



# BRIEFING

## Family migration to the UK

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AUTHORS: Nuni Jorgensen  
Peter William Walsh  
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This briefing examines the migration of family members to the UK. This includes migration of people who come to join British or settled residents in the UK, families of refugees, as well as people joining or accompanying migrants who hold temporary status.

## Key Points

Between 2009 and 2022, the level of family unification migration to the UK was lower than migration for work or study.

In 2022, an estimated 3.5 million people living in the UK said they had originally moved to join a British citizen or settled resident.

People on family unification visas are more likely to settle long-term in the UK than those on work or study visas.

Family migrants are usually on a five-year route to settlement, though ten-year routes have become more common in recent years.

The UK has comparatively restrictive economic requirements for the sponsors of family unification migrants.

A partner who comes to the UK on a family unification visa could face immigration costs of around £12,500 on a typical route to citizenship.

Over 90% of the people who enter the UK as families of refugees are women and children.

Since 2020, dependants of workers and students have significantly outnumbered family unification migrants.

Since 2016, the proportion of male dependants among study and work visa holders has increased significantly.

Work visa holders who come to the UK with dependants are more likely to obtain permanent status than those who come alone.

## Understanding the policy

This briefing examines three types of family migration. The first, “family unification”, refers to migrants entering or remaining in the UK to live with family members who are British citizens or non-British settled residents. The second type of family migration is refugee family reunion (or simply “family reunion”). It includes people who come join a relative with refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK. The third type of family migration is of “dependants”. These are people who come to the UK as the family members of migrants who do not have settlement or British citizenship and are in the UK on any other temporary visa, such as for work or study.

On 30 March 2019, the government launched a new family route, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) family permit. This allows for entry into the UK of a non-EU-citizen family member of an EU citizen who has been granted settled status or pre-settled status under the EUSS.

### **Family Unification**

Family members of UK citizens or permanent residents can apply for a family visa to join them in the UK. The only family members eligible for family unification visas are spouses or civil partners; fiancé(e)s or proposed civil partners; unmarried partners (including same-sex partners); children; and, in a smaller number of cases, adult or elderly dependent relatives. From November 2010, non-EU nationals applying to enter or extend their stay as a partner of a British citizen or settled resident were required to demonstrate a level of English language proficiency, with some exceptions.

In addition, since July 2012, the British citizen or permanent resident who acts as a sponsor needs to meet specific income requirements. They must have an annual income of at least £18,600, or £22,400 if the partner sponsored brings one child, plus £2,400 for each additional child. This is the “minimum income threshold”, [The Minimum Income Requirement for Non-EEA Family Members in the UK](#).

In July 2012, the UK also implemented stricter eligibility criteria for the Adult Dependant Relative route, which UK citizens and settled residents use to bring, for example, parents or grandparents to the country. Since this rule change, the adult relative needs to prove that they require long-term personal care to perform daily tasks as a result of age, illness, or disability; that this care is not available or affordable in their country of origin; and that the sponsor can maintain the applicant in the UK without access to public funds.

Family unification visa holders may apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR, also known as settlement) after five years of residence in the UK. Until then, they usually have no access to public funds.

### **Refugee family reunion**

Refugee family reunion is the pathway through which the family members of a person with recognised refugee status or humanitarian protection can join them in the UK. Typically, only spouses, unmarried partners (including same-sex partners), and children under 18 are eligible for family reunion. The refugee and the applicant must have been part of a family and lived together before the refugee was forced to leave the country. Separately from refugee family reunion, asylum applicants' partners and minor children can also stay in the UK as dependants if they arrive in the UK with the person seeking asylum, known as the “main applicant”. The dependants on an application receive the same outcome as the main applicant. Family members of refugees can apply for ILR.

New humanitarian visa schemes for Ukrainians and British National Overseas status holders have broader definitions of family than those that apply to most refugees. The protection schemes created to admit people fleeing Ukraine include as dependants the siblings, adult children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces, nephews, parents-in-law, and other relatives of the main applicant. Hong Kong British National Overseas visa holders (BNOs) can also bring other dependant relatives, provided they lived with the main applicant and are highly dependent on them due to illness, disability or age.

### **Dependants**

Until recently, most work or study migrants could apply to bring their families to the UK as “dependants”. However, in March 2023, a new policy announced by the Home Office will mean that from 2024, sponsored students will no longer be eligible to bring dependants, unless they are enrolled in research postgraduate programs.

Only spouses, partners (including same-sex partners) and children below 16 of the main applicant are eligible to apply as dependants. Children aged 16 or older can be accepted as dependants in some circumstances.

Dependants are on the same route for settlement as the main applicant and do not have access to public funds until they obtain ILR. Children born in the UK to migrants who are not permanent residents do not automatically become British citizens; they must also apply for a dependant visa under the same route as their parents.

## Understanding the evidence

This briefing draws mainly upon Home Office administrative data on visas issued. The Home Office classifies individuals by the type of visa or grant of protection they were granted, any subsequent grants of extensions of stay in the UK, and grants of settlement (ILR). The Home Office breaks down family migration into four main categories: “family” visas (i.e., visas for family unification) and “dependants” (i.e., those joining family members on temporary visas, such as for work or study); “dependants joining/accompanying”; and “EEA family permits”, for non-EU migrants who enter or remain in the UK as family members of EU nationals.

To differentiate family visas from other types of leave granted to individuals joining or accompanying temporary migrants in the UK, this report uses the term “family unification visa” to refer specifically to visas granted to family members of UK citizens or settled residents.

Dependant visas are recorded by the Home Office under the immigration route of the “main applicant” (e.g., as a dependant of a worker or student).

There are also visas which act as a catch-all for dependants who have been issued a visa based on their relationship with another migrant who is not a settled person or British citizen. These are included within the Home Office category “Dependants joining/accompanying” (referred to in this briefing as “Dependant”) and may have been issued a visa for any reason (e.g., work, study, family).

Lastly, the “Family: other” category in the Home Office entry clearance dataset combines refugee family reunion visas and family unification visas under the ‘Parent Route’. Since refugees’ families are treated separately in this briefing, the ‘Family: other’ category was excluded from all estimates on family unification.

We also use the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Long-term international immigration estimates for 2022 and compare them with Home Office information on entry visas issued. These ONS data were developed using new methods of measuring migration. These include tax and benefits records contained in the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID) and Home Office data on visas granted and entries and exits at the border. These data sources can potentially improve migration statistics, but are not yet labelled National Statistics and are presented as “experimental”. As such, they have significant limitations and a high degree of uncertainty.

To determine the total number of family migrants currently residing in the UK, regardless of when they came into the country, we use the 2022 Annual Population Survey (APS). This survey provides information on the primary reasons that individuals went to the UK, including family unification or as the dependants of temporary migrants. The Annual Population Survey (APS) is obtained by merging waves one and five of four LFS quarters and data from the Annual Local (Area) Labour Force Survey (LLFS) Boosts for England, Scotland, and Wales.

