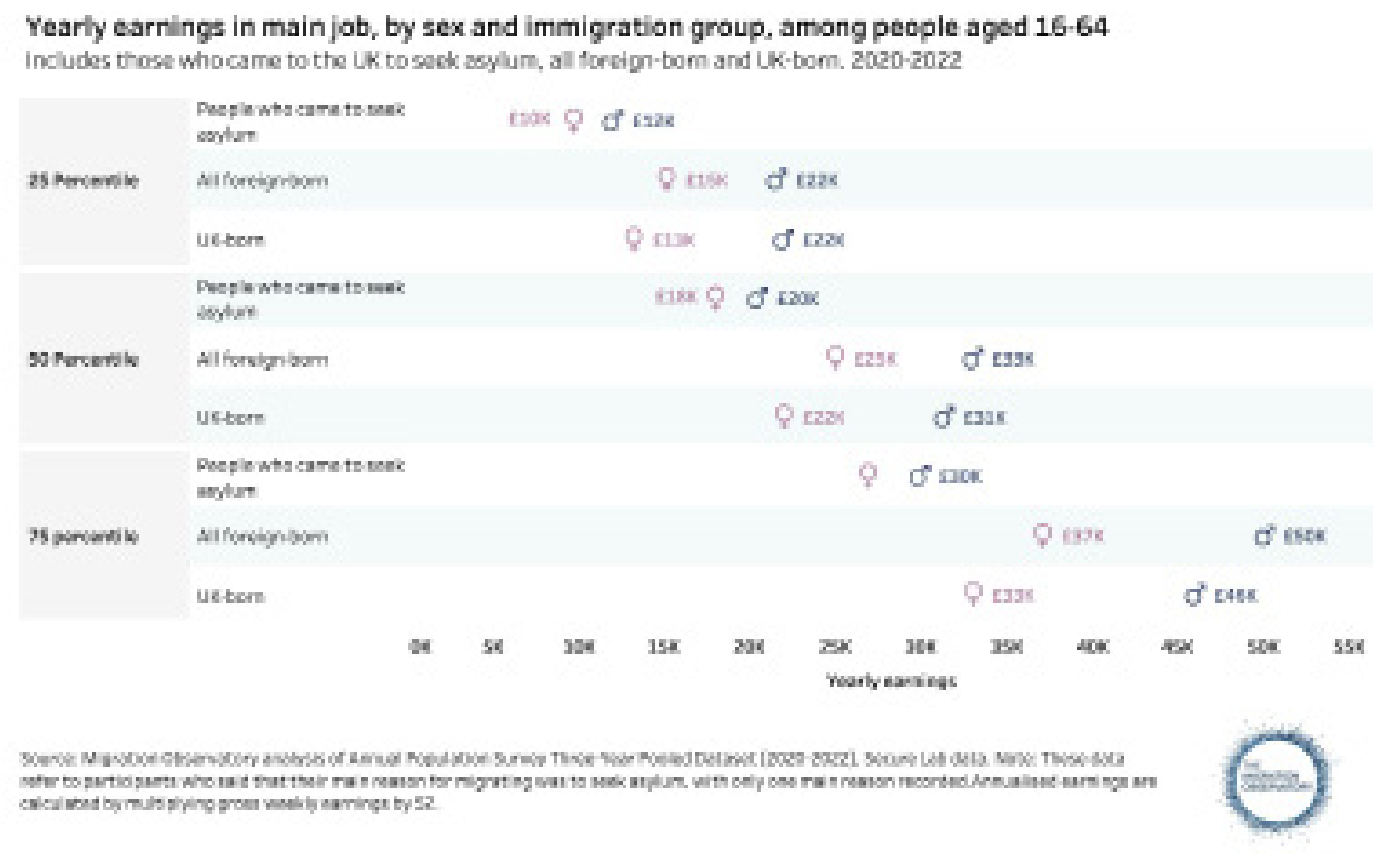
Figure 15



People who came to the UK seeking asylum tend to be employed in low-paid occupations

