



BRIEFING

Asylum in the UK

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This briefing examines the UK asylum system, providing statistics on the main characteristics of refugees and asylum seekers, the financial costs of the asylum system, and asylum decision-making.

Key Points

The number of asylum claims peaked in 2024 and stayed high in 2025

Most asylum seekers arrive in the UK through unauthorised routes but entries on visas became more common after 2022

Pakistani nationals were the largest group of asylum seekers in the UK in 2025

The share of asylum applications decided within six months has increased significantly since 2024, following several years of longer decision times

Refusals have generally been processed faster than grants, except during the backlog peak

The financial cost of operating the UK's asylum system was around £4.8 billion in the financial year 2024/25

A majority of people granted refugee status in the UK are men. The suspension of the refugee family reunion route is expected to shift the gender balance of the refugee population in the UK further in this direction

Refugees have lower qualifications and employment rates than the UK born. They also tend to be employed in low-paid occupations

Compared against EU countries, the UK ranked 5th for number of people claiming asylum in 2025, and 12th when adjusted for population size

Understanding the policy

Asylum

Asylum is the protection that is granted by a government to a person who has left their country to escape a serious threat to their life or liberty. This protection arises out of the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, and people who qualify for it are called refugees. The word refugee is sometimes used more generally to refer to anyone who has fled their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster, but they are not legally refugees 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 legally obliged to make their asylum claim in the first safe country they arrive in after leaving their country of origin, and many UK asylum seekers pass through—or spend time living in—safe countries such as France on the way. 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). For example, under an EU law known as the [Dublin III Regulation](#), asylum seekers can, 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 usually not possible to apply from outside the country, such as at a UK embassy abroad. A recent (and limited) exception to this has been the UK's [one-in-one-out returns deal](#) with France, which since July 2025 has enabled some people who arrived in the UK by small boat to be returned to France, in exchange for the UK receiving an equal number of migrants from France, who may apply to come to the UK legally where they can then apply for asylum. 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 given the right to live, work, access mainstream benefits, and eventually apply for permanent residence. Second, the applicant can be judged not to qualify for refugee status but be 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. Dependents in 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. They can apply for free accommodation and asylum support on the basis of being destitute. This is currently set at £49.18 per person per week (around £7 per day). Cash support is reduced (to £9.95 per person per week) if their accommodation provides meals.

The Home Office may grant an asylum applicant permission to work 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 professional occupations, social care and some skilled trades). Asylum seekers are permitted to study while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim.

In November 2025, the government [proposed](#) removing the statutory duty to support destitute asylum seekers and introducing powers to withdraw support from those working illegally.

Dispersal

Since 2000, the UK has operated a policy of dispersal across the UK of asylum applicants who require accommodation, to prevent London and the South East from being overburdened. Applicants have no choice over where they live; placements are arranged through negotiations between local authorities, the Home Office, and private contractors. While policy traditionally relied on long-term private rentals, there has been a marked shift towards hotel use since 2020, driven by a growing backlog and housing shortages.

In July 2025, the government [announced](#) plans to end hotel use, including a new model developed with local authorities to expand dispersal accommodation, though details remained unclear as of April 2026. For more details, see our briefing on [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#).

Recent policy developments regarding asylum

The current and previous governments have introduced a range of measures intended to reduce the number of people arriving without permission and subsequently claiming asylum.

In December 2025, the Labour government enacted the Border Security, Asylum, and Immigration Act. 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. In July 2025, the UK government announced a new [deal](#) with France to return some people who arrive by small boat, in exchange for accepting an equal number of asylum seekers from France.

In September 2025, the UK's Labour government [suspended](#) the refugee family reunion route, which had allowed recognised refugees and people granted humanitarian protection to bring their immediate family members to the UK without meeting income or language requirements that apply to the partners of British citizens and settled residents. The government stated that high numbers of people seeking asylum and sponsoring family members had increased pressure on public services. See our commentary on the [UK's new approach to refugee family reunion](#).

Alongside these measures, the government [introduced](#) “emergency brakes” on visas for nationalities identified as having higher rates of claiming asylum after entering through authorised routes. In March 2026, it suspended sponsored study visas for citizens of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan, as well as work visas for Afghans.

From March 2026, the government [restricted](#) refugee status so that it no longer confers five years' permission to stay in the UK, after which refugees could apply for permanent status (settlement, or ‘indefinite leave to remain [ILR]’) without paying fees or meeting language requirements that apply to other migrants. Instead, refugees are granted 30 months' permission to stay, which must be renewed every 30 months for as long as it remains unsafe for them to return to their country of origin. The government has indicated that, where it considers return to be safe, it will seek to return individuals to their country of origin. It has also said that it plans to increase the standard qualifying period for settlement from five years to twenty years, with exceptions for people who are working or studying, but details of the policy were not yet available at the time of writing. See our commentary, [Changes to Settlement, for more information on the proposals](#).

In June 2026, the government introduced a new [Immigration and Asylum Bill](#), which proposed further changes to the asylum system. The Bill would replace the existing immigration tribunal with a new Independent Immigration Appeals Authority (IIAA) to hear asylum and immigration appeals, as part of the government's plans to streamline the appeals process. It would also reform the rules on asylum accommodation by allowing the Home Office to require recognised refugees with sufficient financial resources to repay some of the cost of the accommodation and support they received while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. The Bill does not specify how much people would be required to repay, although the government's [accompanying policy](#) announcement said that the average repayment would be around £10,000. People who would be left destitute would be exempt from the repayment requirement. Recognised refugees who are required to repay these costs but do not do so could be prevented from obtaining Indefinite Leave to Remain until the debt has been repaid. As of July 2026, the Bill was progressing through Parliament.

Refugee resettlement and humanitarian routes

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.

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

Refugee resettlement and these bespoke humanitarian routes are collectively described as “safe and legal routes”. This briefing focuses on asylum only.

Understanding the evidence

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 grant 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 grant 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. These data provide a better indication of grant rates than data on initial decisions. They exclude withdrawn and pending applications because these applications have not received a decision.

This briefing uses data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on the main reasons foreign-born UK residents came to the country to analyse the qualification levels. 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.

For employment outcomes of refugees, this briefing uses results from the Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) dataset. The RIO dataset is a linked administrative dataset combining Home Office refugee records with Census 2021 and other government data sources, enabling analysis of integration outcomes such as employment, education, housing, and health. This briefing focuses on the asylum-route refugee cohort – people granted refugee status in the UK between 2015 and 2020 – using linked Census 2021 data for England and Wales. The dataset is based on matched records rather than the full refugee population, meaning some people are not included due to non-linkage, absence from the Census, or leaving the UK.

How has the number of asylum claims changed over time?

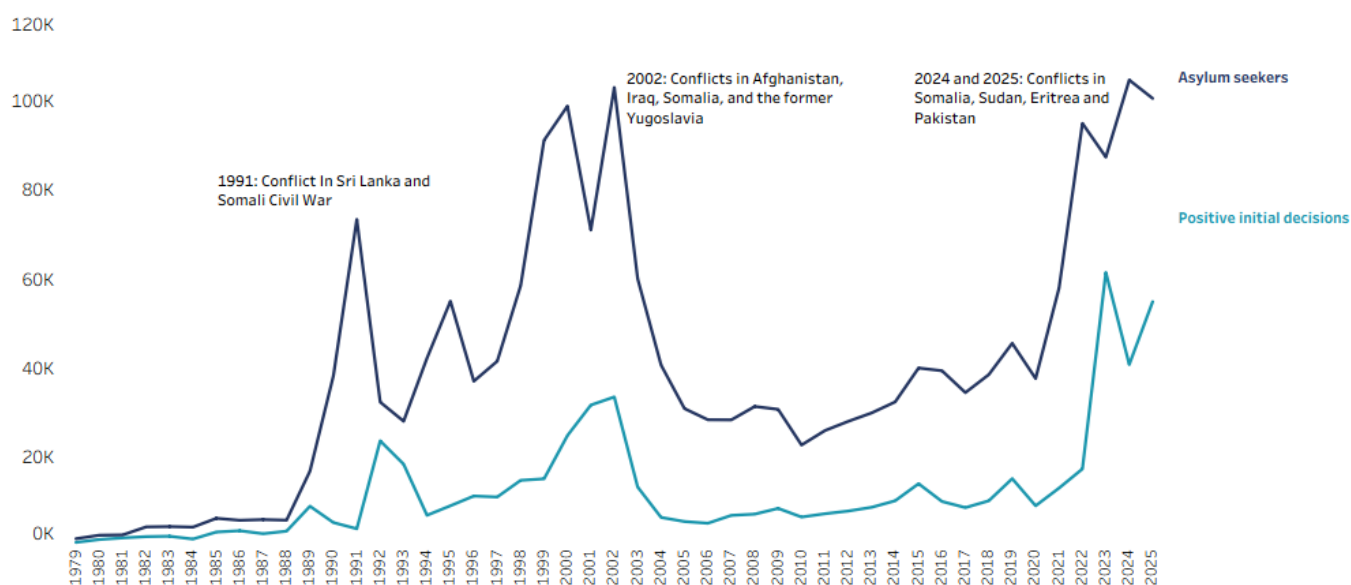
In 2024, around 105,000 people claimed asylum in the UK, the highest number since records began in 1979. This surpassed the previous record of around 103,000 people in 2002, which was driven by wars in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Figure 1). In 2025, 101,000 people claimed asylum in the UK, which continued to be high by historical standards.