## Between 2009 and 2022, the level of family unification migration to the UK was lower than migration for work or study

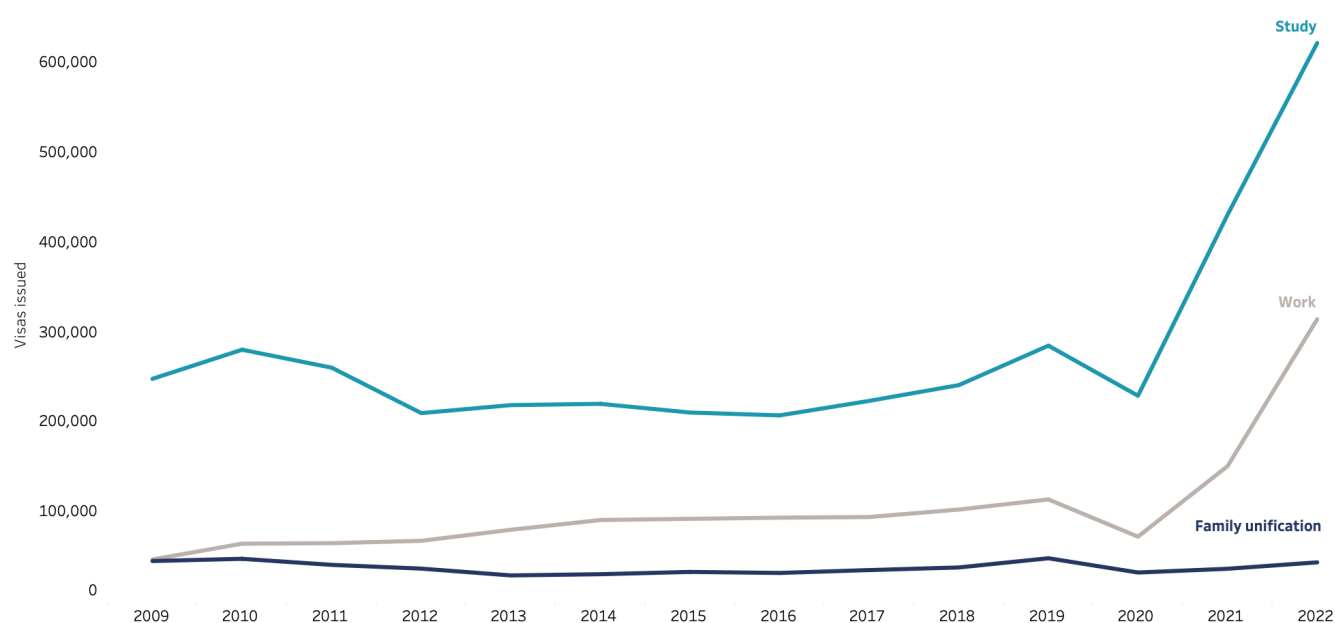
The number of family unification visas issued by the UK remained relatively stable from 2009 to 2022, averaging approximately 38,000 per year. During this period, the levels of family unification migration have been consistently lower than those observed for work or study reasons (Figure 1). In the first two quarters of 2023, the Home Office recorded a two-fold increase in family unification visas issued. The rise has been recorded for migrants coming from all world regions. It remains to be seen whether this level will be sustained.

Between 2009 and 2012, family unification visas fell by almost 20%. This decline could have been driven by the introduction of the English language requirement in 2010, changes in the Adult Dependant Relative route, and the application of the minimum income threshold in 2012 (see the Migration Observatory commentary, [How many people have been prevented from bringing a partner to the UK due to the £18,600 minimum income requirement?](#)).

**Figure 1**

### Number of visas issued in the UK, by visa type, 2009 to 2022

Sponsored study visas and work visas include main applicants and dependants



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration System Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas – Applications and Outcomes. Table Vis\_D02, Year ending March 2023.

Notes: Study visas and work visas include main applicants and dependants. The data presented exclude the "Family: other" category, temporary workers and short-term students.



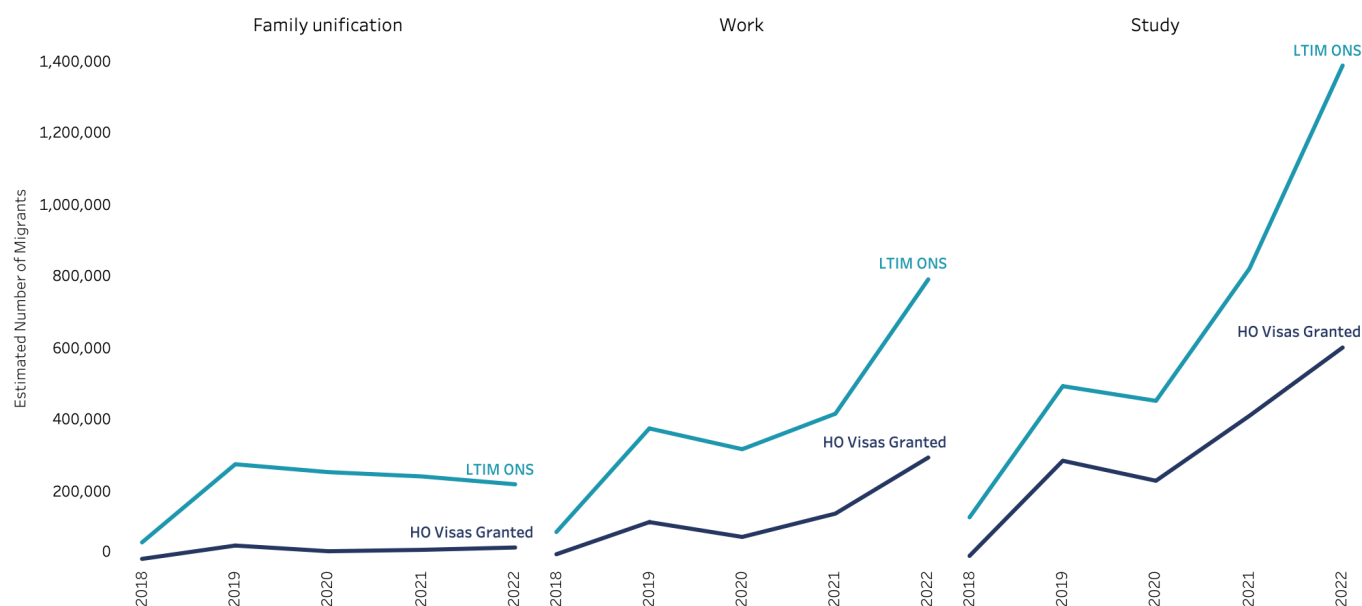
Long-term immigration (LTIM) estimates produced by ONS also reveal the stability and lower levels of family unification to the UK over the past couple of years compared to work and study migration (Figure 2).

The reason why LTIM estimates for family migration are consistently higher than those reported under Home Office data could be due to several factors, including differences in the way the ONS categorises the reasons for migration.

Figure 2

### Estimated non-EU immigration to the UK, by reason of migration and source of data, 2018 to 2022

Home Office visas granted and ONS Estimates of Long Term International Migration



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration System Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas – Applications and Outcomes. Table Vis\_D02, Year ending March 2023; and ONS LTIM Estimates. Table 02, Year ending December 2022.

Notes: Study visas and work visas include main applicants and dependants. The data presented exclude the "Family: other" category, temporary workers and short-term students. LTIM 2022 estimates are classified as "provisional" by the ONS. LTIM estimates include only non-EU migration.



### In 2022, an estimated 3.5 million people living in the UK said they had originally moved to join a British citizen or settled resident

According to the Annual Population Survey, in 2022, an estimated 10 million foreign-born people were living in the UK. Of these, approximately 3.5 million said that they originally moved to the country mainly to join or accompany a British citizen or UK-settled resident. This means that over 35% of all the foreign-born in the UK are family unification migrants.

