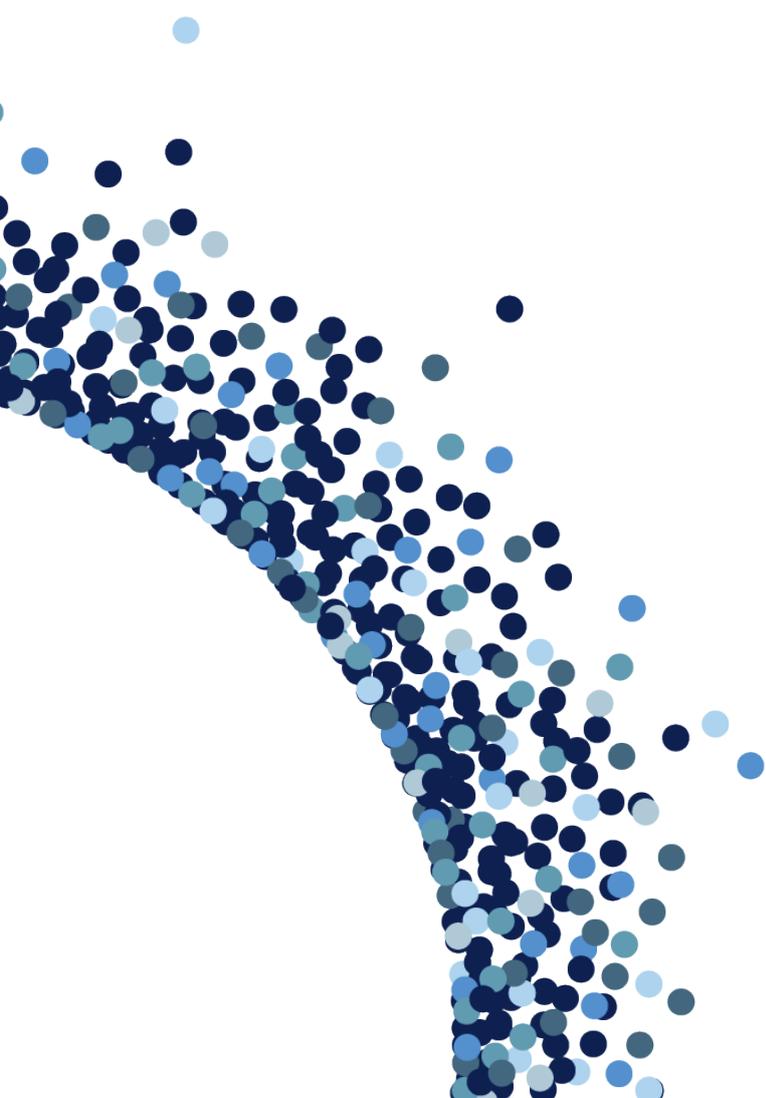




BRIEFING

People crossing the English Channel in small boats



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www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

This briefing examines the phenomenon of people crossing the English Channel in small boats. It reviews what we know about the numbers, characteristics, and motivations of people making this journey.

Key Points

Around 41,000 people were detected crossing the English Channel in small boats in 2025, a 13% increase on 2024 but fewer than in 2022.

Between 2018 and 2025, citizens of six countries – Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Albania, Syria, and Eritrea – made up 65% of people crossing in small boats.

Between 2018 and 2025, the asylum grant rate for people who arrived by small boat was 62%, higher than the grant rate for asylum applicants overall.

Around 7,500 people who arrived by small boat had been returned from the UK by the end of 2025, making up 4% of all arrivals since 2018. Most returns were to Albania.

In 2025, 24 people died trying to cross the English Channel by small boat, down from 73 the year before.

Increased enforcement on other irregular routes and the professionalisation of smuggling gangs may have contributed to the rise of small boat crossings.

Some people prefer to seek asylum in the UK for a variety of reasons, and their knowledge of asylum policy varies.

Increased enforcement, measures to deter migrants, and the introduction of safe and legal routes are the main types of policies policymakers and advocates have proposed to reduce small boat crossings.

In 2025, unauthorised arrivals by sea to other European countries fell while numbers in the UK rose. Italy and Greece still experienced more arrivals than the UK.

Bilateral deals and enforcement measures may have reduced unauthorised arrivals by sea in some European countries.

Understanding the evidence

The government publishes provisional daily counts of small boat arrivals, which are derived from operational databases and are subject to revision. Finalised official statistics on small boat arrivals are published as part of the Home Office's Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release.

Counts of small boat entries or other unauthorised entries refer to the number of people detected, and not the number of unique individuals. The same person may be detected multiple times, either under the same method of entry or under different methods (if an individual leaves the UK and then is detected re-entering). Such individuals will be counted multiple times in the statistics.

A 'small boat' is defined as one of a number of vessels used by individuals who cross the English Channel with the aim of gaining entry to the UK without permission to enter. The most common small vessels detected making these types of crossings are rigid-hulled inflatable boats (RHIBs), dinghies, and kayaks. Statistics on small boats include individuals who were detected on arrival in the UK, and those detected in the Channel and subsequently brought ashore.

The data do not include those who arrive in the UK on larger vessels (e.g., yachts, motor cruisers, tugs, fishing vessels, ferries), those who arrive in the UK clandestinely on larger vessels not referenced above (including where hidden in a vehicle on a ferry), or individuals who arrive in the UK undetected. Nor do they include people who were prevented from departing France, or were intercepted by French authorities and returned to France.

This briefing also presents Home Office information on detected irregular entries other than by small boat. These statistics cannot be summed to infer the total number of people entering the UK without authorisation. This is because they refer only to detected irregular entries. Because small boat arrivals are more likely to be detected than other methods of irregular entry, statistics for different methods of entry cannot be directly compared. Moreover, changes in the number of irregular entrants detected could be a result of changes in operational activity or recording practices, and not only changes in the number of people attempting to enter the UK without authorisation.

How many people have crossed the Channel in small boats?