Asylum migration is driven by several factors, including poverty, inequality, and conflict. Changes over time in the number of people claiming asylum in the UK [are driven](#) in large part by geopolitical events, as well as changes in entry routes, networks, and, to some extent, policy. For example, the spike in people who came to the UK to seek asylum from 1998 to 2002 comprised mainly nationals of Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia, which were then sites of war (Figure 1). From 2022 onwards, the rise in asylum claims has similarly been shaped by global events, including ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and rising instability in the Horn of Africa and South Asia. Note that not all people from unstable or conflict-prone countries qualify for asylum.

Figure 1

Number of people who claimed asylum and positive initial decisions in the UK, 1979 to 2025

Main applicants and dependants; positive decisions are grants of asylum or other permission to stay



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics: for asylum seekers and positive initial decisions, 1979–2000: Table as_02 (June 2019), and for 2001–2024, Table Asy_D02 (December 2025).

Note 'Other leave' comprises grants of humanitarian protection, discretionary leave, leave under family or private life rules, UASC leave, leave outside the rules, Calais leave, and exceptional leave to remain. Grants are at initial decision; the number of people granted some form of asylum-related leave will be higher if appeals are taken into account.



How do asylum seekers arrive in the UK?

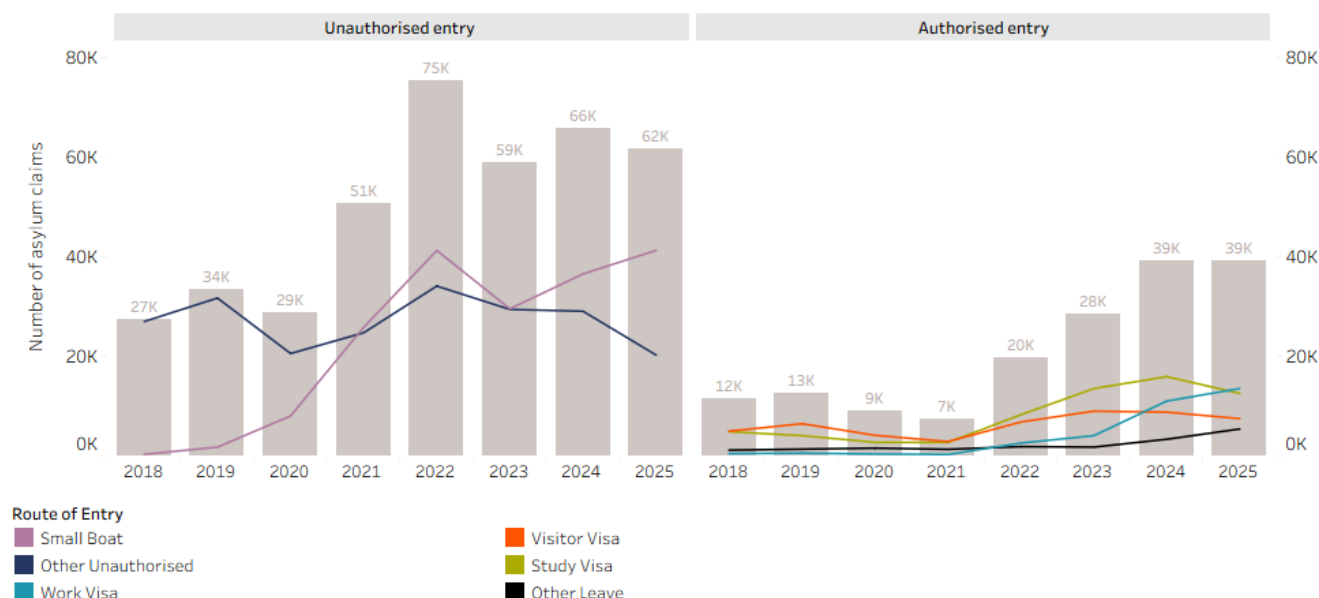
Most asylum seekers arrive in the UK through unauthorised routes, which is where the applicant enters the UK without the appropriate visa. In 2025, 52% of those claiming asylum had entered via an unauthorised route, including 41% by small boat. However, applications from people entering on a visa, which is an authorised route, have become more common from 2022 onwards. The share of asylum applications where the applicant first entered on a visa rose from 30% in 2018 to 39% in 2025 (Figure 2). Among these, work and study visas were the most common routes of entry.

According to the [Home Office](#), certain nationalities of asylum claimants were significantly more likely to have entered the UK on a visa or other forms of leave in the year ending 2025, including nationals of Pakistan (89%) and Nigeria (87%). Bangladesh (85%) and India (71%).

Figure 2

People claiming asylum by route and mode of entry to the UK and year

2018 to 2025. Routes of entry include small boats, other unauthorised routes, study visas, work visas, visitor visas, and other types of leave



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Asy_D01a (December 2025). Notes: Data include both main applicants and dependants. "Other unauthorised routes" include clandestine routes (for example, people entering concealed in cars or lorries), people who entered without relevant documentation (such as those refused at the border), and other unauthorised entry routes, such as people entering through Common Travel Area routes without valid permission, UK-born children of asylum seekers or refugees, and claims that could not be matched to a recorded route of entry.



What were the top nationalities of asylum seekers in 2025?

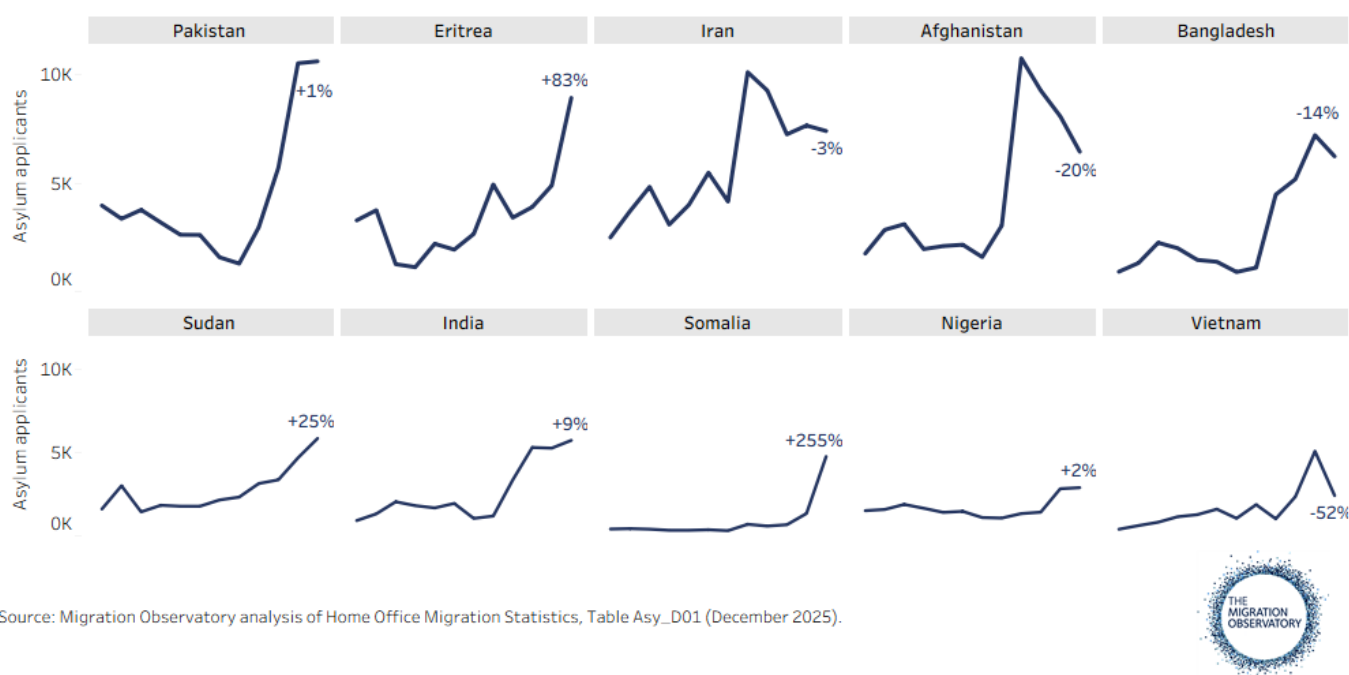
Among the top countries of origin in 2025, asylum claims increased most sharply among Somali (+255%), Eritrean (+83%), and Sudanese (+25%) nationals compared to 2024 (Figure 3). These increases are driven by a combination of ongoing armed conflict and political instability in the Horn of Africa.