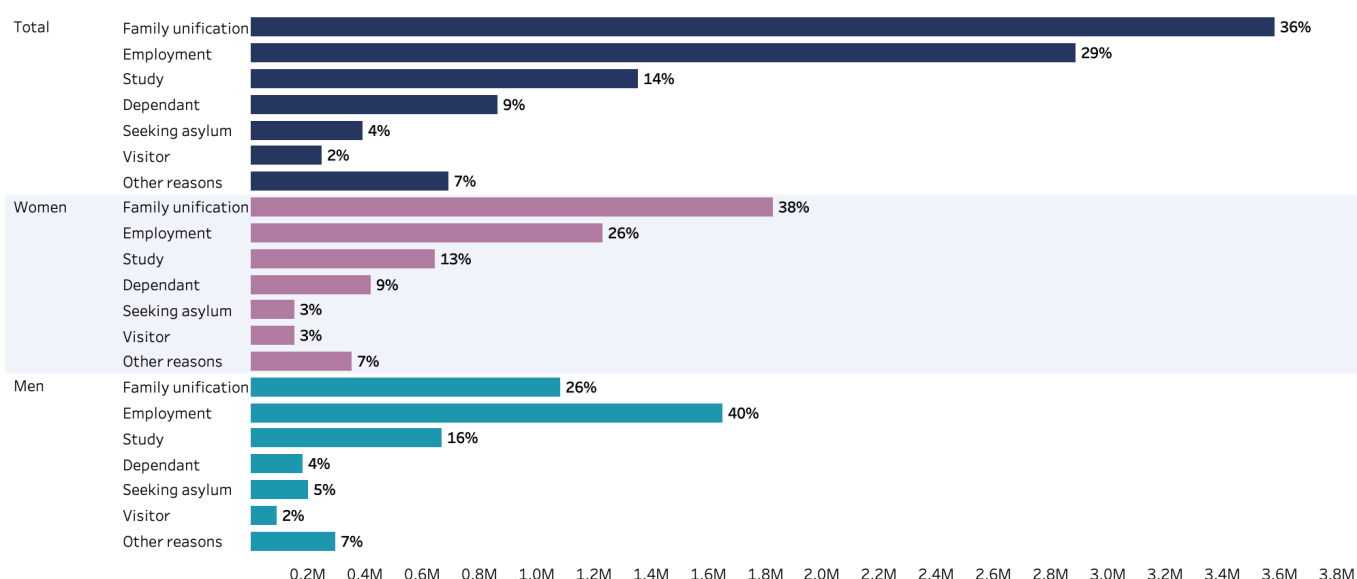
Although family unification makes up a small share of total migrant inflows to the UK (Figure 1), family unification migrants are more likely to settle (see next section). As a result, they make up a larger share of the migrant population living in the UK relative to work migrants or students (Figure 3).

Women are significantly more likely than men to state that they moved to the UK to join a British citizen or settled resident (Figure 3). Among the adult population (aged 18 or older), over 60% of family unification migrants are women.

Figure 3

### Size of the UK's foreign-born population in 2022, by sex and original main reason for migration

The figures by sex include only the adult population (18+)



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of the Annual Population Survey, YE 2022.

Notes: Some residents of communal establishments are excluded from the coverage of this survey. The estimates come with a margin of error, which is not shown. Total figures include children aged 0-17.



### Around eight in ten family unification visa holders are partners of the sponsor

In 2022, approximately 84% of all family unification visa holders were partners of the sponsor, and 15% were children (Home Office Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas, Table Vis\_D02, YE March 2023).

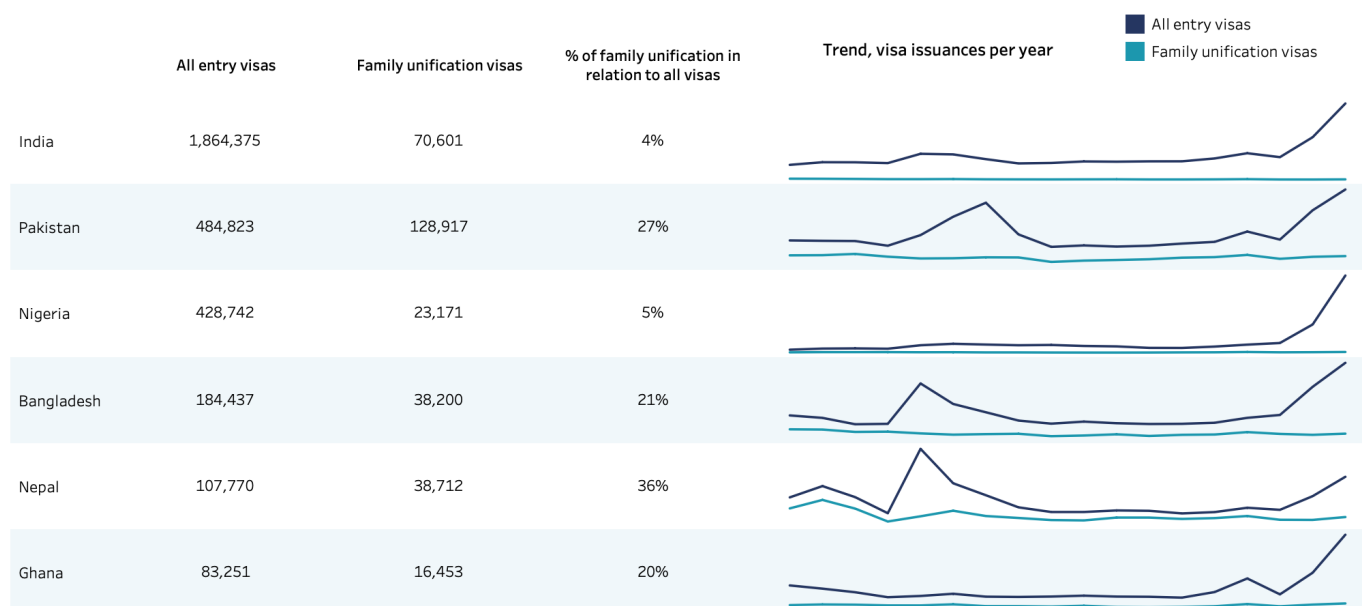
Statistics are not regularly published on the number of adult or elderly dependent relatives (ADRs) admitted to the UK. However, the Home Office (2018) has said that the number of ADR visas issued has been small since July 2012, when new rules came into effect restricting their entry: 2,782 ADR visa applications were made from 9 July 2012 to 31 December 2015, of which 606 were successful. Between 2017 and 2020, 97% of visas applications under this route were refused. According to a [report](#) published by the House of Lords, in 2021 and 2022, only one visa was issued to a parent or grandparent of a British citizen or settled resident under the ADR route. Drawing on qualitative data, the same publication suggested that the low number of ADR visas issued following the implementation of new rules may be attributed to the stringent eligibility criteria for this route. These require the sponsor to demonstrate that they meet minimum financial requirements to care for a relative in the UK while proving that such care is neither available nor affordable in the individual's country of origin.

Most people on family unification visas are women. Of all people granted this type of visa in 2022, 61% were women, 25% were men, and 13% were children. These data align with ONS estimates on the population of family unification migrants by sex, shown in Figure 3.

In 2022, 38% of family unification visas were granted to nationals of South Asian countries, while 19% were granted to nationals of Sub-Saharan African countries. Nearly half of the migrants granted family unification visas in 2022 were from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ghana, and Nigeria. These nationalities are also more likely to come to the UK on study and work visas.

**Table 1****Total family unification and entry visas issued in the UK, by country of nationality, 2005 to 2022**

Selected countries only



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas – Applications and Outcomes. Table Vis\_D02. Year ending March 2023.

Notes: The data presented for family unification visas exclude the "Family: other" category. The data presented for all entry visas exclude the following categories: "Other study", "Other temporary visas", "Temporary workers" and "Visitors".



## People on family unification visas are more likely to settle long-term in the UK than those on work or study visas

Of all people granted a family unification visa in 2012, 82% had citizenship or indefinite leave to remain by 2022. Family unification visa holders are significantly more likely to settle in the UK than holders of work or study visas (Figure 4).