The number of small boat arrivals has increased substantially since 2018. While reports of people attempting to enter the UK by crossing the Channel go back [over fifty years](#), significant numbers did not begin to be detected until [late 2018](#).

From 2018 to 2025 inclusive, around 193,000 people were detected reaching the UK in small boats.

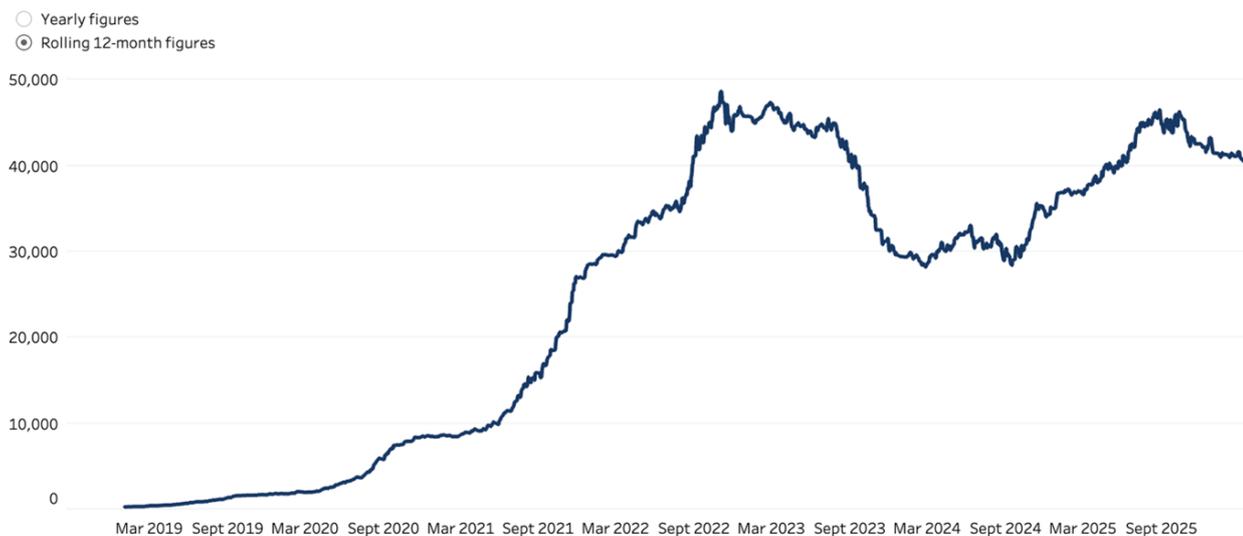
In 2025, around 41,500 people were detected crossing the Channel in small boats. That was 13% more than the year before, and the second highest annual figure. In 2022, about 46,000 people crossed the Channel in this way.

Approximately 2,200 additional people crossed the Channel in the first two months of 2026, similar to previous years.

Figure 1

Small boat arrivals increased by 13% in 2025 but remained below the record levels of 2022

Number of people arriving by small boat, rolling 12-month period or daily cumulative arrivals by year, 1 Jan 2018 to 18 Mar 2026



Source: Home Office, Migrants detected crossing the English Channel in small boats - monthly data and Small boat arrivals - last 7 days .
 Notes: Counts refer to those detected on arrival to the UK in a small boat, or who were detected in the Channel by UK authorities and subsequently brought to the UK, having travelled in a small boat. Small boats include rigid-hulled inflatable boats (RHIBs), dinghies and kayaks, but not larger vessels, such as go-fast craft, yachts, motor cruisers, tugs, and fishing vessels, which the Home Office says are "rarely used" by irregular migrants.



The majority of those arriving in small boats are men over the age of 18 – around 76% of 2025 arrivals for whom this information was recorded. A further 12% of arrivals that year were children under 18. These proportions have been relatively stable over time. One reason for the higher share of men is the danger associated with unauthorised migration. In some cases, female and [minor children](#) join later through family reunification routes.

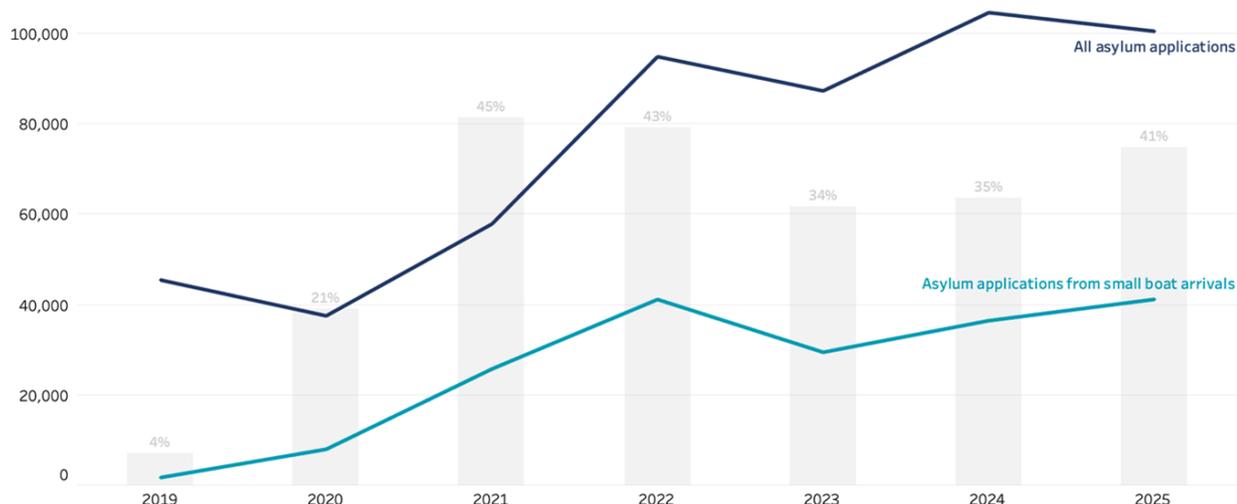
Most people who cross the Channel in small boats claim asylum once they are in the UK. In 2025, 99% of all those crossing either applied for asylum or were named as a dependant (partner or child) on an application. For all arrivals between 2018 and 2025, the share was 95%.