Claims from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian nationals also increased markedly from 2022 to 2025. By 2025, Pakistan had become the largest country of origin for people seeking asylum in the UK (Figure 3). Globally, the drivers of migration from Pakistan [are mixed](#), including economic pressures such as inflation and limited job opportunities, alongside reports of political persecution and restrictions on political activity, although it is not known how these factors are reflected in the profiles of those arriving in the UK. In 2025, around one-third of Pakistani asylum applicants received a positive initial decision (Table 1).

Figure 3

Number of people who claimed asylum in the UK, by nationality, 2014 to 2025

Main applicants and dependants. Top 10 nationalities in 2025. Percentage change in relation to previous year



Which nationalities had the highest and lowest grant rates in 2025?

Table 1 shows the ten most common countries of nationality of people (main applicants and dependants) who applied for asylum in the UK in 2025.

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 four-year period 2020 to 2024, the share of Sudanese and Eritrean nationals who had received a grant of asylum or other permission by September 2023 was 99% and 94% (after appeal), while for Indian nationals, it was 4% (Table 1). Sudanese and Eritrean nationals also currently have the highest grant rates at initial decision, with 94% and 87% of decided applications resulting in a grant in 2025.

It is important to note that the difference between the initial decision grant rate in 2025 and the overall grant rates for the 2020-2024 period reflects both the impact of appeals and shifts in grant rates over time. As shown in Figure 5, in a later section of this briefing, 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 2025

Country	Asylum seekers in 2025	% of people seeking asylum in 2025	Initial decision grant rate for main applicants in 2025	% of 2020-24 main applicants ultimately granted asylum or other leave	Trend, 2001–2025
Pakistan	10,638	11%	35.4%	52%	
Afghanistan	6,462	6%	33.7%	68%	
Iran	7,419	7%	58.5%	83%	
India	5,751	6%	0.5%	4%	
Bangladesh	6,247	6%	15.7%	24%	
Eritrea	8,948	9%	87.5%	94%	
Sudan	5,869	6%	94.4%	99%	
Vietnam	2,428	2%	19.0%	39%	
Nigeria	2,904	3%	27.7%	41%	
Somalia	4,777	5%	35.0%	59%	

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Asy_D01 (December 2025); Table Asy_D02 (December 2025); and Table Asy_D04 (December 2025).

Note: 'Asylum seekers' comprises main applicants and dependants. 'Share ultimately granted asylum or other leave' is the share of applications (main applicants) received in 2020 to 2024 inclusive that had resulted in a grant of asylum or other leave as of December 2025, taking into account appeals to the First-tier Tribunal but not higher courts, and excluding applications that were withdrawn or are pending.



How have asylum grant rates changed over time?

In 2022, the share of asylum applications (main applicants) receiving a grant at the initial decision rose to a record high of 76%, which was much higher than in previous years. In 2018, the initial decision grant rate was 33% (Figure 5). Many factors could have driven the change. One contributing factor, but not the only explanation, was an increase in the number of nationalities whose asylum application grant rate is typically higher than average, such as Iranians, Syrians and Eritreans. From 2018 to 2022, the grant rate also increased for people of the same nationality in most cases (Figure 5).

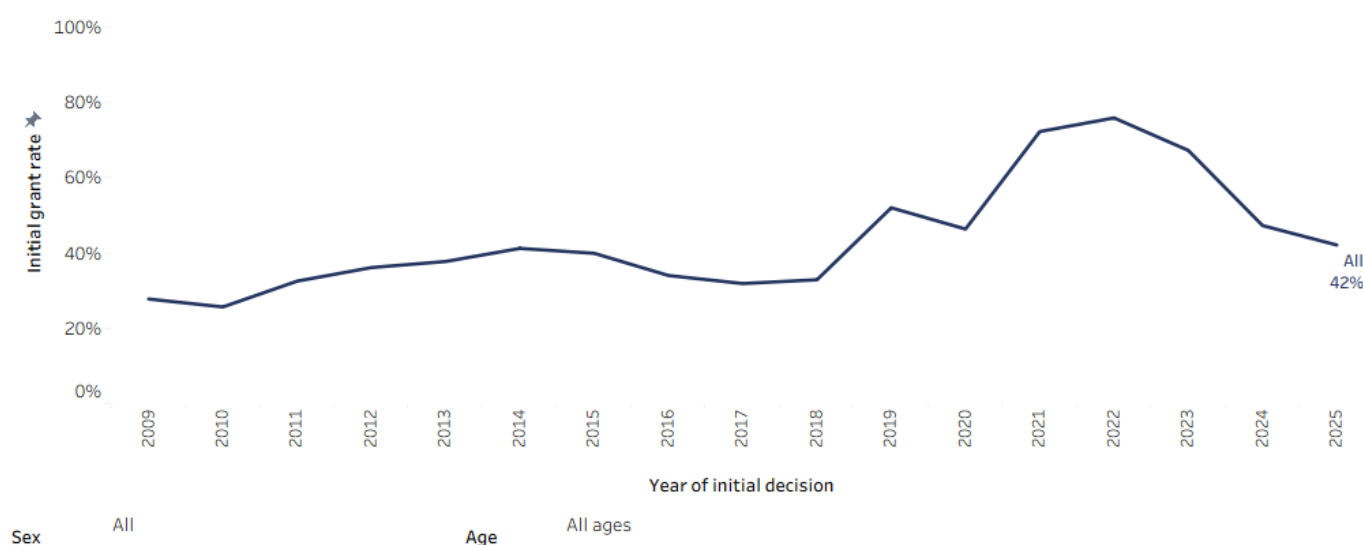
This upward trend ended in 2023, when the percentage of successful applications at the initial decision stage dropped to 67%, declining further to 42% in 2025 (Figure 4).

Data from 2025 show that asylum grant rates at initial decision were broadly similar for men and women (Figure 4), although differences are more pronounced among younger (under 30) and older (over 70) applicants. Overall, 45% of women received a positive decision compared with 41% of men. Among those aged 18–29, the gap is wider, with 51% of women receiving a positive decision compared with 41% of men.

Figure 4

Share of asylum seekers receiving a grant of asylum-related permission to stay *at initial decision*, per year, by age and sex, 2009 to 2025

Main applicants only



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Asy_D02 (December 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 grant rates may be linked to [changes](#) introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA), which raised the standard of proof in asylum claims. Applicants are now required to demonstrate, “on the balance of probabilities”, that they would face persecution if returned to their country of origin – a higher threshold than the previous “reasonable degree of likelihood” standard (see ‘Understanding the Policy’ above). Among the top 10 nationalities of asylum seekers in 2025, all experienced rising grant rates between 2018 and 2022, followed by a decline from 2023, except for Sudanese nationals (Figure 5).

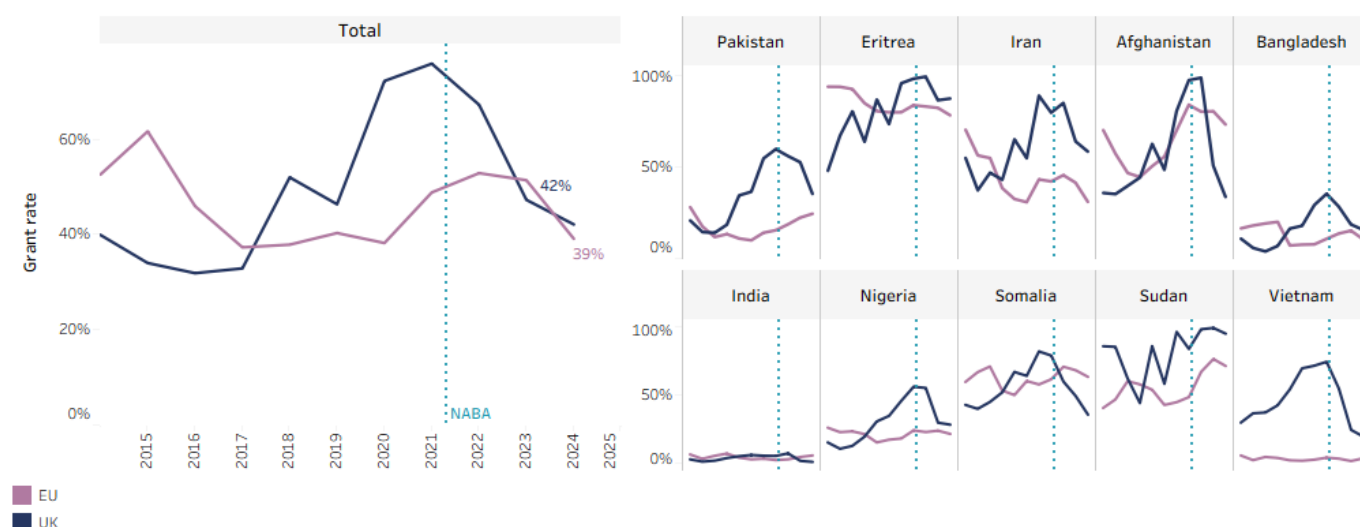
Since 2018, the UK has had higher grant rates than the EU for most of the top nationalities seeking protection in the UK. As grant rates have fallen in the UK, the gap between UK and EU outcomes has narrowed – although in 2024 it remained substantially higher for Iranian, Pakistani, Sudanese, and Vietnamese nationals (Figure 5). The exception is Afghan asylum seekers, who had much lower grant rates in the UK (51%) compared with the EU (81%) in 2024. As of April 2026, EU-level data on decisions for 2025 were not yet available.