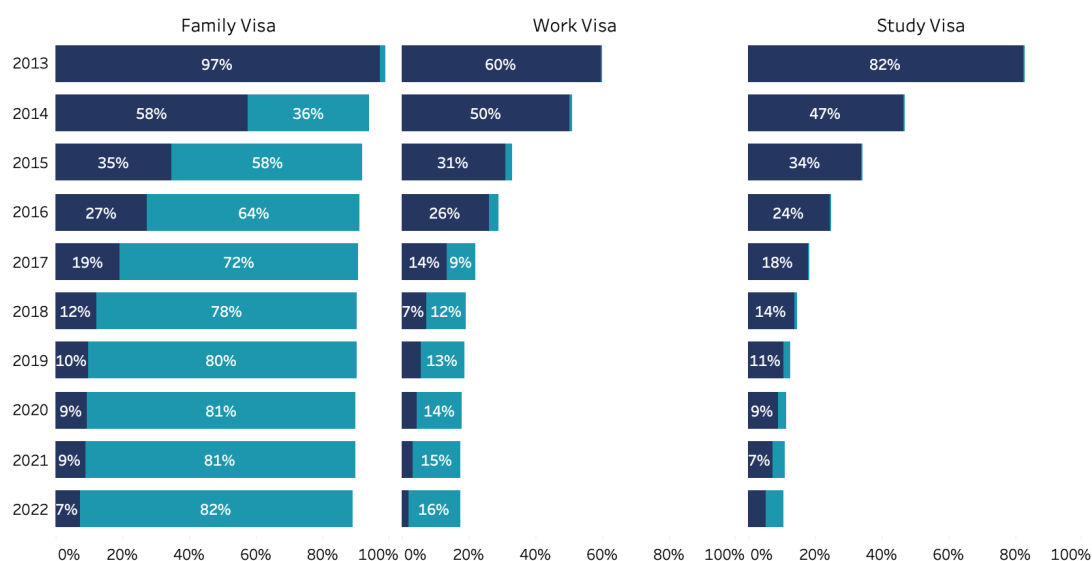


Figure 4

### Share of migrants issued an initial visa in 2012 with permanent status or valid leave to remain in subsequent years, by type of initial leave

Leave at end of year  
 Permanent status  
 Valid leave to remain

Permanent status includes Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and citizenship



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Migrant Journey, Table MJ\_D01. 2022 Report. Note: The data presented exclude the "Family: other" category, temporary workers and short-term students. Work and study visas include main applicants and dependants.



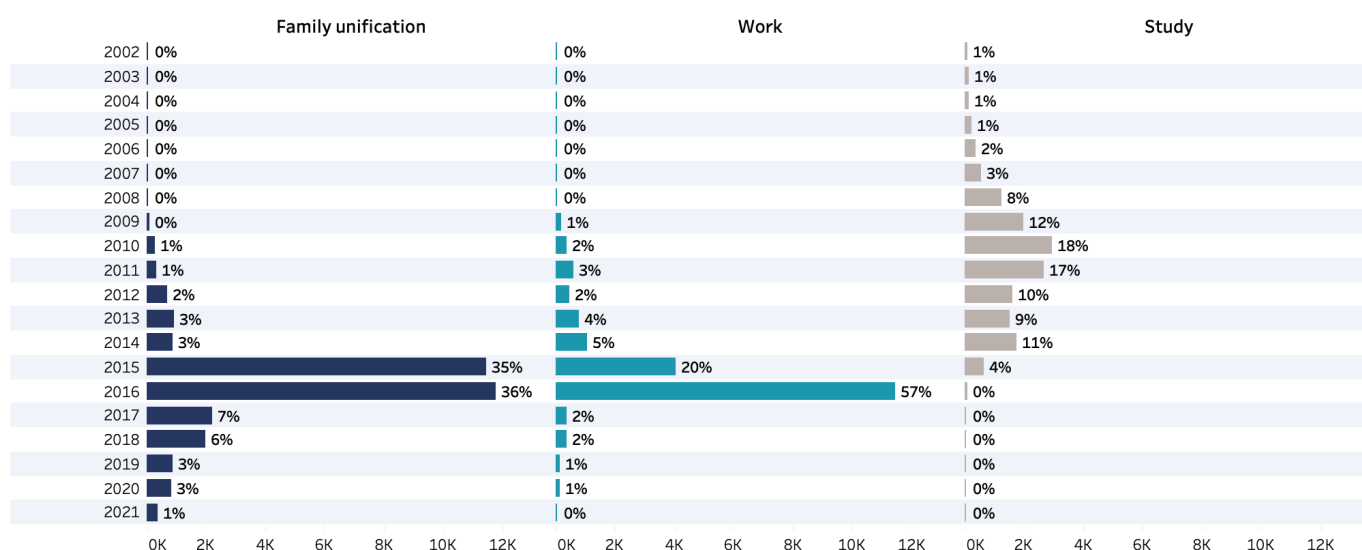
### Family migrants are usually on a five-year route to settlement, though ten-year routes have become more common in recent years

Of the roughly 33,000 family unification visa holders granted settlement in 2022, around three-quarters received their initial visa from 2015 to 2018, consistent with a typical route to settlement of five years (Figure 5). On average, migrants on work or student visas take significantly longer to settle.

Figure 5

### Year of initial visa for migrants granted permanent status in 2022, by type of initial visa and type of application

Permanent status includes ILR and citizenship



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Migrant Journey, Table MJ\_02. 2022 Report. Note: Study visas and work visas include main applicants and dependants. The data presented exclude the "Family: other" category, temporary workers and short-term students.

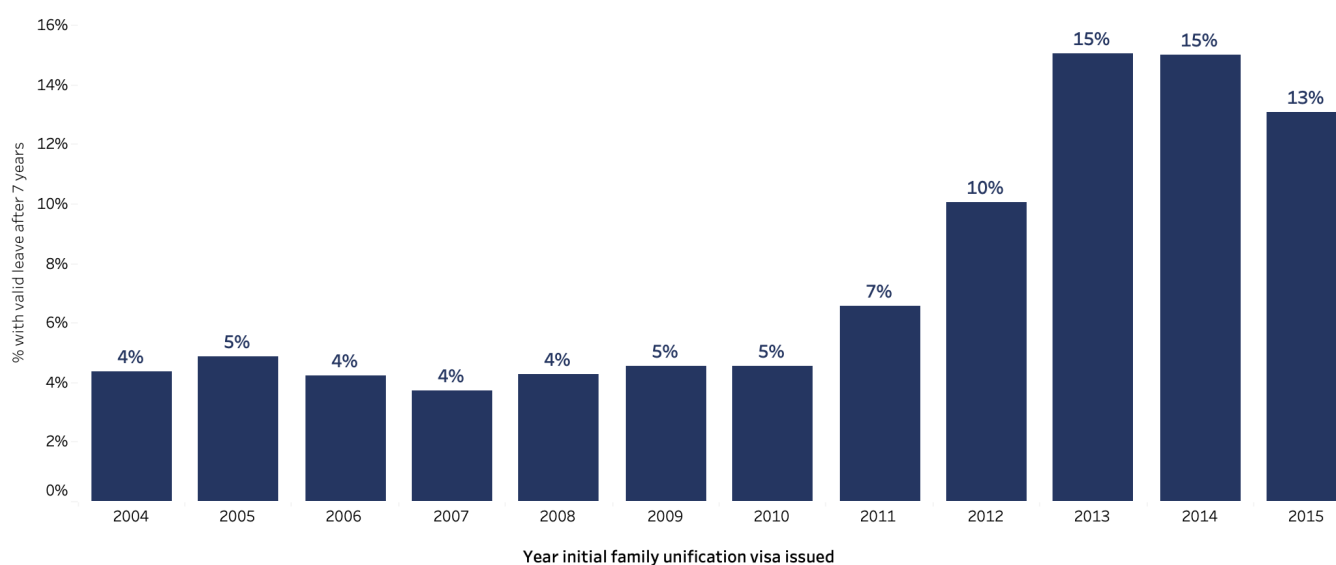


However, in recent years, an increasing share of family unification migrants have been on a ten-year route to settlement. This will not be reflected fully in the settlement statistics for another few years because most are not yet eligible for settlement. However, the increase in individuals taking a longer route to settlement can be seen by looking at the share of people with leave to remain seven years after initially being issued a family unification visa. For example, of the roughly 29,000 people issued a family unification visa in 2014, 15% (around 4,400) had valid leave to remain, but not settlement or citizenship, at the end of 2021 (Figure 6). This share is around three times greater than for cohorts arriving from 2004 to 2010, before the current system of ten-year routes to settlement was introduced.