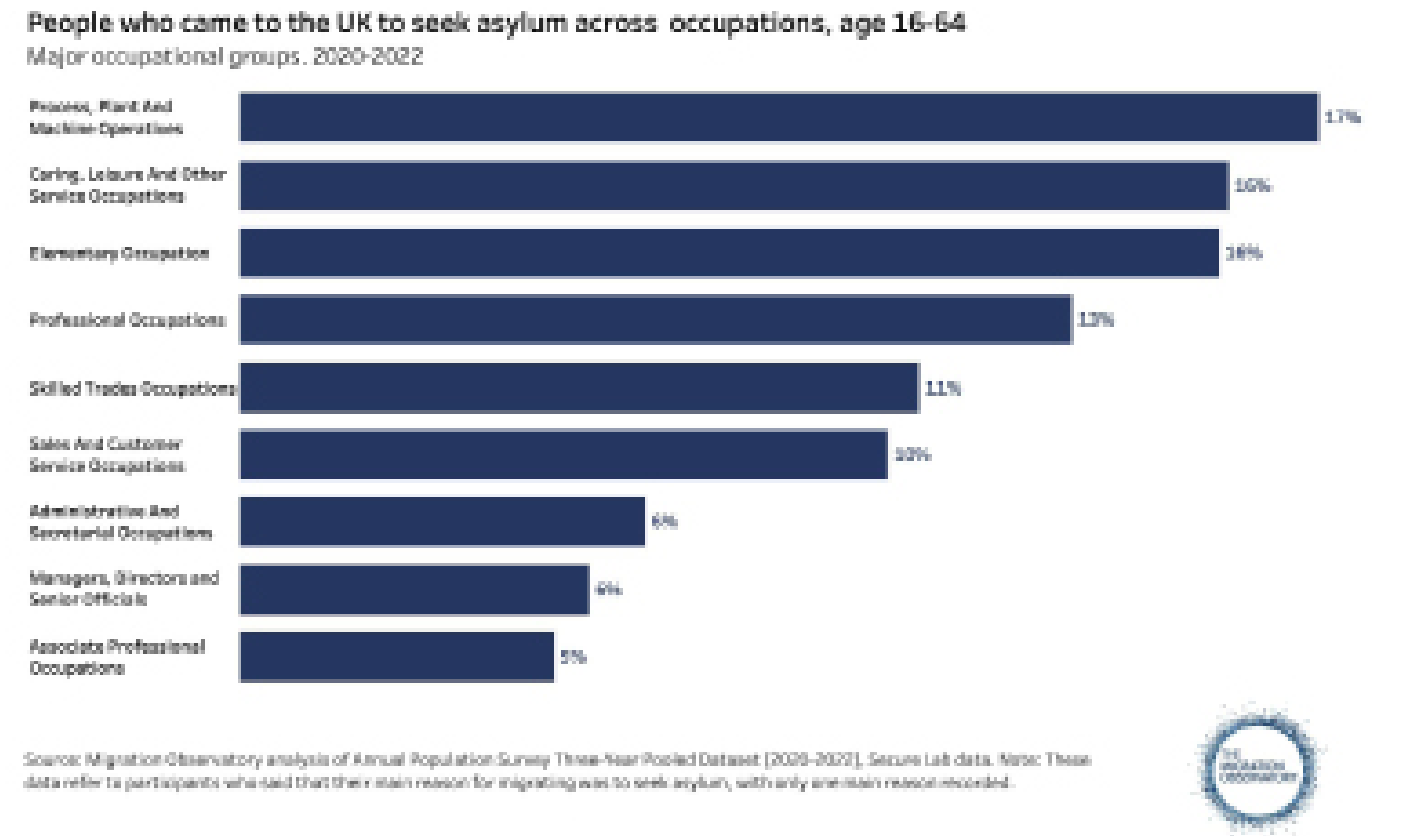
People who came to the UK seeking asylum earn significantly lower salaries than both other foreign-born and the UK-born population. According to ONS data from 2020 to 2022, men who arrived seeking protection had median annualised earnings of £20,000, compared to £31,000 among UK-born men. Women had median earnings of £18,000, compared to £22,000 for UK-born women (Figure 16). Salary distribution among those who came to seek asylum is also notably narrow: men in the upper percentiles earn just £30,000, and women £27,000. While lower qualifications may partly explain this (see Figure 14), the limited earnings even among those in the upper percentiles suggests that other barriers are also at play.