Overall, the UK’s grant rate in 2024 (47%) was slightly below the EU average (51%). The overall 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 5

Share of asylum seekers receiving a grant of asylum-related permission to stay *at initial decision* in the UK, EU and selected countries, per year, by nationality, 2015 to 2025

Main applicants and dependants. Totals include all nationalities; detailed figures are shown for the top 10 nationalities in the UK in 2025.



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Asy_D02 (December 2025) and Eurostat statistics, 'First instances decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex', date of retrieval: 30/03/2026. Notes: includes main applicants and dependants and may differ from previous figures on grant rates that refer only to main applicants. Grants includes all people receiving a *positive grant*, which includes refugee status, authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons, or any other kind of permission to stay. The success rate of applications in any year cannot be calculated by dividing the number of grants by the number of applications, because grants will be made with respect to applications made in previous years.



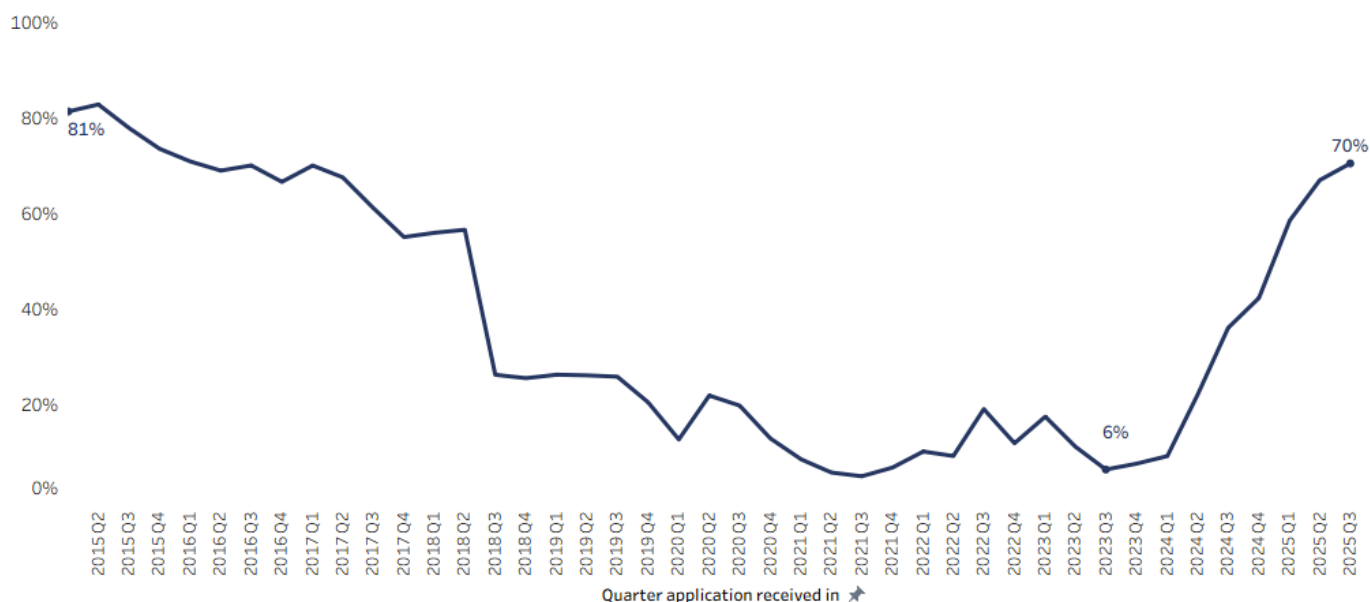
How long does it take for asylum applications to get a decision?

The time taken 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, falling abruptly to 26% in Q3 2018, and then gradually to just 6% by Q3 2023 (Figure 6).

There was a significant reduction in processing times since the beginning of 2024, with 70% of applications submitted in Q3 2025 being processed within six months (Figure 6). The change may be linked to a Home Office strategy to increase the number of caseworkers and apply simplified procedures for certain types of asylum casework (see our briefing on the [UK's asylum backlog](#)).

Figure 6

Share of asylum applications receiving an initial decision within six months, UK, Q1 2015 to Q3 2025
Adult main applicants



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of UK Visas and Immigration Transparency data, Immigration & Protection data, Asy_01 (March 2026).



How have the asylum and appeals backlogs changed over time?

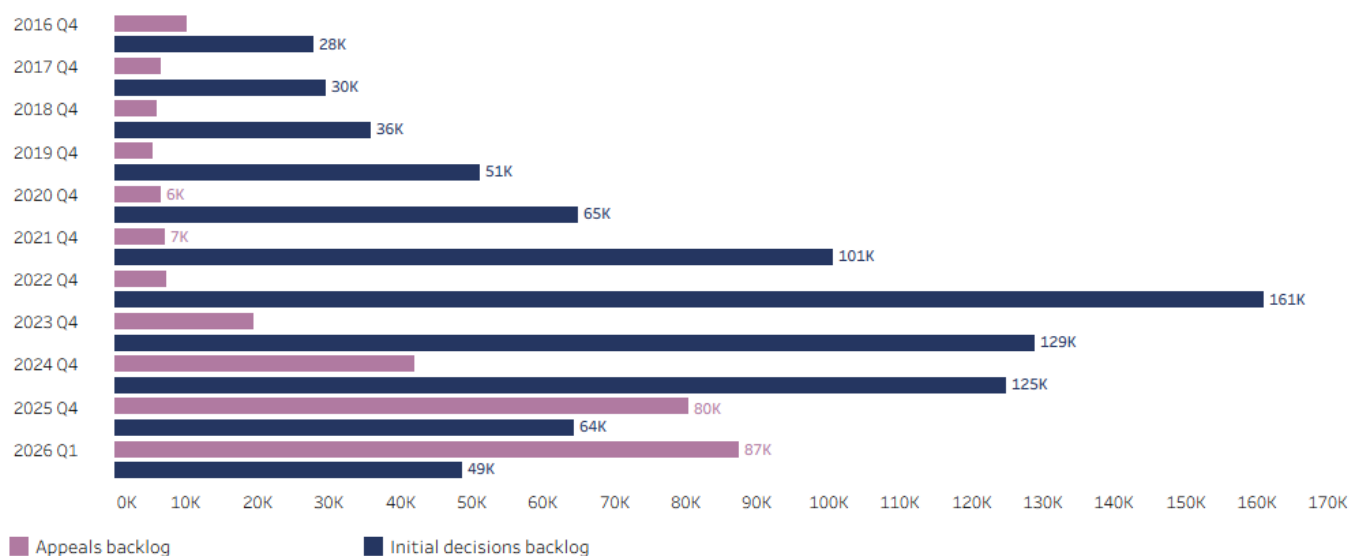
The asylum backlog increased substantially from 2018 to 2022 due to both an increase in applications and longer processing times. On 30 June 2023, the backlog hit its peak, with around 175,500 people awaiting an *initial decision* on their asylum claim (including main dependants) – more than 18-fold the number awaiting an initial decision on 30 June 2010 (Figure 7).

Recent data show a change in this trend. While progress has been made in reducing the backlog of initial decisions – from 91,000 applications at the end of 2024 to 49,000 a year later – another backlog has built up in the courts. This appeals backlog stood at 80,000 cases at the end of 2025, roughly double its level a year earlier. The appeals backlog is not directly comparable to the initial decisions backlog due to differences in the methodology. For more information, see ‘Understanding the Policy’ above and our briefing on the [UK’s asylum backlog](#).