**Figure 6**

**Percentage of family unification migrants with leave to remain (but not settlement or citizenship) 7 years after receiving their initial visa, by year of initial visa issuance**

Main applicants and dependants



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Migrant Journey, Table MJ\_01. 2022 Report. Note: The data presented excludes dependants joining of accompanying and the “family: other” category.



## The UK has comparatively restrictive economic requirements for the sponsors of family unification migrants

The UK’s main economic requirement for the sponsors of family unification migrants is a minimum income threshold. Since July 2012, if a non-EU citizen applies as a partner of a British citizen or non-British citizen with settlement (i.e., ILR), the sponsor must have an annual income of at least £18,600, or £22,400 if the partner sponsored is bringing one child, plus £2,400 for each of any additional children. For more information on the UK’s minimum income threshold, see The Migration Observatory’s report, [The Minimum Income Requirement for Non-EEA Family Members in the UK](#).

More broadly, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) analyses 56 countries with respect to their policies for integrating migrants. The index comprises eight policy areas, one of which is ‘family reunion’. Within the policy area of family reunion, there are ten policy indicators, covering, for example, eligibility criteria for family migrants; integration requirements for family migrants; economic resources and accommodation requirements for sponsors; and the rights granted by family visas. The MIPEX analysis of these ten indicators ranks the UK as the second most restrictive country of the 56 analysed when it comes to family migration policy.

## Over 90% of the people who enter the UK as families of refugees are women and children

In 2022, the UK issued around 8,100 visas to the family members of refugees, either through refugee family reunion (where family members join those granted asylum or humanitarian protection) or as the dependants of successful main asylum applicants. This represents less than 1% of the total migrant visas issued in the same year.

From 2010 to 2022, the UK issued a total of 257,284 grants of refugee status and other protection. This figure includes people coming to the country as resettled refugees and under the family reunion route. In this period, the

number of grants of protection given to main asylum applicants (107,397) was similar to the number of grants issued to refugees' family members (96,709), either as dependants of main applicants or under the refugee family reunion route (Home Office Statistics, Asylum and Resettlement, Table Asy\_D01, YE March 2023 and Home Office Statistics, Family Reunion visas grants, Table Fam\_D01, YE March 2023).

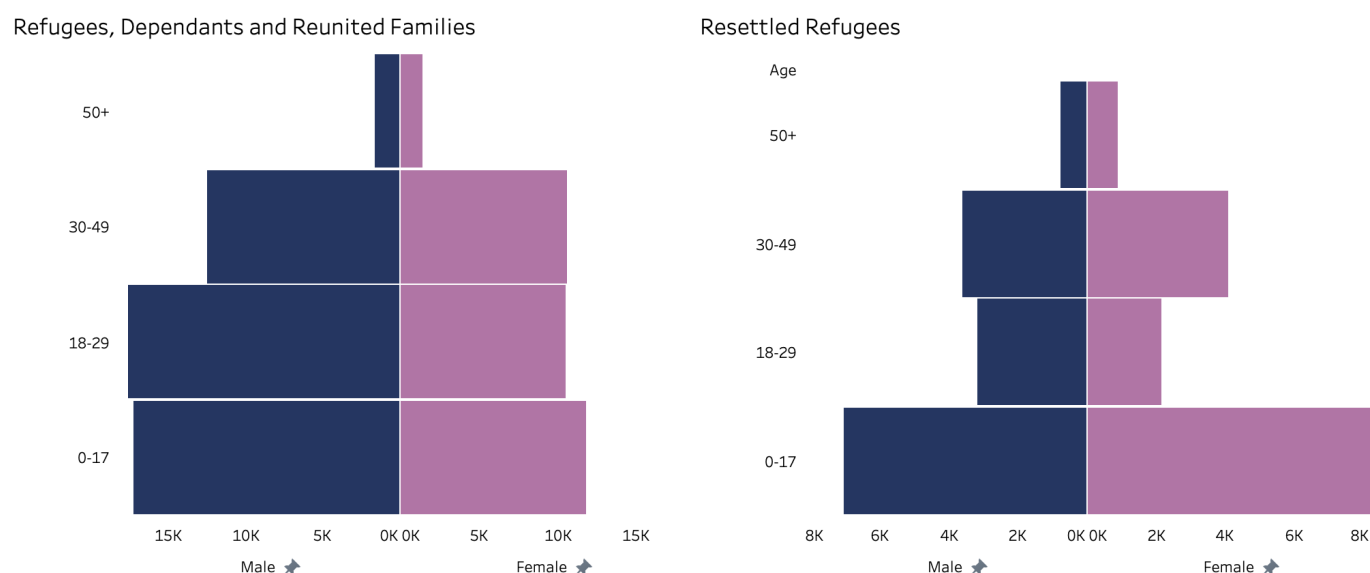
Families of refugees tend to enter the UK after the refugee has arrived in the country and secured asylum. From 2010 to 2022, of the grants of protection issued to family members, approximately 70% were given through family reunion, with the remaining 30% being given to the dependants of main asylum applicants.

From 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2023, over 90% of the people who received permission to live in the UK as close family members of refugees or holders of humanitarian protection (whether as dependants or family reunion beneficiaries) were adult women and children. This is because, in the same period, main applicants tended to be adult men (64%). Men are more likely to flee ahead of their families, often taking long and risky journeys, and then apply for family reunion once they have secured asylum.

Family reunion makes the refugee population in the UK almost gender balanced, and even more evenly distributed across ages than resettlement (Figure 7). (See also the Migration Observatory briefing on [Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK](#).) One of the reasons that refugee family reunion cannot completely mitigate the gender bias seen among refugees is that a significant proportion of main applicants are unaccompanied boys (11%), who are not generally permitted to bring their parents or other family members to the UK.

**Figure 7**

**Age and sex distribution of refugees who arrived in the UK between 1 January 2019 and 31 March 2023, by type of arrival**



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Asylum and Resettlement – Asylum applications, decisions and resettlement, Table Asy\_D01. Year ending March 2023; and Home Office Statistics, Asylum and Resettlement – Family Reunion visa grants, Table Fam\_D01. Year ending March 2023. Note: The charts present aggregated data from 2019 to Q1 2023. Figures for the left-hand chart include family reunion beneficiaries (Table Fam\_D01), and main applicants and dependants who were granted protection and other forms of leave (Table Asy\_D01). Figures for the right-hand chart include resettled refugees (Table Asy\_D01).