Small boat arrivals made up 41% of all people applying for asylum in the UK in 2025, a similar share to the preceding four years. The total number of people claiming asylum in the UK has increased sharply since 2020, reaching 101,000 in 2025, close to the record level of 2024 (Figure 2). Only part of this growth is explained by people crossing the Channel by small boat. Data show that a large proportion of asylum seekers – 39% of those applying in 2025 – travelled to the UK legally on a work, study, visitor, or other visa.

Figure 2

Small boat arrivals accounted for 41% of all asylum applications in 2025

Number of asylum applications and small boat asylum applications as percentage of the total, by year



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office irregular migration statistics, Tables Asy_D01 and Asy_D01a.

Note: Asylum applications from small boat arrivals refers to asylum applications lodged by people who arrived in the UK without authorisation after crossing the Channel in a small boat. Around 98-99% of all recent arrivals applied for asylum.

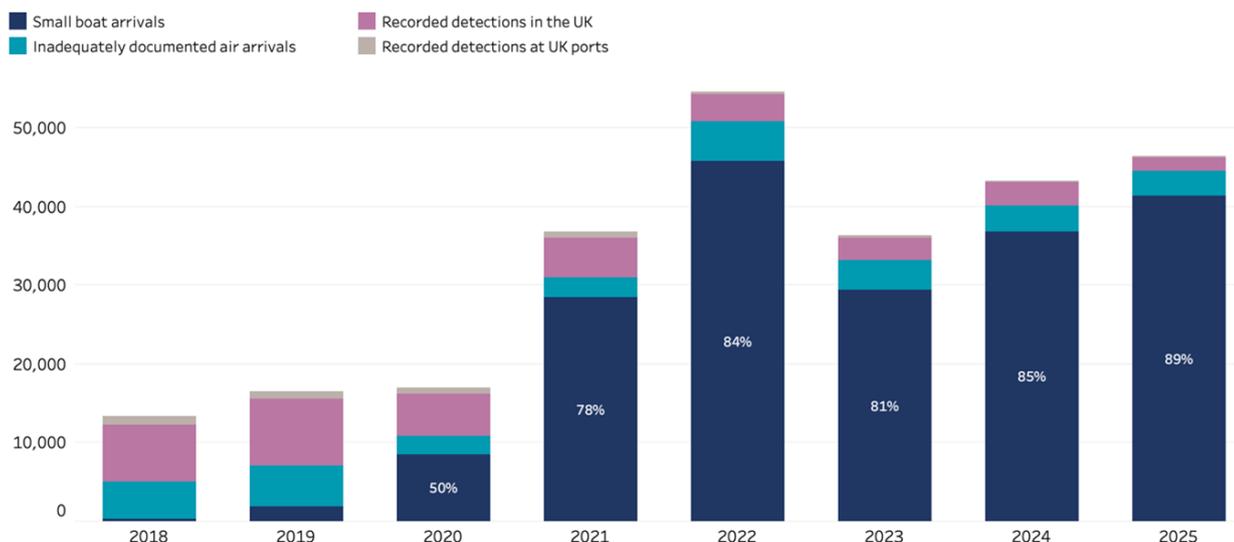


Some people also enter the UK through other unauthorised means, such as in lorries or containers. The increase in small boat crossings means that overall unauthorised arrivals have risen, and that small boats have accounted for more than 80% of such detected arrivals in recent years (Figure 3; though note that a higher share of boat arrivals are detected compared to other irregular arrivals).

Figure 3

Small boats made up more than 80% of all detected unauthorised arrivals in the last four years

Detected unauthorised arrivals to the UK, by mode of entry and year



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office irregular migration statistics, IER_D01.

Notes: Recorded detections in the UK refer to people detected by authorities outside a port who are believed to have entered the country without authorisation in the 72 hours prior to their detection. Comparisons between the different methods of irregular entry should be made with caution, because the detection rates across methods of entry differ. Changes in the number of irregular entrants detected could be a result of changes in operational activity or recording practices, and not only changes in the number of people attempting to enter the UK irregularly.



Where do people who arrive by small boat come from?

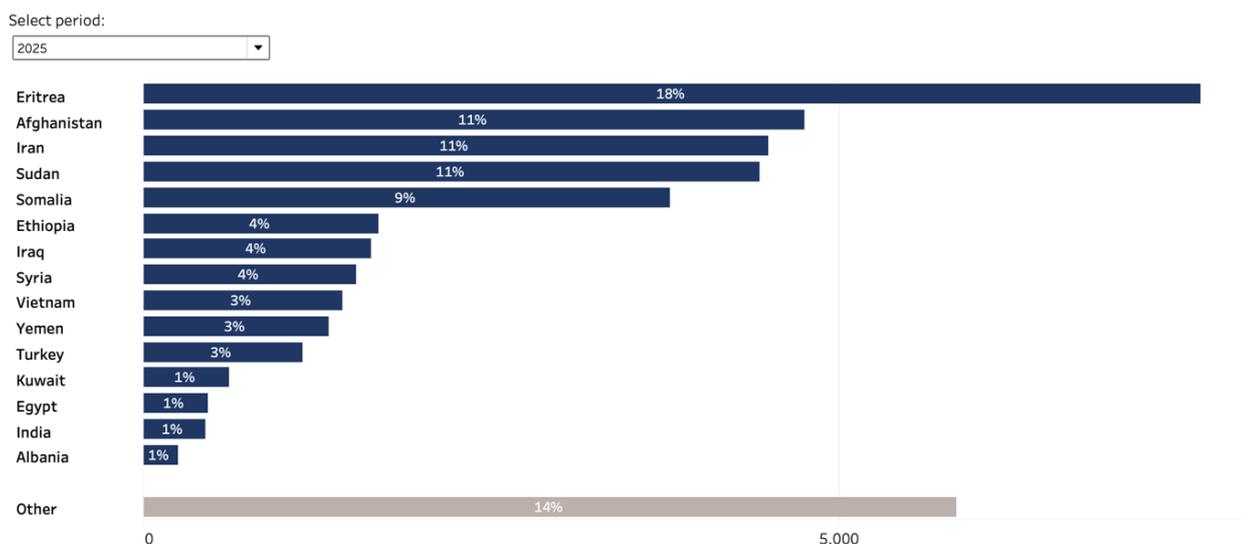
A small number of nationalities make up a large share of people crossing the Channel in small boats. From 2018 to 2025, nationals of six countries accounted for 65% of all arrivals – Iran (16%), Afghanistan (14%), Iraq (10%), Eritrea (10%), Albania (8%), and Syria (8%).