Figure 16



The low salaries among those who came to the UK to seek asylum matches their concentration in lower-paid roles. Between 2020 and 2022, most were employed in process, plant, and machine operations, caring and leisure services, or elementary occupations (Figure 17).

Figure 17



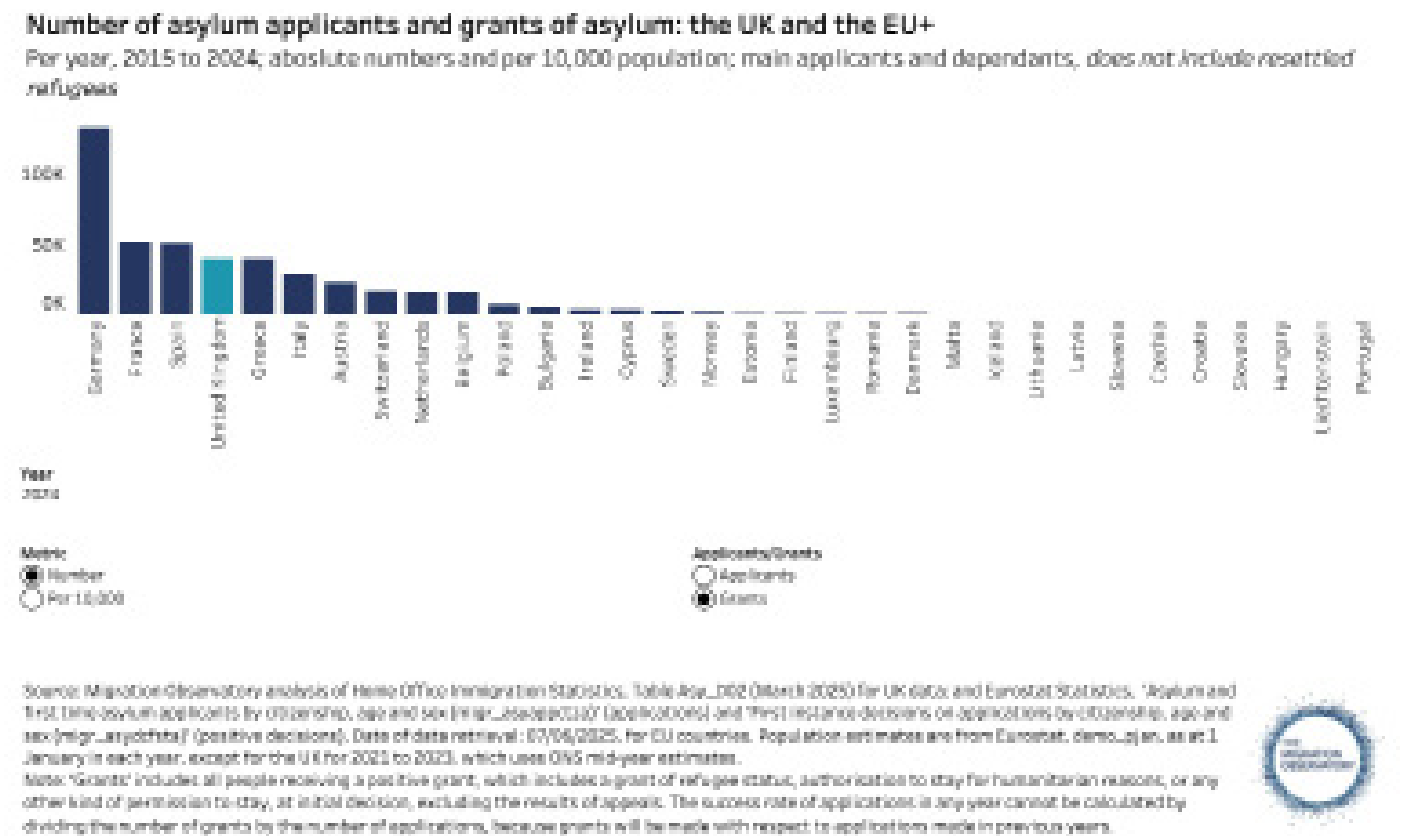
Compared against EU countries, the UK ranked 5th for number of people claiming asylum in 2024, and 17th when adjusted for population size

In 2024, the UK received around 108,100 asylum applicants, the 5th highest when compared with the EU+ (the EU-27 plus Switzerland and the three EEA countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). When adjusted by population size, it received the 17th highest number of applications: 16 per 10,000 residents.