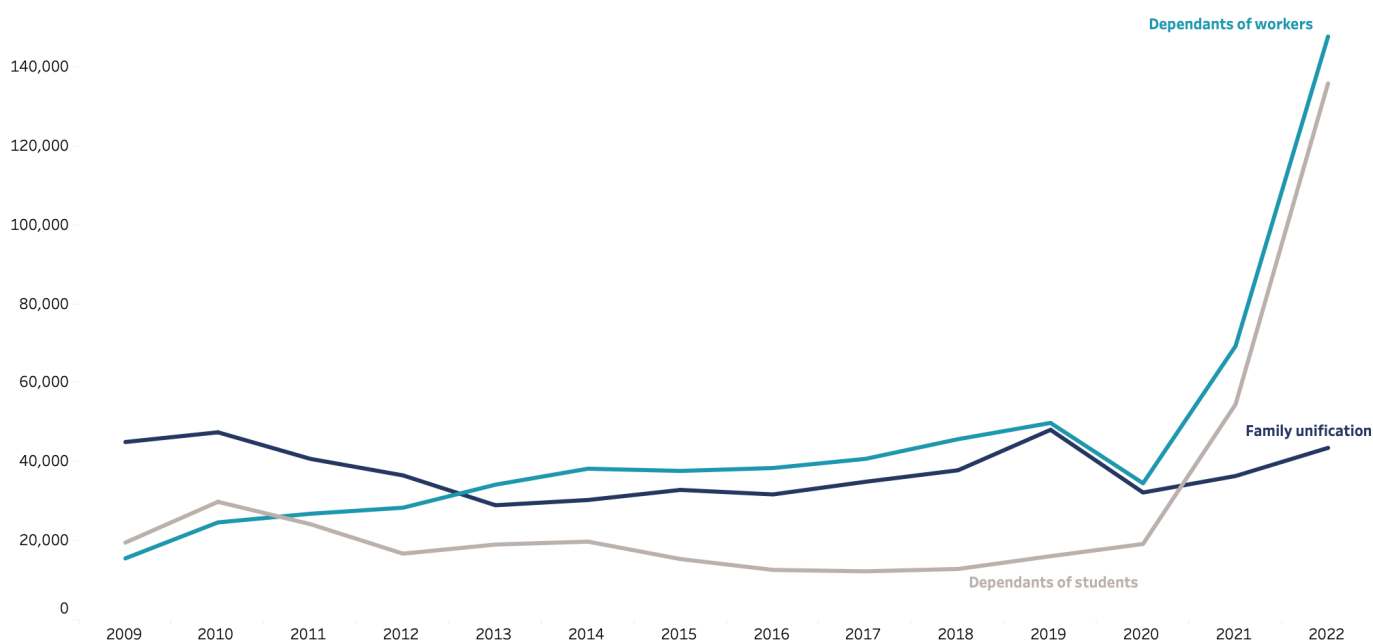
## Since 2020, dependants of workers and students have significantly outnumbered family unification migrants

The migration of dependants is by definition dependent on immigration permission given to main applicants, such as for work or study. Unlike family unification, which has remained relatively constant over the years, the migration of dependants has seen a significant increase since 2020 (Figure 8), which is linked with the growth in visa issuances for work and study visas in the same period. (See the Migration Observatory briefing on [Net Migration to the UK](#).)

**Figure 8**

### Number of visas issued in the UK, by type of visa, 2010 to 2022

Family unification, dependants of workers, and dependants of students



Migration Observatory Analysis of Home Office Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas – Applications and Outcomes. Table Vis\_D02, Year ending March 2023.

Notes: The data presented exclude the "Family: other" category, temporary workers and short-term students.

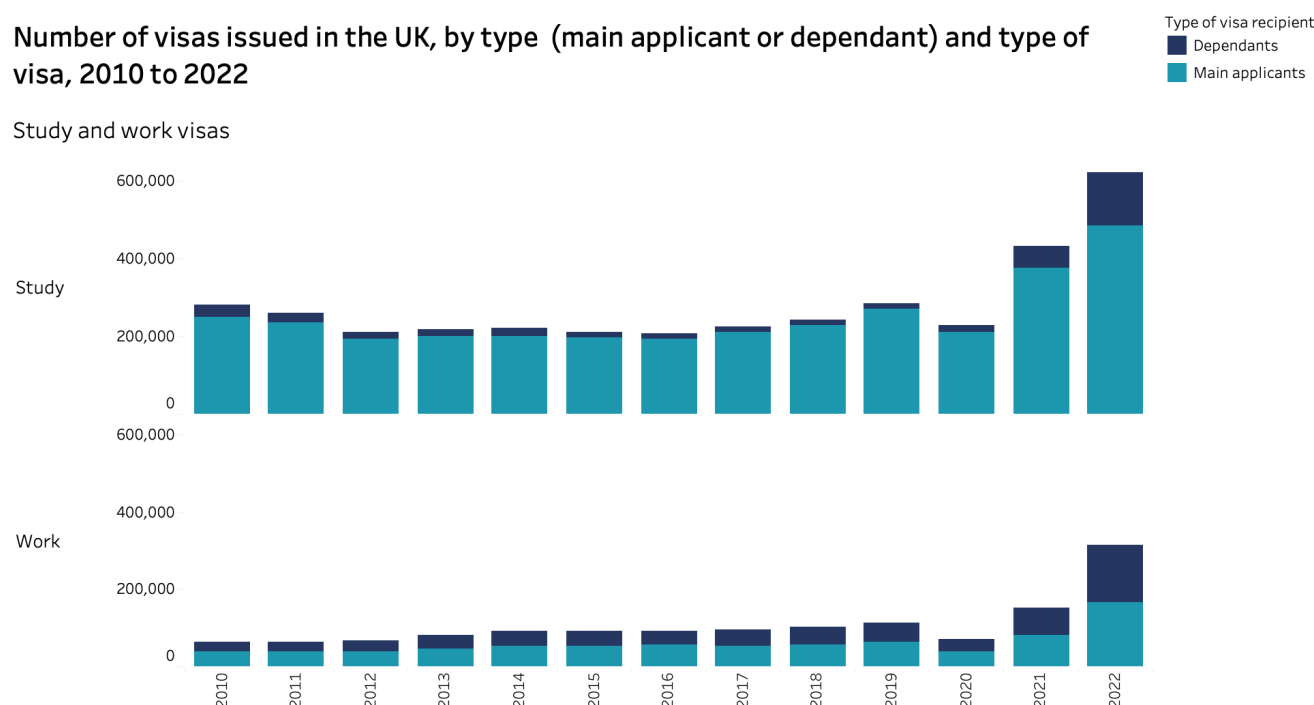


Over the past decade, dependants of workers have consistently accounted for the majority of dependant family migration to the UK, comprising over 60% of all visas in the category in 2017. However, in 2022, there was a notable shift where the share of dependant visas granted to family members of students and workers became quite similar (46% and 43%, respectively). This change can be attributed to two factors: more student visas were being issued in this period, and, among those, a higher proportion were issued to dependants (Figure 9).

While the share of dependant visas granted to sponsored workers has remained relatively constant over the years, there has been a rise in the percentage of dependant visas granted to students since 2021 (Figure 9), reaching over 45% of all student visas issued in the first quarter of 2023. This means that, on average, more students have come to the UK with dependants or that the mean number of dependants per student has increased. This trend is likely to change over the next couple of years, with the implementation of the policy that restricts the right of most students to bring family members, such that only PhD students and master's students on research-based courses (typically lasting two years) will be able to bring their partner and children.