The most common nationalities have varied over time (Figure 4). A wide range of factors can shape these trends, including policy changes and developments in origin countries. Eritrea was the top country of origin for small boat arrivals in 2025, with more than twice as many arrivals than in 2024. Afghanistan was the top country of origin in 2023 and 2024 – and remained second in 2025 – though arrivals declined last year. The number of Syrian, Iraqi, and Vietnamese nationals who arrived by small boat also fell in 2025. In contrast, arrivals from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia all increased significantly. In 2022, there was a very sharp but relatively short-lived rise in Albanian nationals crossing the Channel (for details, see [Albanian asylum seekers in the UK and EU: a look at recent data](#)).

Figure 4

Eritrean was the top nationality among small boat arrivals in 2025

Number of small boat arrivals, by nationality and year, 2018 to 2025



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office irregular migration statistics, Table IER_D01.
 Note: The top 15 nationalities between 2018 and 2025 are included. Other comprises all other nationalities.



How likely are small boat arrivals to be granted asylum?

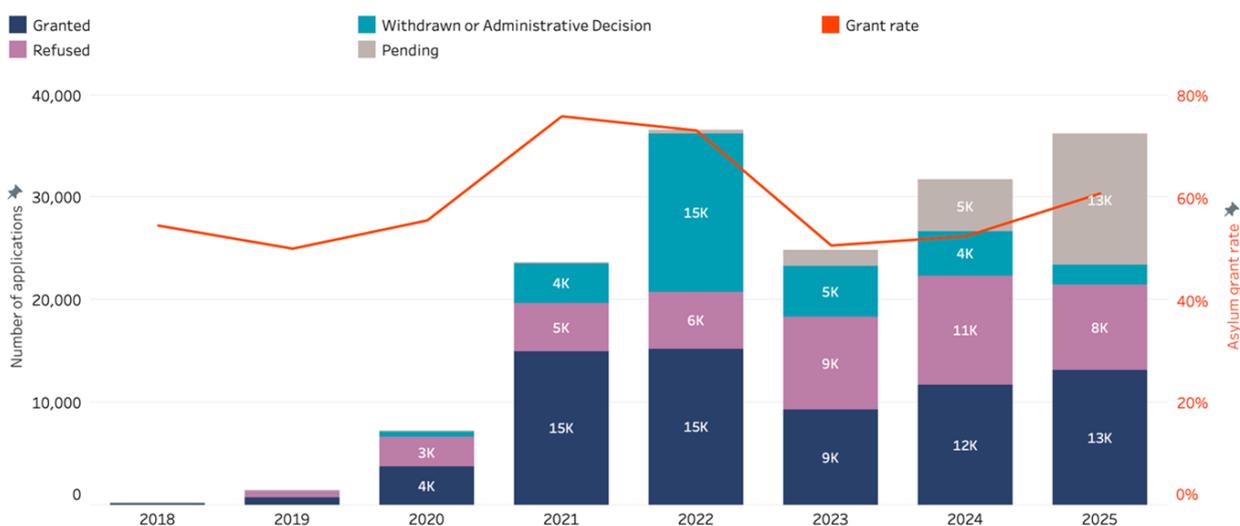
Between 2018 and 2025, there were around 162,000 asylum applications from small boat arrivals to the UK (main applicants only). Around 20,000 of these applications, or 12% of the total, were still awaiting an initial decision at the end of 2025. Excluding withdrawals and administrative decisions, around 62% of all initial decisions on asylum applications from people who arrived by small boat – a total of 69,000 – were grants of protection. That was higher than the grant rate for asylum applications generally, which stood at 52% for the 2018–25 period.

Between 2018 and 2025, around 31,000 asylum applications from small boat arrivals were withdrawn or received an administrative decision, with around 16,000 of these outcomes in 2022 (see Understanding the Evidence). While some applications are withdrawn at the request of the applicant, most withdrawals are implicit – they occur if the applicant fails to meet certain [conditions](#), such as attending an asylum interview or responding to Home Office letters within a five-day deadline. A 2023 [inspection](#) of asylum casework raised concerns about the number of withdrawn asylum applications, highlighting inadequate quality control processes. There is evidence that many people whose asylum applications were initially withdrawn by the government later re-entered the asylum system to have their claim processed (for more details, see [The UK’s asylum backlog](#)).

Figure 5

Around 69,000 asylum applications from people who arrived by small boat resulted in a positive initial decision

Number of initial decisions and asylum grant rate on asylum applications from small boat arrivals, by year of arrival
As of 31 December 2025 (main applicants only)



Source: Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table IER_D03.
Notes: Data include main applicants only, and not dependants. Data are current as of 31 December 2025. The asylum grant rate is calculated by excluding pending and withdrawn applications, as well as administrative decisions. Numbers will change as more applications are processed.