In the same year, the UK granted asylum or another form of legal status to around 39,600 people (at initial decision, excluding appeals), placing it fourth in the league table. Germany ranked first on both measures, receiving around 250,000 asylum applicants in 2024, and granting asylum-related protection to around 133,700 people at initial decision that year (Figure 18).

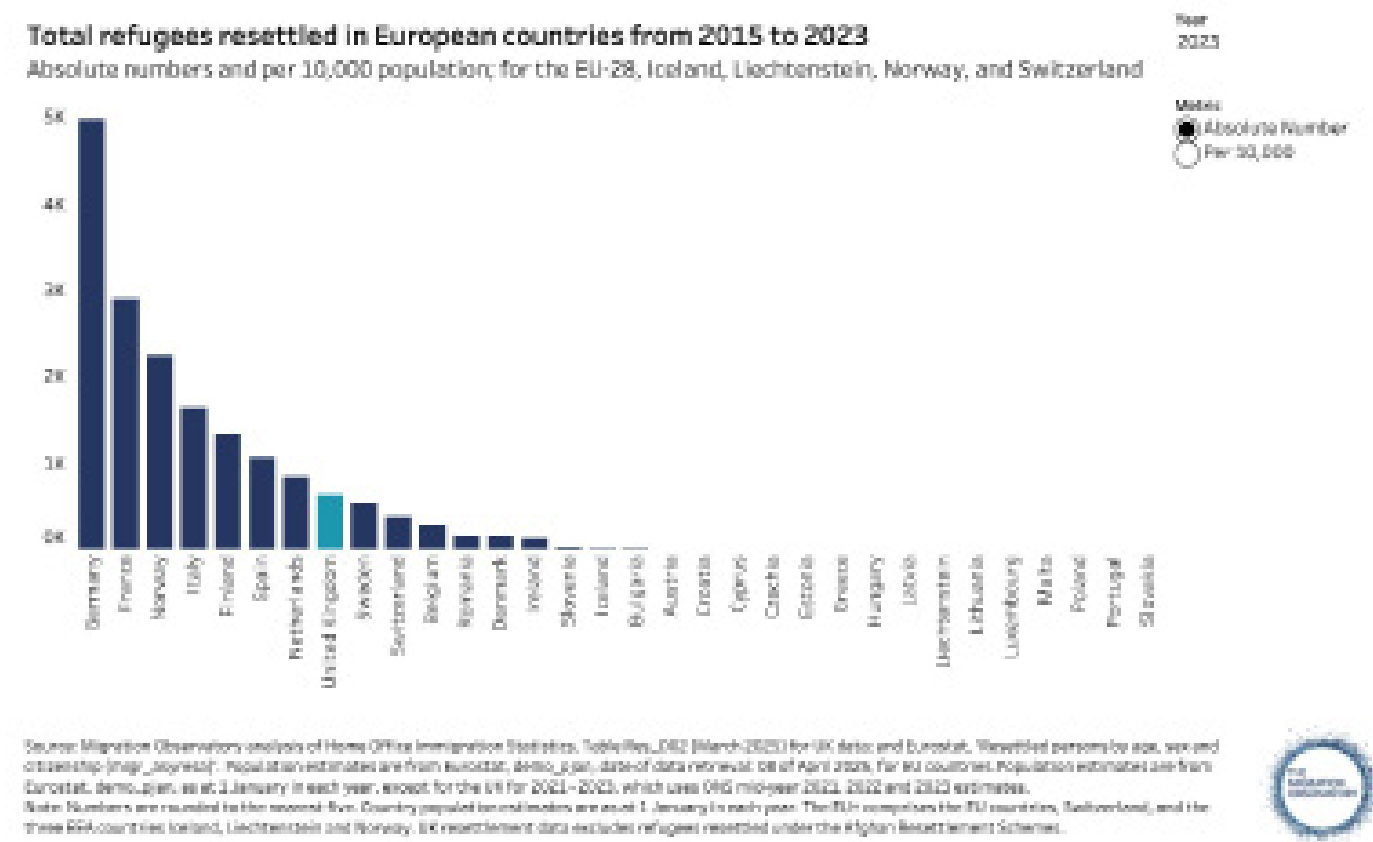
Adjusting grants for population size, the UK ranked 14th when compared with the EU+, having granted protection in 2024 to six asylum seekers per 10,000 of its resident population.