Figure 9

### Number of visas issued in the UK, by type (main applicant or dependant) and type of visa, 2010 to 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Entry Clearance Visas – Applications and Outcomes. Table Vis\_D02. Year ending March 2023. Note: The data presented exclude dependants joining or accompanying, temporary workers, short-term students



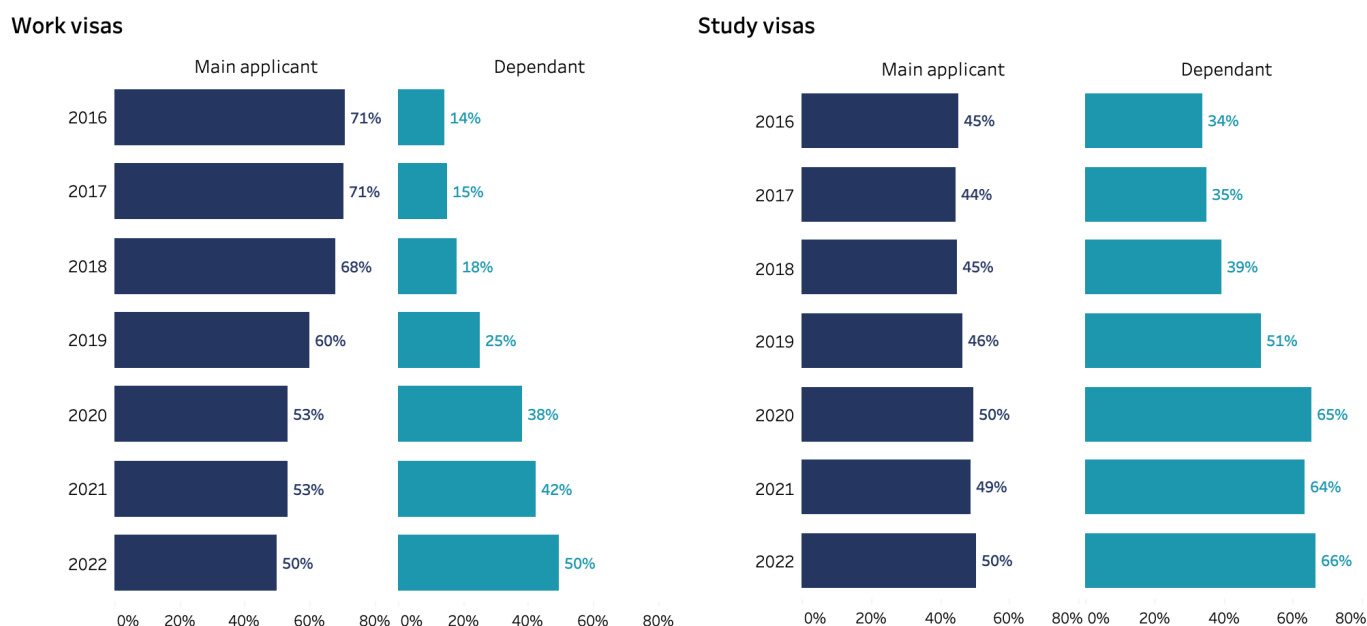
### Since 2016, the share of men among dependants of study and work visa holders has increased significantly

In 2016, only 14% of the dependants of skilled worker visa holders were men (18+). In 2022, 50% were men (Figure 10). There may be several reasons for this trend. First, the share of women who came to the UK as main applicants has risen significantly, going from 30% in 2016 to 50% in 2022. Second, among the women who entered the country as main applicants, more could have come with their male partners. Thirdly, there could have been a rise in the number of men who were accompanied by their same-sex partners.

A similar pattern can be seen among study visa holders. Men represented 34% of dependants in this category in 2016. By 2022, this share had increased to 66%, and now men far outnumber women as study dependants (Figure 10). Interestingly, this occurred even though there are now roughly equal numbers of men than women entering the country as main applicants under the study route. One hypothesis for the rising share of male dependants is that more female students are coming to the UK with their families, rather than alone. This is consistent with the increase in the proportion of study visas granted to dependant children, which went from 3% in 2016 to 18% in 2023.

Figure 10

Share of men among UK visa holders, by type (main applicant or dependant) and type of visa, 2016 to 2022



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Freedom of Information Request 77202, from September 2023. Note: The data presented exclude dependants joining or accompanying, temporary workers, and short-term students. The data only includes adults (18+).



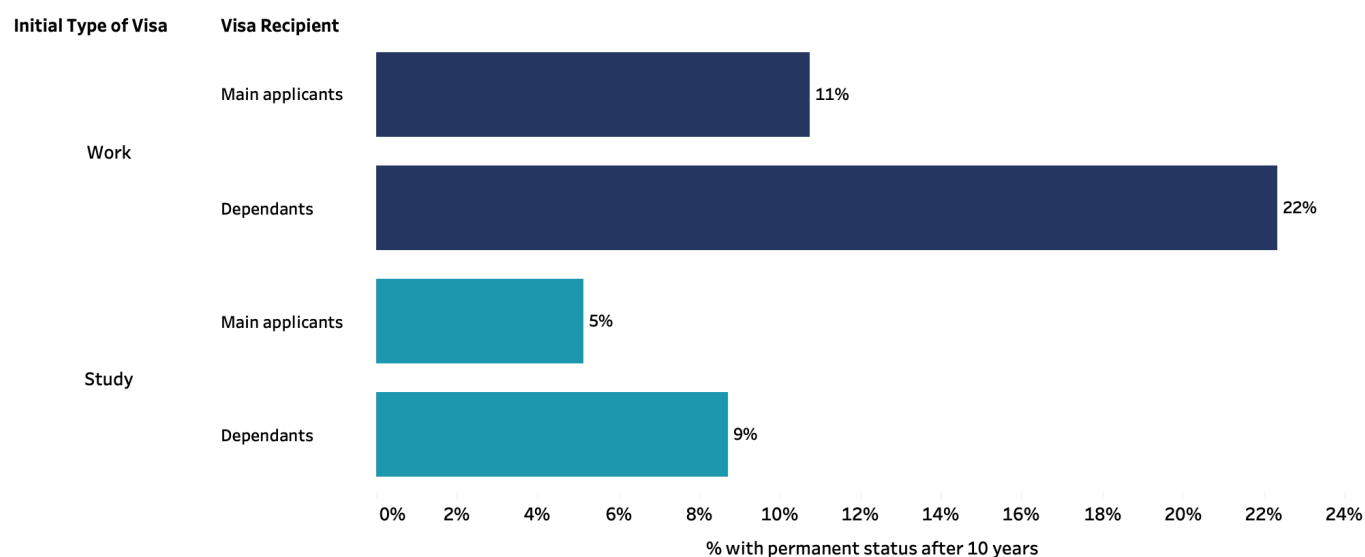
## Work visa holders who come to the UK with dependants are more likely to obtain permanent status than those who come alone

Across all visa categories, dependants are, on average, more likely to obtain permanent status (ILR or citizenship) in the UK than main applicants. We do not have information about settlement rates between dependants and main applicants *within* the same family. However, since dependants have their right of residence tied to the main applicant, these data indicate that main applicants who come with dependants are more likely to get permanent status than those who come alone.

The difference in settlement rates according to the type of visa recipient (main applicant or dependant) is higher for workers than for sponsored students. Study visa holders are unlikely to obtain ILR or citizenship in any scenario (Figure 10). Among work visa holders, dependants are, on average, twice as likely to settle as main applicants (Figure 10). The greater likelihood of families settling in the UK compared to single individuals may be due to several factors, including that those who come with families [may already have plans to settle](#) and that families may be less mobile than single individuals.

**Figure 11****Immigration status in 2022 for individuals granted visas in 2012, by type of visa recipient and type of initial visa**

Work and study visas



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Migrant Journey. Table MJ\_01, 2022 Report.

Note: The data presented exclude temporary students, investors, business development, talent, other work visas and extensions and dependants joining or accompanying.

**A partner who comes to the UK on a family unification visa could face immigration costs of around £12,500 on a typical route to citizenship**

People who want to bring family members to the UK can face substantial costs, whether they are British people using the family reunion route, or whether they are migrants bringing dependants with them on a work or study visa. Figure 12 illustrates the amount of money that different types of families would need to pay in visa and nationality and Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) fees for them to become UK citizens. The actual amount will vary depending on the initial type of entry leave, since some visa fees are higher, and some settlement pathways are longer than others (e.g., workers are typically on a five-year route to settlement, while students are typically on a ten-year route to settlement because their time as a student does not count towards the five years of residence that is generally required for settlement).