Figure 7

Number of people awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim and open asylum cases before the First Tier Tribunal, by year

2016 to 2025. Counts taken on the last day of each year



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Asylum applications awaiting a decision, Table Asy_D03 (December 2025) and Tribunal Statistics Quarterly, FIA_4 (December 2025).

Note: Last day in each year is 31 December. The initial decisions backlog and appeals backlog are not directly comparable. Home Office statistics include both main applicants and dependants, whereas Tribunal statistics include only principal appellants. Principal appellants may include some people classified as dependants by the Home Office. Tribunal statistics also use a broader definition of asylum appeals, including some human rights cases and appeals relating to extensions of asylum, humanitarian protection, and discretionary leave.



Long waiting times also come with a considerable financial cost, because people in the asylum backlog usually live in government-funded accommodation, and this may make it harder for the government to remove people who are eventually refused. Research also 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](#).

How do processing times differ between grants and refusals?

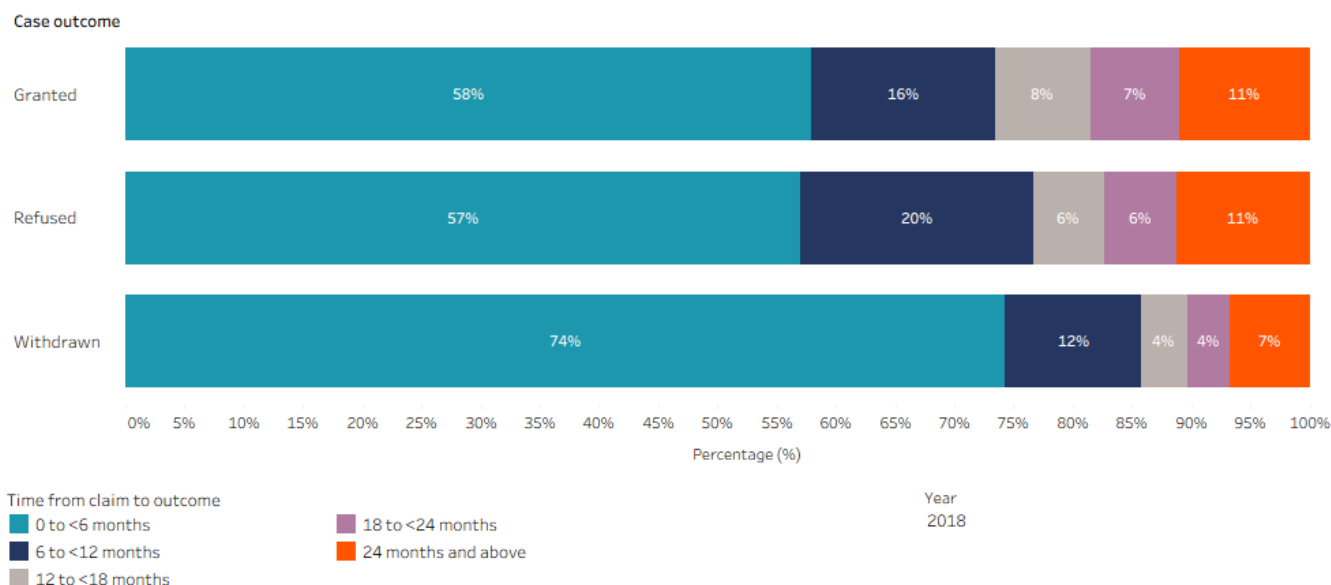
The time from asylum application to initial decision varies considerably depending on the outcome. Data obtained through a Freedom of Information request indicates that between 2015 and 2025, refusals were generally processed more quickly than grants: 37% were decided within six months, compared with 27% of positive decisions (Figure 8). There have been years in which this was not the case, most notably in 2022 and 2023, coinciding with the asylum backlog peak.

Although withdrawn cases have generally been resolved more quickly than both positive and negative grants, this trend became much more pronounced between 2021 and 2023. In 2022, 44% of withdrawals took place within six months, compared with just 4% of grants (Figure 8). In 2023, the government updated its guidance, expanding the criteria under which a claim could be withdrawn, although withdrawal numbers had already begun to rise before the change.

By 2024 and 2025, as the government accelerated decision-making, the earlier pattern largely re-emerged, with grants being processed more quickly than, or at similar speeds to, refusals and withdrawals (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Time from asylum claim to initial outcome, by outcome and year
2015 to 2025. Positive decisions are grants of asylum or other permission to stay



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Freedom of Information Request data (FOI 2025/17206). Notes: Data relate to main applicants only.



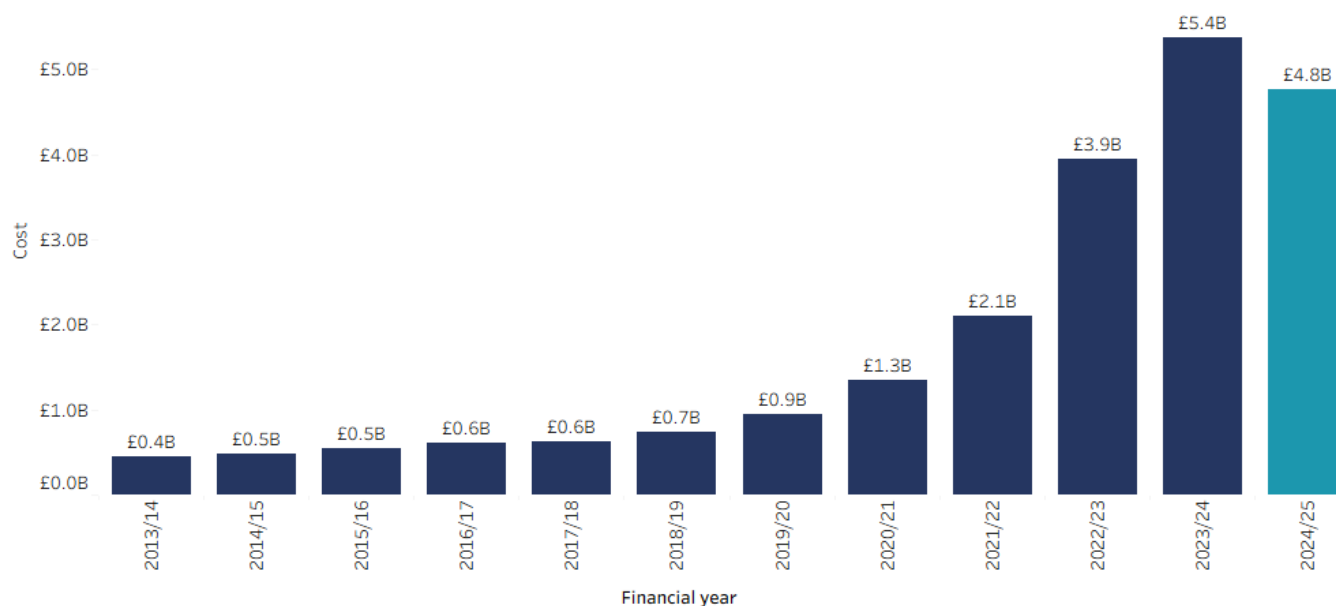
What is the financial cost of operating the UK's asylum system?

The financial cost of the UK's asylum system increased tenfold, from £538 million in the financial year 2011/12 to £5.4 billion in 2023/24, ten years later (Figure 9). A significant driver of this rise is the asylum backlog and the growing reliance on hotels to accommodate asylum seekers (see our briefing on [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#)). In 2024/25, overall costs fell for the first time since 2013, though they remained historically high at £4.8 billion. The Home Office [attributed](#) part of this decline to efforts to reduce reliance on hotels and to speed up asylum decision-making.

These figures do not include the administrative costs of the tribunal system, which are funded separately through HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). In the 2024/25 financial year, the [final budget](#) relating to the work of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber was £139 million, including legal aid, judicial salaries, and administrative costs. This figure, however, covers not only asylum cases but also other immigration matters such as deportation and removal appeals, immigration bail cases, and entry clearance visa appeals.

Figure 9

Annual financial cost (£ billion) of the UK's asylum system, 2013/14 to 2024/25
Financial years.



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration and Protection Transparency Data, Table Asy_04 (Dec. 2025)

Notes: Costs include those associated with deciding a case (interviews, asylum casework, issuing a decision); managing any appeals; accommodation and asylum support payments; costs of detention; enforcement costs, including escorting and assisting voluntary returns; and the cost of the Home Office's relevant department staff and buildings.



How have asylum support payments changed over time?

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. The Home Office regularly reviews the level of the weekly cash allowance and has changed it 14 times since 2000 (Figure 10: 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 with a single payment level for all destitute asylum seekers.

The value of support payments has declined due to inflation since the single asylum support payment was introduced in 2015 (Figure 10: Inflation-adjusted). In real terms, the payment level in 2026 of £49.18 per week or £7.03 per day was 35% lower than in 2000. Support payment levels have not changed since the end of 2023.