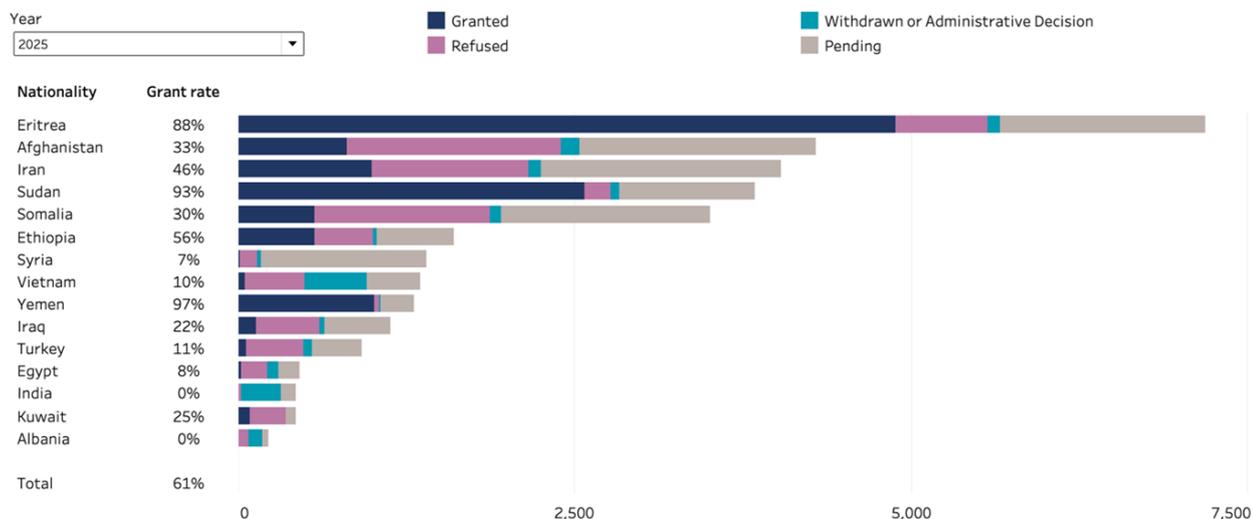
Almost a third of all small boat asylum applications that were withdrawn – around 10,000 – came from Albanian nationals, following a spike in arrivals in 2022 (Figure 6). Approximately 82% of all initial decisions on Albanian applications were withdrawals or administrative decisions. Between 2018 and 2025, only 41 applications from Albanians who arrived on small boats resulted in a grant of protection.

Some of the top nationalities among small boat arrivals have high asylum grant rates, such as Eritrean and Sudanese citizens. Others are much more likely to be refused – including Albanians, but also citizens of Iraq, Vietnam, Turkey, or India. As the UK’s overall grant rate has declined – from a record high of 76% in 2022 to 42% in 2025 – and conditions in countries of origin changed, the grant rate for some top small boat nationalities has fallen significantly. This is most visible among Syrians, with those arriving in 2025 having an initial grant rate of 7%, down from 99% for those who arrived in 2022.

Figure 6

The asylum grant rate varies widely among top small boat nationalities

Number of initial decisions and grant rate on asylum applications from small boat arrivals, by period of arrival and nationality (main applicants only)



Source: Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table IER_D03.

Notes: Data include main applicants only, and not dependants. The asylum grant rate is calculate by excluding pending and withdrawn applications, as well as administrative decisions. Numbers will change as more applications are processed.



How many people who arrived by small boat have been removed from the UK?

Around 2,600 people who had first arrived in the UK by small boat were returned to another country in 2025. In total, there were 7,500 such returns between 2018 and 2025 – around 4% of all arrivals during this period.

It remains unclear how many of the 193,000 people who arrived by small boat between 2018 and 2025 are liable for removal, or are likely to become so in the future. By the end of 2025, around 48,000 small boat arrivals had been refused asylum at the initial decision stage, though some of these individuals will eventually be granted status on appeal and hence be able to remain in the UK. Another 33,000 had their asylum application withdrawn or administratively decided.

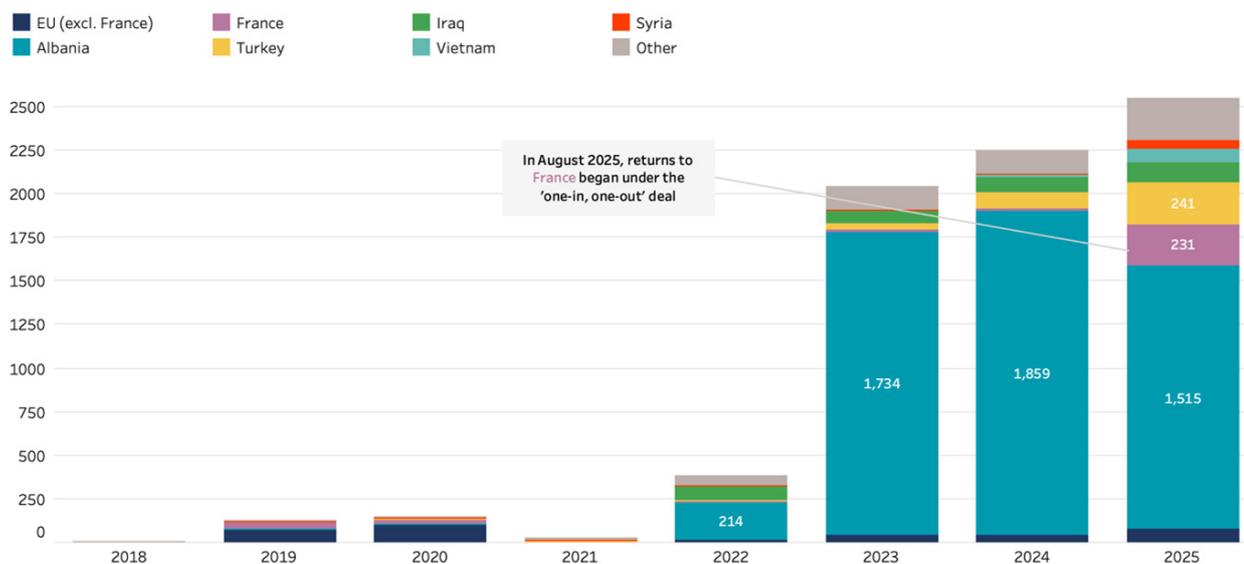
Most returns of small boat arrivals have been to Albania: 5,300 or 71% of the total. The government prioritised the processing of Albanian asylum applications after arrivals spiked in 2022, and overall removals to the country increased sharply after a returns agreement was signed the same year. However, around 13,000 Albanian nationals who arrived by small boat were either refused asylum or had their application withdrawn between 2018 and 2025 – which suggests that the majority remain in the UK without authorisation.