Figure 18



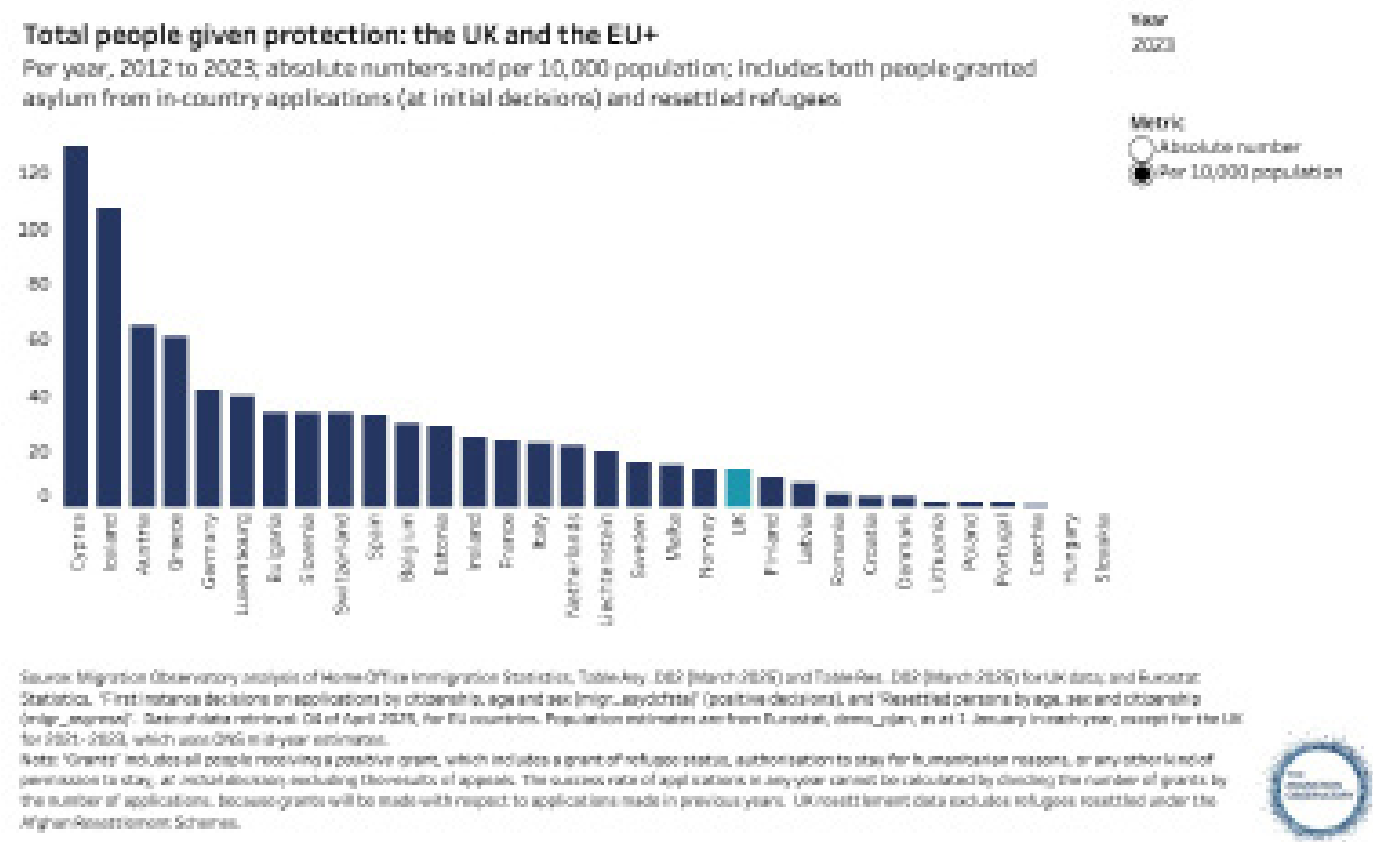
These figures do not include people given protection under refugee resettlement programmes. Under such programmes, the UK resettled around 29,000 refugees from 2015 to 2023, excluding the Afghan resettlement schemes and Ukraine and Hong Kong visa schemes. While the UK ranked first in the league table across the whole period between 2015 and 2022 compared to the EU+, it fell to 8th place in 2023 (Figure 19). During that year, the UK resettled 632 people, whereas Germany, ranking first in the measure, resettled 5,000 people. When adjusting for population size, the UK ranks 15th on the list. As data on resettlement for 2024 are not yet available for most EU countries, this comparison is provided for 2023.