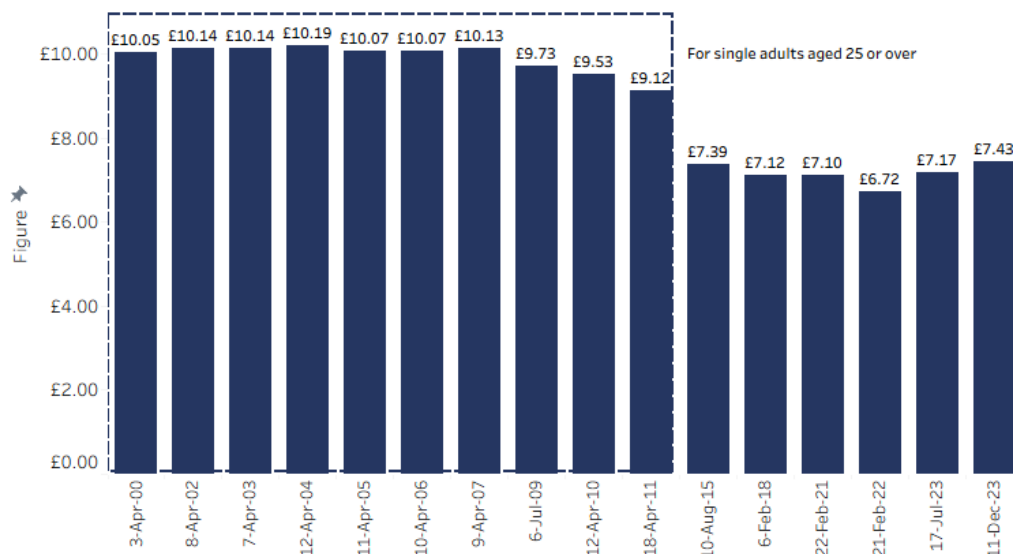
Figure 10

Asylum support payments have fallen in real terms since 2000

Per-day nominal payments; and inflation-adjusted estimates (based on 2026 GBP), 2000 to 2026

Select measure:

- ☒ Inflation-adjusted (in 2026 GBP)
☐ Nominal



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of legislation.gov.uk: The Asylum Support Regulations 2000 and subsequent legislation amending it, up to The Asylum Support (Amendment) Regulations 2024.

Notes: Inflation-adjusted estimates were calculated using the Bank of England Inflation Calculator. Inflation-adjusted estimates are given in 2026 GBP. From 3 Apr 2000 to 9 August 2015, payment levels are given for a single person aged 25 or over (reflecting the most common category of asylum seeker); from 10 August 2015 onwards, there was only one type of asylum support payment.



How many people come to the UK on refugee family reunion routes?

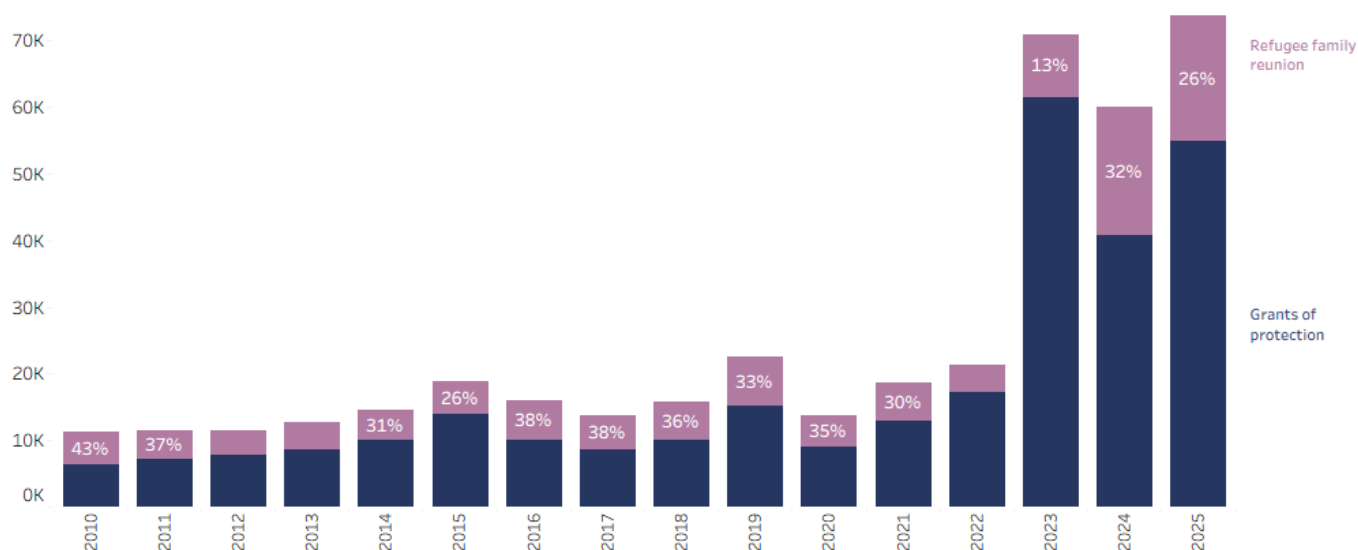
People who submitted asylum claims before 4 September 2025 and received asylum could sponsor visas for their close family members to join them in the UK through the refugee family reunion route (see ‘Understanding the Policy’ above). From 2010 to 2020, the number of people granted asylum-related permission 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 11). The number of people receiving refugee family reunion visas increased sharply as the number of granted refugees increased, from 2023 to 2025 (Figure 11).

On 4 September 2025, the government suspended the family reunion route for new applicants (see ‘Understanding the Policy’ above and our commentary on [the UK’s new approach to refugee family reunion](#)). The number of family reunion visas issued fell sharply in the last quarter of 2025, from 5,300 in Q3 to 2,800 (Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Fam_D01 March 2026). However, the full impact of the suspension is not yet reflected in the year-ending March 2026 data, as applications submitted before the suspension continued to be processed and granted in the first quarter of 2026.

Figure 11

Number of people receiving asylum-related permission to stay, and share of family reunion visas out of the total

Asylum-related grants and family reunion visas



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office immigration statistics, Table Asy_D02 (December 2025) and Fam_D01 (December 2025). Notes: Successful asylum applications 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.



Most asylum seekers are men (72% of adult applicants from 2015 to 2025). Male refugees who receive asylum often go on to be joined by their female partners through refugee family reunion. From 2015 to 2025, 82% of adults receiving refugee family reunion visas were women. As a result, family reunion makes the gender balance among those granted protection more even over time. During this period, it increased the share of adult women by around nine percentage points – although the asylum route remains largely male even after accounting for family reunion. The suspension of this route is therefore likely to shift the gender balance further towards men (see our briefing [Migration and gender in the UK](#)).

Table 2

Adult asylum grants, resettlement and refugee family reunion by sex, 2015-2025, annual average

	Men	Women	% Men
Successful asylum applicants (initial decision only)	12,895	4,999	72%
Refugee family reunion visas granted	676	3,120	18%
Successful asylum applicants (initial decision) + refugee family reunion	13,571	8,119	63%

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office immigration statistics, Table Asy_D02 (December 2025) and Fam_D01 (December 2025). Note: Excludes people under age 18. Successful asylum applications 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.



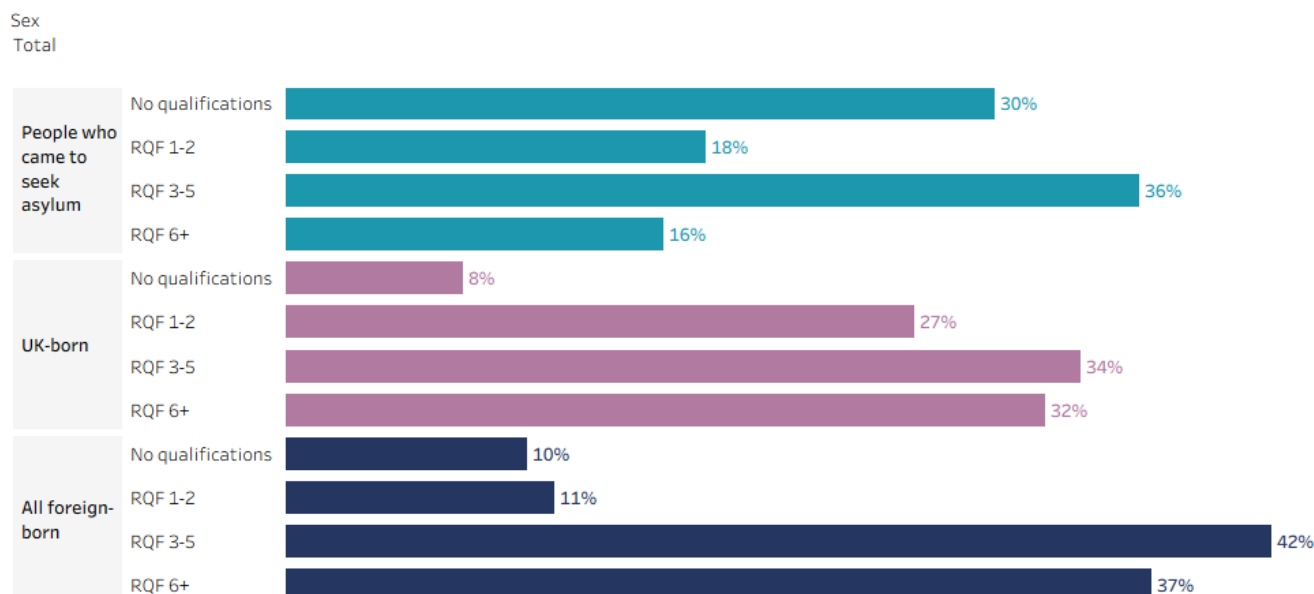
How do refugees’ qualifications and employment rates compare with those of other migrants and the UK-born?