In addition to the usual process of removing those who are refused asylum, in August 2025 the government began returning a small number of people who arrived by small boat to France under a [pilot agreement](#). This allows the UK to return some people after arrival, without considering their asylum application, in exchange for receiving an equivalent number of migrants from France (see below for a discussion of its deterrent effects). There were 231 returns to France in 2025. That made up around 1% of all small boat arrivals between August and December.

Figure 7

Most returns of small boat arrivals have been to **Albania**

Number of people who arrived by small boat and were subsequently returned, by year of return and destination



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of data from FOI 04113/2025 and FOI 02453/2026.

Notes: Years refer to the year a person was returned, not the year of arrival. Data include both enforced and voluntary departures.



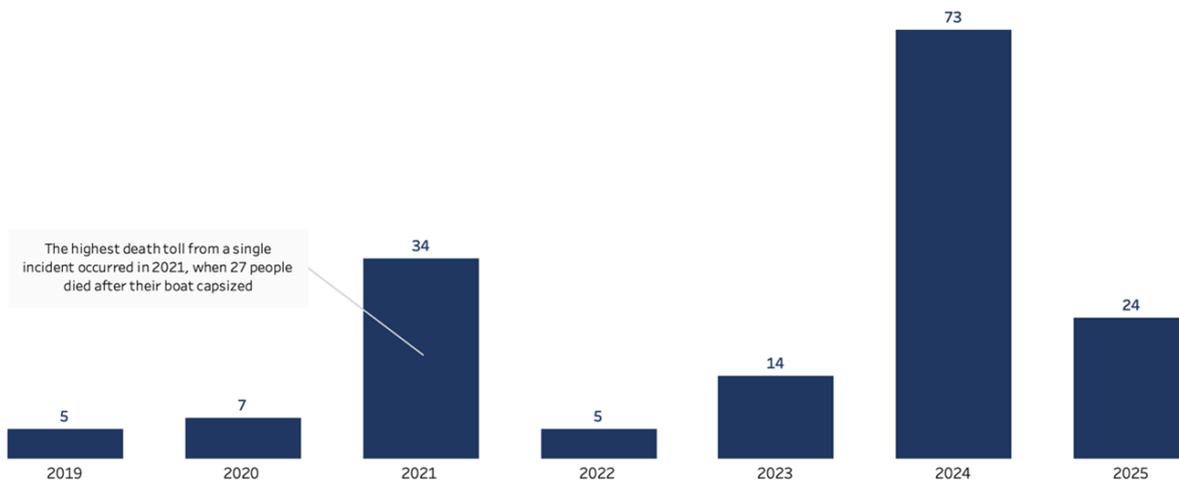
How many people have died while trying to cross the Channel?

In 2025, there were 24 confirmed deaths related to Channel crossings, down from 73 the year before. A total of 162 people were recorded as having died in the Channel between 2018 and 2025. This rises to 257 when considering other deaths related to migration in the area, such as accidents involving people who try to board lorries bound for the UK. These figures may understate the true toll, as not all incidents are reported.

The number of deaths in the Channel has fluctuated substantially over time, and it is not fully clear what drives such changes. One factor that may play a role is the number of people in each boat, which grew from an average of 13 in 2020 to 62 in 2025. More people per boat reflects the use of larger boats, but may also indicate that some boats are used beyond their capacity, making accidents more likely. Another reason could be [increased enforcement](#) by the authorities and subsequent changes in strategy among smugglers. After beaches in Northern France became subject to more patrols, smugglers changed their points of departure and began using taxi boats (boats which depart from less closely monitored waters with only a pilot onboard and pick up their passengers directly from the water). Some journeys may have become longer and more dangerous as a result. Reports from 2022-23 indicated that small boats became more likely to depart from [further along the coast](#), or even canals or rivers [inland](#).

Figure 8

Fewer people died while trying to cross the Channel by sea in 2025 than the year before
 Number of deaths related to attempts to cross the English Channel by sea, by year



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

Notes: Data only include confirmed deaths related to attempts to cross the English Channel by sea. Other deaths related to attempts to reach the UK, such as by lorry, are not included.



How did the small boat route across the Channel emerge?

Increased enforcement of other unauthorised modes of entry, such as lorries and trains, is likely to have contributed to the initial rise of the small boat route into the UK. After 2014, the British and French governments invested in enhanced security in and around French ports and the Eurotunnel. Measures included more perimeter fencing, additional CCTV, increased patrols, CO2 and heartbeat detectors, and thermal imaging. Several organisations have argued that these measures led to more people crossing in small boats, including the UK's [Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration](#), the [UN Refugee Agency](#), and the [Institute for Public Policy Research](#), a think tank.

Another contributing factor has been the expansion of smuggling operations across the Channel. Smuggling groups have become larger and increasingly professionalised in recent years. There is some evidence that the price of crossing the Channel declined over time, although estimates are uncertain and can vary significantly. According to some [sources](#), prices fell from around €14,000 in 2018 to [well under](#) €4,000 in 2024.

Why do people cross the Channel by small boat?

There is limited evidence on why Channel migrants decide to come to the UK. Several factors appear to play a role in their decision, such as the presence of friends and family members [in the UK](#). The most common nationalities crossing the Channel have [larger diaspora populations](#) in the UK rather than France. Other reasons [include](#) language and cultural links to the UK, perceptions of the UK as safe and welcoming, as well as negative experiences in other European countries.