According to visa fee levels at the time of publication and the Immigration Health Surcharge (HIS) costs expected for 2024 under new government [proposals](#), a partner who comes to the UK on a family unification visa would need to pay around £12,500 in visa fees to become British citizens; if they come to the UK with dependent children, these fees will be significantly higher. Families consisting of two adults and two children who arrive in the UK on a skilled worker visa, would incur over £41,000 in immigration costs under 2024 expected fees. This represents a 30% increase in relation to September 2023.

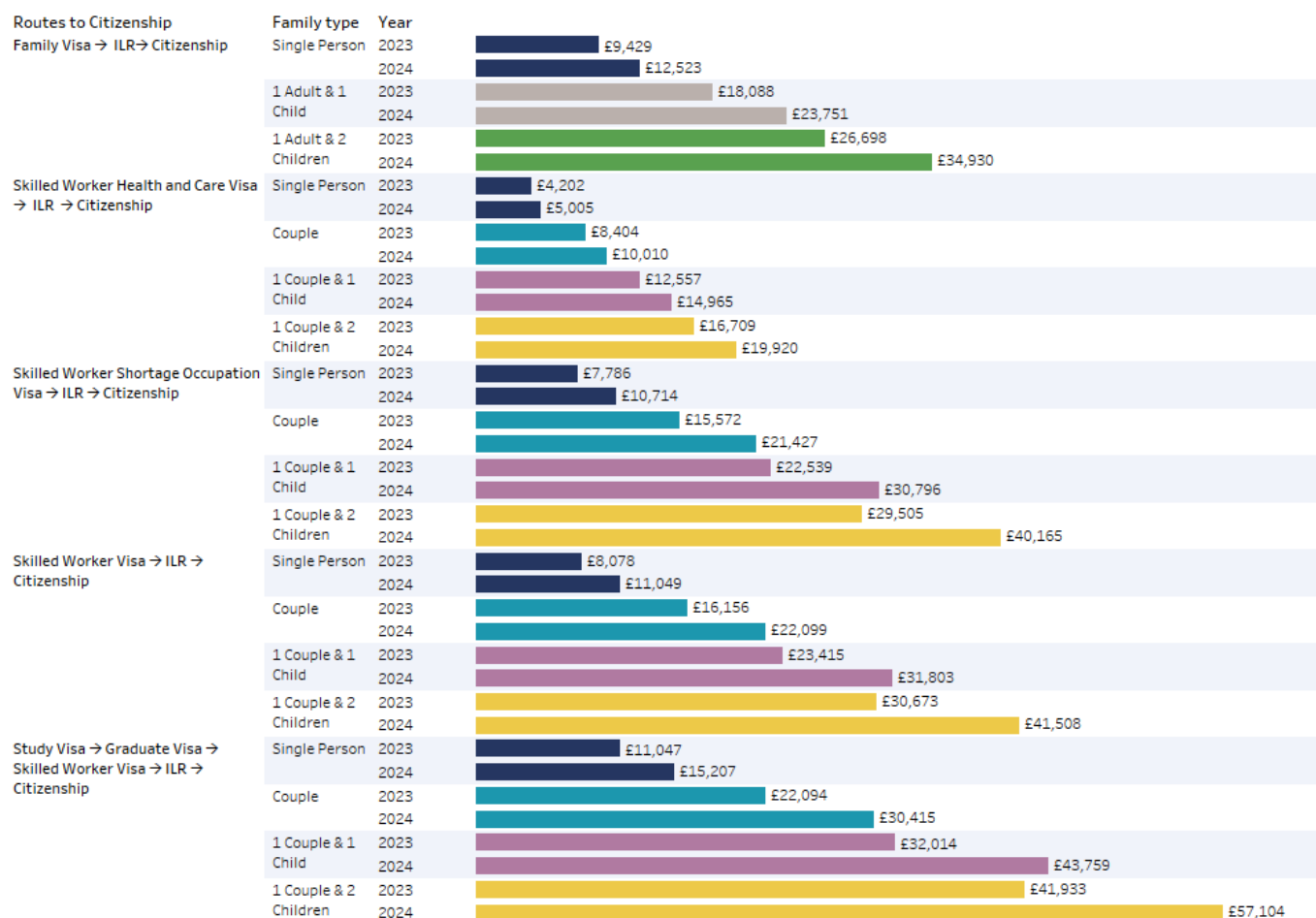
In the case of workers, it is unclear what percentage of visa and IHS fees are covered by employers, and whether they typically pay only for the fees of the main applicant or also include dependants. As a result, visa costs can have a varying impact on different immigrant groups, depending on factors such as work arrangements, entry visa category, and family size.



Figure 12

### Total immigration fees on routes to citizenship, by type of initial visa, family type and date

Cost of routes to citizenship for different types of family, as at September 2023 and expected for 2024



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of UK Immigration and Nationality and IHS fees.

Notes: 2023 costs include visa, ILR, nationality and IHS fees as at September 2023. 2024 costs include visa, ILR and nationality fees as at October 2023, and expected IHS costs for 2024 under new government proposals. These are potential routes to citizenship. For Skilled Workers, it assumes a person who applied for their initial leave outside the UK and received a certificate of sponsorship for a duration of over three years. As for sponsored students, it considers a person who applied for a one-year visa outside the UK, transitioned to a two-year graduate visa while in the UK, and then applied for a skilled worker visa within the UK, obtaining a certificate of sponsorship for over three years. In the case of a family-visa holder, it considers a person who applied for the visa outside the UK and extended their stay after two years and nine months. The exact costs of new visas fees have not been announced yet. The calculations are based on the minimum expected fee increase announced by the Home Office on 13 July 2023.



## Evidence Gaps and Limitations

There is no single definition of family migration used across all datasets, making evidence from different datasets inconsistent with each other.

Some dependant visas are recorded as “Joining or Accompanying” rather than being categorised according to the tier of the main applicant. Differences in recording protocols over the years could have an impact on the figures presented.

In the entry clearance dataset published by the Home Office, family reunion beneficiaries (refugees’ families) are counted under the “family: other” category together with family visa beneficiaries under the Parent Route. We have been told by the Home Office that the vast majority of family: other correspond to family reunion visas. For this reason, we excluded the “family: other” category from our estimates on family unification, even though this category could include a small number of cases of family visa holders.

There are a couple of limitations regarding APS data, summarised [here](#). In addition, it is possible that people do not correctly state their reason for coming to the country, particularly if they arrived in the UK a long time ago, which could impact family migration estimates.

There are substantial gaps in the evidence about the impacts of family migration policies in the UK. For example, it is currently not possible to estimate reliably how many people have been prevented from coming to the UK due to policies such as the minimum income requirement. [Previous estimates](#) looked at the decline in family visa grants immediately after the policy was introduced in 2012, but a decade later it is more difficult to make assumptions about how many people would receive visas under a different policy regime.

Because fee waivers are not available for ILR applications, family members who cannot afford the fee for an application for ILR sometimes remain in the UK with temporary immigration status. This may lead to an increase in the duration of routes to settlement for family member. However, published Home Office statistics do not allow us to assess the number of people in this situation.

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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.



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[www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)

## About the authors

Nuni Jorgensen  
Researcher,  
The Migration Observatory  
[nuni.jorgensen@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:nuni.jorgensen@compas.ox.ac.uk)

Peter William Walsh  
Senior Researcher  
The Migration Observatory  
[peter.walsh@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:peter.walsh@compas.ox.ac.uk)

## Press contact

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

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