Home Office data show that people who come to the UK to seek asylum tend to have lower levels of education compared with other migrants and the UK-born population (Figure 12). While around 16% hold high-level qualifications (NQF Level 6 and above), such as university degrees, 30% have no qualifications – compared to 8% among the UK-born.

Figure 12

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".

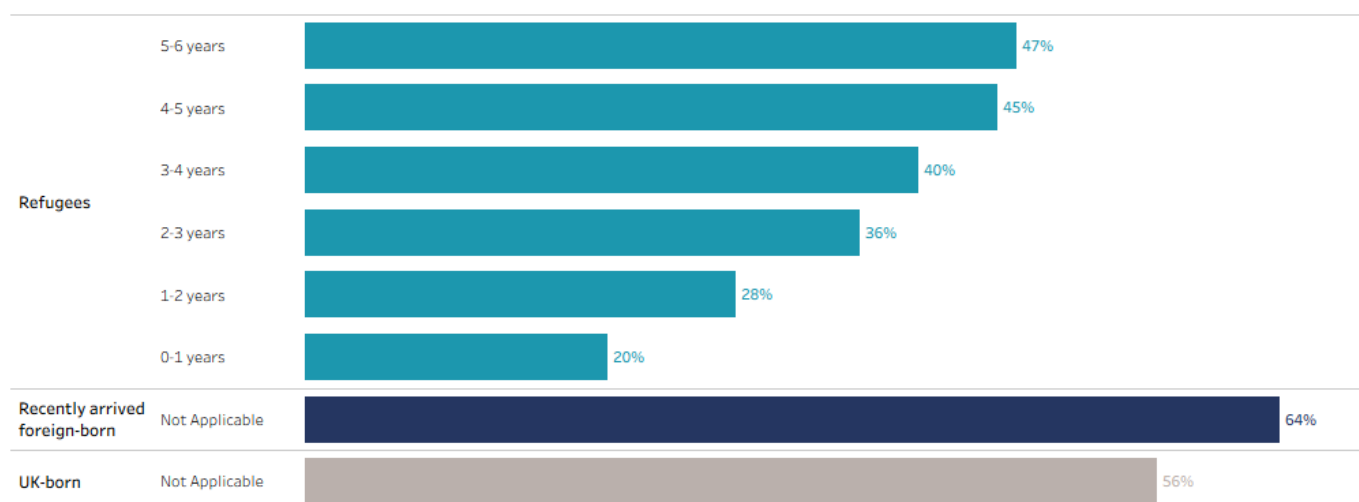


Census data matched with administrative data indicate that employment rates among refugees are low, particularly in the first year after status is granted. Among those who were granted status in 2020, only 20% were employed in 2021, with the majority (62%) not looking for work. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to [have contributed](#) to the particularly low levels of economic activity observed among the 2020 and 2021 cohorts. Over time, employment rates rose: among those granted status in 2016, almost half were employed by 2021, narrowing the gap with the UK-born (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Refugees' employment rates in 2021, by sex and years since asylum was granted

Compared with UK-born and recently-arrived foreign-born. Excludes resettled refugees



Select visualisation
Total

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) Insights: Embarks, Economic Activity, and Housing between 2015 and 2021 and 2021 Census databuilder. Recently arrived foreign-born includes only people who arrived in the UK from 2014 onwards. Includes only people aged 16 and over.

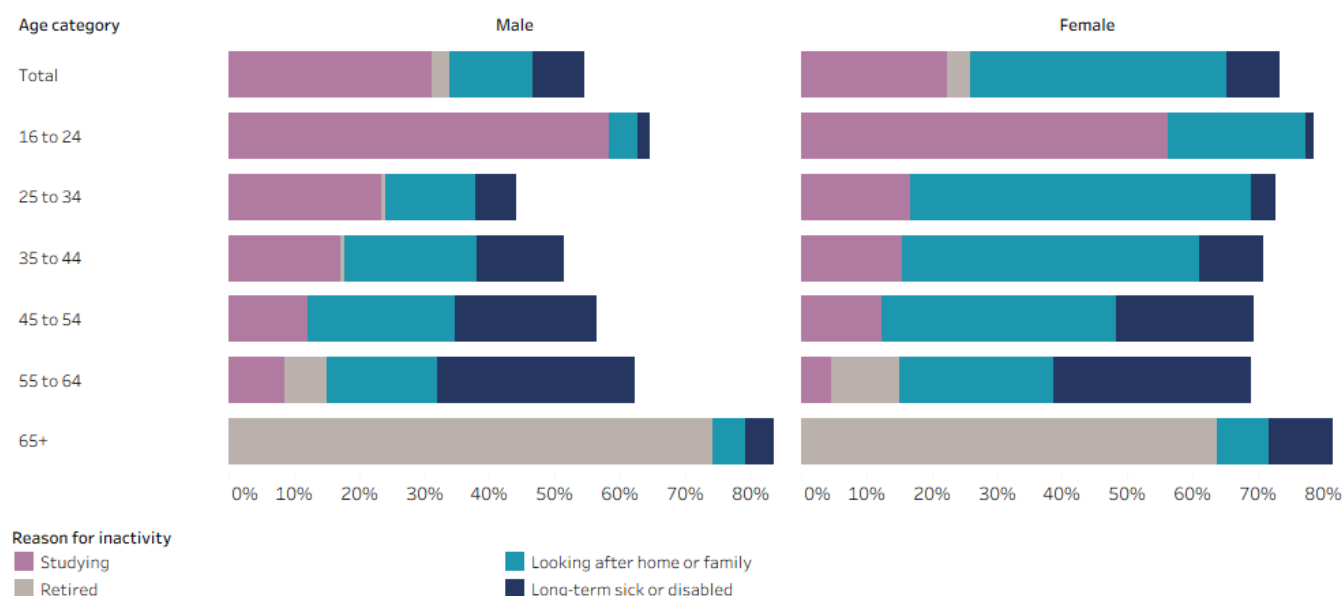


The gender gap in employment is particularly pronounced among refugees and tends to persist over time. One year after being granted status, 12% of refugee women were employed compared with 24% of men. After five years, fewer than one-third of women were in work, versus 54% of men, indicating a widening gap (Figure 14). Data suggest that childcare and domestic responsibilities are the main drivers of inactivity among refugee women, while men are more likely to be out of work due to studying (Figure 14).

Figure 14

Refugees' economic inactivity category in 2021, by sex and age group

Excludes resettled refugees and the category "other"



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) Insights: Embarks, Economic Activity, and Housing between 2015 and 2021.



[Research](#) indicates that the labour-market penalties associated with motherhood are often more pronounced among migrants, particularly [refugees](#). This reflects a combination of limited access to wider family support networks in comparison with native populations and household-level economic decisions, where women's low potential earnings are weighed against care responsibilities. [Sociocultural norms](#) around female employment can also contribute to lower employment rates.