Much debate has focused on whether UK policies affect the decisions of those seeking to cross the Channel. In general, academic research finds that variations in policy between countries are not the most important factor influencing how many people claim asylum in destination countries. Global developments, such as conflict and instability in countries of origin, appear to be more important. Unauthorised migrants' destination countries may also be [influenced](#) in some cases by the decisions of their smugglers.

Research on asylum seekers' motivations find that they have [varying levels of knowledge](#) about the policies that will face them when they arrive, or [recent changes](#) to such policies. Prospective migrants are generally aware of both the [risks](#) involved in an unauthorised journey – such as death, violence, or abuse – and the potential economic [benefits](#) of reaching their destination. However, limited information means that many [underestimate](#) risks and overestimate their chances of obtaining legal status.

One policy factor that may have [influenced](#) people's decision to cross the Channel is that the UK is no longer part of the EU and hence is no longer a part of the [Dublin](#) system. Before Brexit, Dublin allowed for some asylum seekers to be returned to their EU country of first arrival, as well as information sharing on asylum applications made in other member states. In [interviews](#), migrants in Northern France [often](#) cite the departure from Dublin as a reason for wanting to seek asylum in the UK, particularly if they had already been refused protection in the EU. However, it is unclear how big a role this played in their decision-making. In practice, few people were returned under Dublin when the UK was still a member – an average of 560 a year between 2008 and 2020.

Another argument – made by France's previous [Interior Minister](#), among others – has been that Britain's flexible labour market regulations and lack of ID cards attract migrants wishing to work in the shadow economy. However, there is little evidence that the UK's lack of an ID card system acts as a draw to migrants. As in France, British employers can be fined or imprisoned if they are found to have hired someone without permission to work and did not check their immigration status. In fact, data from the [World Bank](#) suggest that the [informal economy](#) – which includes many undeclared activities and is likely to [rely](#) on the employment of people without work authorisation – is smaller in the UK than in France, relative to the economy.

What measures have been proposed to reduce small boat arrivals?

Three main types of policies have been proposed to tackle small boat arrivals.

First is increased enforcement to disrupt smuggling networks, thereby restricting the 'supply' of smuggling services. The Labour government's initial approach upon taking office – its promise to 'smash the gangs' – fell into this category. Its measures included [increased staffing](#), [more cooperation](#) with European police forces, new security agreements with countries such as [Iraq](#) and [Serbia](#) to tackle smuggling routes, and a new [Border Security Command](#) to coordinate investigations. The government has also pushed France and Germany to change their laws to bolster enforcement efforts against smuggling gangs – allowing French police to [intercept boats](#) in shallow waters, and making smuggling into the UK [illegal](#) in Germany to make it easier to seize boats and equipment.

In addition, the [Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025](#) became law in December 2025. This gives authorities expanded powers, such as the ability to search people and seize their belongings more easily.

There is [some evidence](#) that enforcement can have an impact on the number of people claiming asylum in some settings, although measures to reduce small boat crossings through such means face particular challenges. Leaders of smuggling networks tend to [operate outside Europe](#), in countries where there is little international law enforcement co-operation with the UK. When a smuggler is apprehended, they can typically be quickly replaced. There are limited costs involved in setting up a new smuggling operation, and few barriers to entry. [Studies](#) have highlighted that smuggling operations across the Channel are not driven by large gangs with centralised control and clear hierarchical structures. Instead, they operate as loose networks with localised operations that specialise in different aspects of the business, such as recruiting migrants or securing equipment. Because of the high demand for crossings, there are strong financial incentives for new actors to fill any gaps created by successful enforcement.

The second type of approach is [deterrence](#) – altering the incentives of migrants who want to reach the UK in order to reduce *demand* for crossings. This was a central focus of previous Conservative governments. Deterrence policies aimed to restrict the rights of asylum seekers after they arrive, such as the [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) (IMA), which prevented people who entered the UK without authorisation from being granted protection. Most notably, [an agreement was signed with Rwanda](#) to relocate asylum seekers there. However, this was delayed by legal challenges, and no asylum seekers were forcibly relocated to Rwanda by the time of the 2024 Election. The scheme was cancelled under the Labour government, and most provisions of the IMA have been repealed by the new Border Security Act.

However, the current government began implementing new measures aimed at deterrence in 2025. A new [deal](#) with France took effect in August 2025, which allows the UK to return some people who arrive by small boat, in exchange for accepting an equal number of migrants from France. As with the Rwanda scheme, the goal is to deter people from crossing the Channel in the first place. Around 200 people were returned to France between August and December, although the government has stated that the scheme remains a pilot and numbers will increase in the future. Returns remain a small share of all small boat arrivals, with 16,000 people making the crossing in the same period. The deterrent effect of this scheme (as with Rwanda) will likely depend on the number of asylum seekers who are eventually relocated; a significant deterrent effect may require a relatively large number of people arriving by small boat to be removed.

In November 2025, the government also announced [reforms to the asylum system](#) that aim to deter asylum seekers from coming to the UK. Instead of being placed on a direct path to permanent residence as before, recognised refugees will be given a temporary status that will have to be renewed every 30 months, and wait up to 30 years before being granted settlement if they arrived in the country without authorisation. The change will [apply](#) to people who applied for asylum on or after 2 March 2026. Other measures, including the implementation of previously announced [changes to settlement](#) rules, are scheduled for later in 2026.

Third and finally, civil society proposals have focused on providing ‘safe and legal routes’ for people to claim asylum in the UK, so they do not have to make dangerous crossings by boat. These include creating or expanding refugee resettlement programmes, expanding visa routes for refugees to join family members in the UK, providing additional humanitarian visas, or creating an option to apply for asylum from overseas. There is limited evidence that providing safe and legal routes has a large impact reducing the number of asylum seekers arriving without authorisation. For example, an [analysis](#) of US policies facilitating lawful border crossings between 2011 and 2023 found that the practice of allowing a limited number of legal arrivals explained only 9% of the monthly variation in illegal ones. In practice, it is likely that legal routes will reduce the use of unauthorised routes only if they allow a very large number of people to access them. For example, few Ukrainians have been detected crossing the Channel in small boats due to the uncapped visa scheme for this group, whereas Afghans, who have a limited resettlement scheme available to them, have been one of the most common nationalities making the crossing.