Figure 19



When looking at *all people* given protection in 2023 – including through both the in-country asylum route and through refugee resettlement – the UK ranked 5th among EU+ countries (Figure 20). The UK falls to 21st place in the ranking when adjusting for population size.

Figure 20



Evidence Gaps and Limitations

We do not know how many people the UK has ever granted asylum or another form of asylum-related protection to, because published statistics go back only as far as 1979. Moreover, these published statistics record the outcomes of initial decisions only and not appeals, which increase the number of people that are ultimately granted asylum-related permission to stay.

The government does not provide regular statistics on asylum claimants broken down by their method of entry into the UK. New ad hoc statistics indicate that around one-third of asylum claimants in 2024 entered the UK on a visa. However, it remains unclear how many of these people overstayed their visa and how many still held valid permission to stay at the time of their asylum claim. More detailed and regular information would help clarify this issue.

Nor do we have clear information on how long asylum applications take. Data are provided on the share of applications receiving an initial decision within 6 months, and on the number of applications currently pending, but it is not possible using existing data to calculate how long it takes the 'average' asylum application to receive an initial decision or final outcome. We also do not know exactly how many cases or individuals are awaiting an appeal against first-instance refusal as the publication of these figures has been paused.

There is also limited information on what happens to refused asylum seekers. Some depart with the assistance or oversight of the government, for which data are available. However, others depart without notifying the authorities, or remain in the UK without permission (see the Migration Observatory briefing, [Unauthorised migration in the UK](#)).

Secure Research Service Data

Office for National Statistics. (2024). [Annual Population Survey Three-Year Pooled Dataset, January 2020 - December 2022](#). [data collection]. 2nd Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 9119

Disclaimer

Part of this work was undertaken in the Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service using data from ONS and other owners and does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners.

References

- Åslund, O., Engdahl, M., & Rosenqvist, O. (2024). [Limbo or leverage? Asylum waiting and refugee integration](#). Journal of Public Economics, 234, 105118
- Hatton, T. J. (2017). [Refugees and asylum seekers, the crisis in Europe and the future of policy](#). Economic Policy, 32(91), 447–496
- Platts-Fowler, D., & Robinson, D. (2011). *An Evaluation of the Gateway Protection Programme*. Sheffield Hallam University
- Pereira, I., Peel, C., Mckeown, A., & Porter, L. (2023). *VPRS and VCRS Qualitative Evaluation – Year 3 Report*. IPSOS.
- Refugee Action. (2018). *Waiting in the Dark: How the Asylum System Dehumanises, Disempowers and Damages*. Refugee Action.
- Office for National Statistics. (2023). *Early integration outcomes for refugees resettled in England and Wales: 2015 to 2021*. ONS

Related Material

- Migration Observatory briefing – [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory commentary – [The uncertain financial implications of the UK’s Rwanda policy](#)
- Migration Observatory Q&A – [The UK’s former policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda](#)
- Migration Observatory commentary – [UK policies to deter people from claiming asylum](#)
- Migration Observatory Q&A – [The new Hong Kong British National \(Overseas\) visa](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Ukrainian Migration to the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [The UK’s asylum backlog](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Unauthorised migration in the UK](#)



The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory’s analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration. www.compas.ox.ac.uk

About the authors

Peter William Walsh
Senior Researcher,
The Migration Observatory
peter.walsh@compas.ox.ac.uk

Nuni Jorgensen
Researcher,
The Migration Observatory
nuni.jorgensen@compas.ox.ac.uk

Press contact

Rob McNeil
Head of Media and Communications
robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk
+ 44 (0)1865 274568
+ 44 (0)7500 970081

Recommended citation

Walsh, P.W. & Jorgensen, N. (2025). *Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK*. Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford