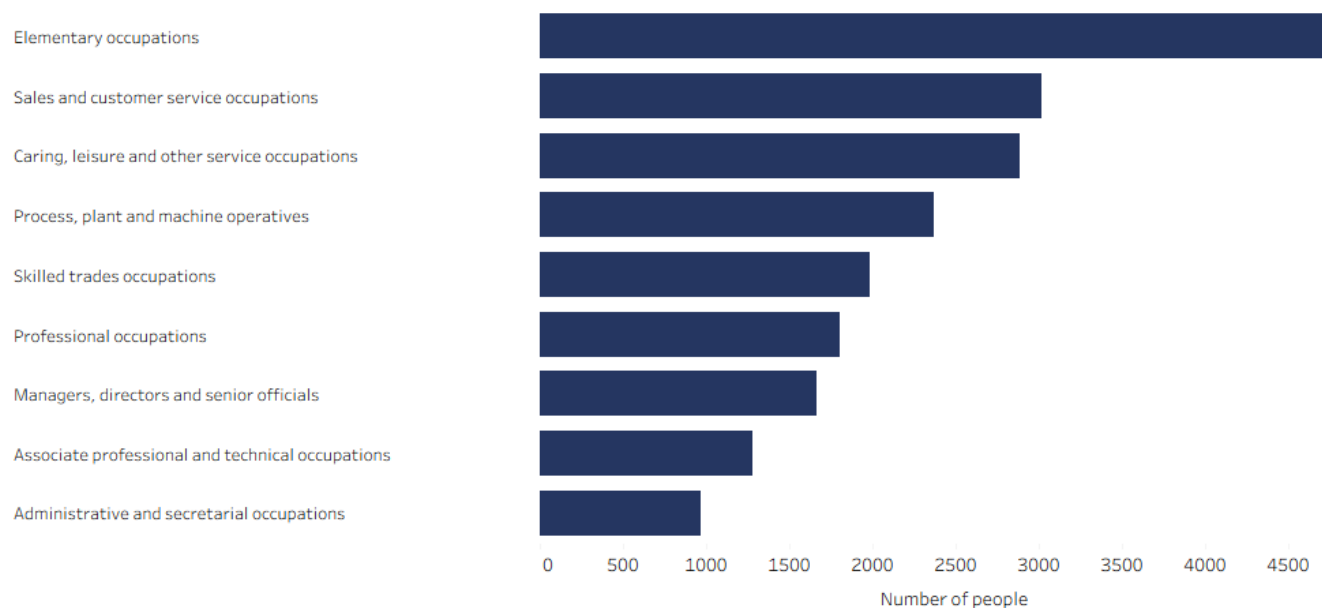
What types of occupations do refugees work in?

Refugees who are employed tend to work in lower-paid roles. In 2021, most were employed in elementary occupations, such as cleaning, construction, and kitchen assistants. This is followed by sales and customer support services and caring and other service occupations (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Refugees' occupation in 2021

Excludes resettled refugees



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO) Insights: Embarks, Economic Activity, and Housing between 2015 and 2021.



How does the UK compare with EU countries in the number of asylum applications and grants?

In 2025, the UK received around 101,000 asylum applicants, the 5th-highest among the EU+ (the EU-27 plus Switzerland and the three EEA countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). When adjusted for population size, it received the 12th-highest number of applications: 15 per 10,000 residents.

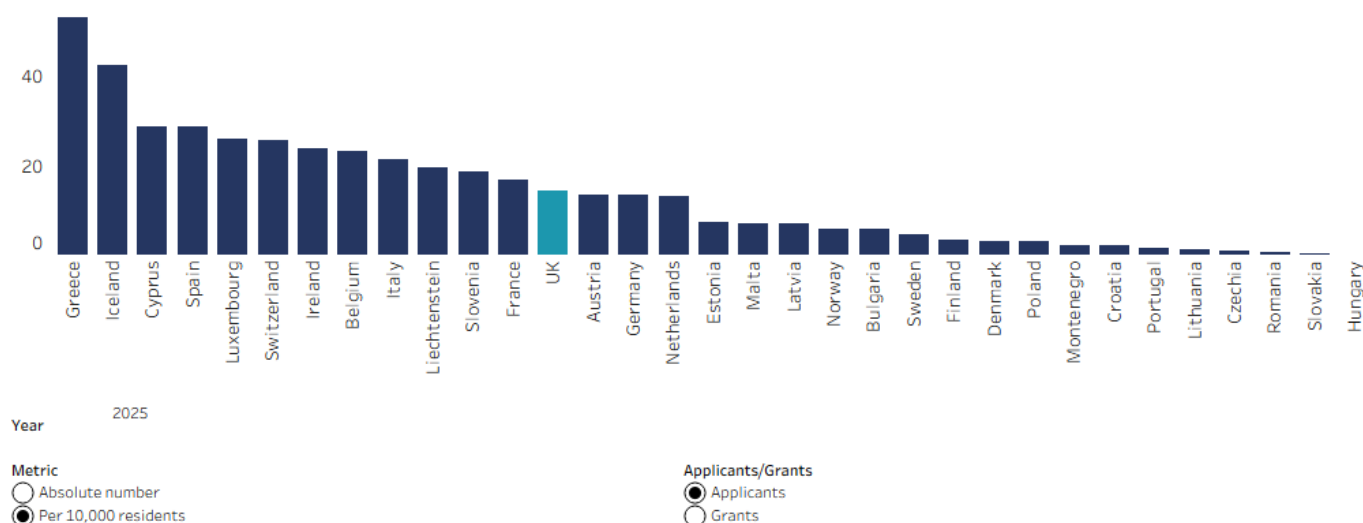
In the same year, the UK granted asylum or another form of legal status to around 54,900 people (at initial decision, excluding appeals), placing it fourth in the league table. Spain ranked first on the number of asylum applicants (main applicants + dependants), with 141,000 people claiming asylum in 2025, while Germany ranked first in the number of protection grants, granting asylum-related protection to around 87,400 people at initial decision that year (Figure 16).

Adjusting for population size, the UK ranked 8th among the EU+, having granted protection in 2025 to 8 asylum seekers per 10,000 of its resident population.

Figure 16

Number of asylum applicants and grants of asylum: the UK and the EU+

Per year, 2015 to 2025; absolute numbers and per 10,000 population; main applicants and dependants, *does not include resettled refugees*



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration Statistics, Table Asy_D02 (December 2025) for UK data; and Eurostat Statistics, 'Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex (migr_asyappctza)' (applications) and 'First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex (migr_asydcfsta)' (positive decisions), Date of data retrieval: 23/03/2025, for EU countries. Population estimates are from Eurostat, demo_pjan, as at 1 January in each year, except for the UK for 2021 to 2025, which uses ONS mid-year estimates.

Note: 'Grants' includes all people receiving a positive grant, which includes a grant of refugee status, authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons, or any other kind of permission to stay, at initial decision, excluding the results of appeals. The success rate of applications in any year cannot be calculated by dividing the number of grants by the number of applications, because grants will be made with respect to applications made in previous years.



Evidence Gaps and Limitations

We do not know how many people have ever been granted asylum or another form of asylum-related protection in the UK because published statistics go back only as far as 1979. Moreover, these published statistics only record the outcomes of initial decisions and not appeals, which increase the number of people who are ultimately granted asylum-related permission to stay. Similarly, there are no regularly published figures on how many asylum seekers make multiple claims for asylum over time, and how many apply for and receive legal status under human rights laws after being refused asylum.

Since YE September 2025, the government has started to publish data on asylum seekers, broken down by their method of entry into the UK. Among those who entered via authorised routes, 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.

We also do not know exactly how many cases or people are awaiting the outcome of an appeal following a first-instance refusal. The Home Office has occasionally published data on asylum "work in progress" (WIP), which is the broadest measure of the asylum backlog. It includes: (1) applicants awaiting an initial decision; (2) those awaiting the outcome of an appeal; (3) people recorded as having absconded; (4) cases treated as implicitly withdrawn because the applicant failed to complete an asylum questionnaire or attend a substantive interview; and (5) unsuccessful asylum applicants awaiting removal from the UK. The latest WIP data relate to 30 June 2024, and no updated figures have been published since. Data on the number of appeals lodged and determined are similarly out of date: the most recent published statistics cover only up to May 2023. As a result, it is currently difficult to assess the extent to which successful appeals affect overall asylum grant rates.

Data from the Ministry of Justice provide some indication of the scale of the appeals backlog, but they are not directly comparable with Home Office statistics. Home Office data include both main applicants and dependants, whereas Tribunal statistics include only principal appellants. Principal appellants may also include some people whom the Home Office classifies as dependants. In addition, Tribunal statistics use a broader definition of asylum appeals, encompassing some human rights cases as well as appeals relating to extensions of asylum, humanitarian protection, and discretionary leave.

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

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Disclaimer

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

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Related Material

- Migration Observatory briefing – [Asylum accommodation in the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory Q&A – [The UK's new approach to refugee family reunion](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [The UK's asylum backlog](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Deportation and returns of unauthorised migrants from the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory commentary – [Migrant Settlement in the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Migrants and modern slavery protection in the UK](#)
- Migration Observatory commentary – [Temporary protection: the UK's new policies on asylum and returns](#)
- Migration Observatory Q&A – [Q&A: Who is responsible for housing asylum seekers and refugees?](#)
- Migration Observatory briefing – [Migration and gender in the UK](#)



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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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