How many unauthorised arrivals by sea do other European states receive?

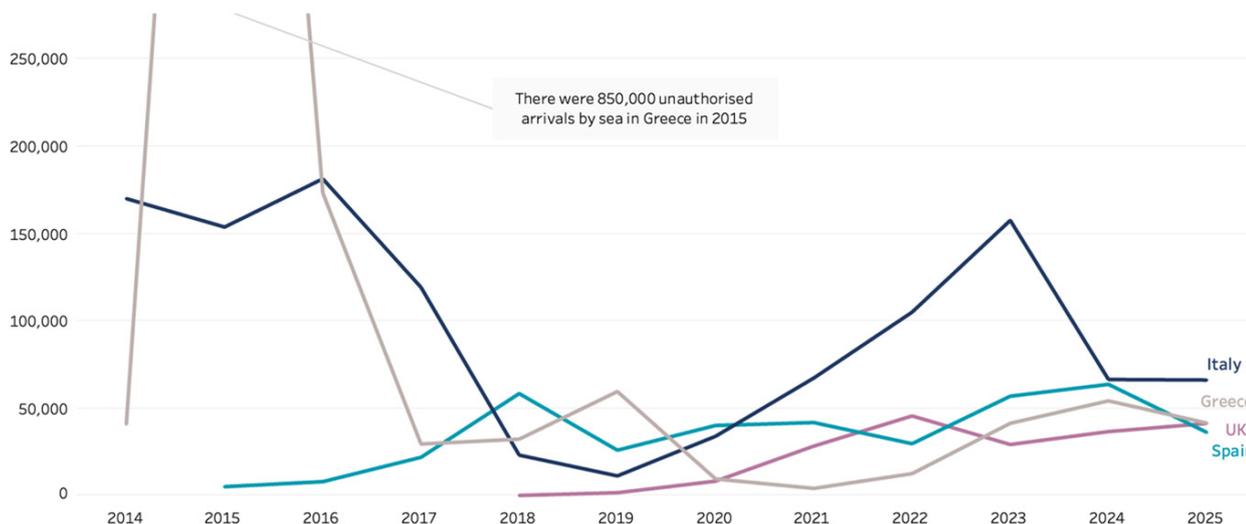
Greece, Italy, and Spain have all received large numbers of [people arriving without authorisation](#) by boat since 2014. While the UK recorded more unauthorised boat arrivals in 2025, numbers declined in other European countries, particularly Spain and Greece. However, Italy again recorded the most unauthorised arrivals, with around 66,000.

The number of boat arrivals in other countries has varied widely over time. Yet in recent years they remained significantly lower than during the refugee crisis of the mid-2010s. Greece and Italy together received more than a million unauthorised sea arrivals in 2015 alone.

Unauthorised crossings in the Mediterranean have led to considerably more deaths than in the English Channel, although the latter route has become more dangerous over time. According to the IOM, around 32,000 died in the Mediterranean between 2014 and 2024. This compared to 332 people who died in and around the English Channel during the same period.

Figure 9

In 2025, unauthorised arrivals by sea fell in other European countries while increasing in the UK
 Number of migrants arriving without authorisation by sea, by year and country



Source: For the UK, Home Office, Irregular migration to the UK, Table Irr_D01. For other countries, UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Mediterranean situation.
 Notes: The numbers for Spain include sea arrivals to the Canary Islands.



The UK receives fewer asylum applications than some other large European countries. In 2024, a record number of 108,000 people applied for asylum in the UK – compared to 251,000 in Germany, 159,000 in Italy, 166,000 in Spain, and 158,000 in France (for more details, see [Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK](#)).

How have other European countries responded to unauthorised sea arrivals?

In response to increases in unauthorised arrivals by sea, European governments adopted more restrictive migration policies. This included restrictions on the rights and eligibility of asylum seekers in [Greece](#) and [Italy](#), as well as efforts by the [Spanish](#) and [Italian](#) governments to curtail search-and-rescue operations by humanitarian NGOs. [Frontex](#), the EU’s shared border and coast guard agency, was also significantly expanded after 2015.

However, the main focus has been on forming bilateral deals with key neighbours. This includes EU agreements with [Turkey](#) in 2016, [Libya](#) in 2017, [Tunisia](#) and [Mauritania](#) in 2023, [Egypt](#) in 2024, and Jordan in 2025. A formal agreement with Morocco was still under negotiation as of late 2025, after increased cooperation on migration since 2017.

These deals vary in scope, although they have a similar principle at their core: the EU provides direct funding and other assistance – training and equipment for police forces, logistical support, expanded access to visas, or refugee resettlement programmes – while its neighbours promise to control the flow of migrants over the Mediterranean. Some of the measures implemented include crackdowns on smuggling gangs, expanded patrols, and pushbacks at sea by coast guards. Some of the EU’s agreements have been [criticised](#) by human rights [organisations](#) for contributing to abuse against migrants.

The EU's bilateral deals may have had some impact in reducing unauthorised migration across the Mediterranean, though their precise effects are hard to measure. Arrivals in Italy, Greece, and Spain fell sharply from high levels after a series of new agreements were reached in 2015-16 and 2023-24. However, the number of people arriving by sea has fluctuated in recent years. For example, arrivals in Italy peaked in 2016, declined rapidly after the agreement with Libya was signed in 2017, then rose quickly between 2021 and 2023 – only to fall again in 2024 after another agreement was reached with Tunisia, where many of the previous routes from Libya had relocated. However, it is difficult to determine exactly how much of these declines were due to changes in policy, as opposed to other factors.

Acknowledgements

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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

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