

Immigration in the UK – Multicultural society

The UK has welcomed newcomers for centuries. It is a mixture of diverse ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture and sometimes their own language or religion. This month is Black History month, celebrating the contribution that Afro Caribbean people have made to British society. Many British Asians will be celebrating Ramadan soon. There are 1.5 million Muslims in Britain with over 6,000 mosques. Asian can be a misleading term as it refers to all those people with roots or family connections in the former British colonies of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Asian does not always mean that the person is of Indian descent. Not all Asians are Muslim. Some are Hindus and others are Sikhs. These 2 groups celebrate the festival of Diwali on November 6th.

The Irish have come to Britain for many years, looking for work. After World War Two Irish and other European workers were encouraged to take factory jobs. Britain couldn't get enough workers to help rebuild the economy and to work in the new Health Service so employers also looked to former colonies and Commonwealth countries. India, countries in Africa and the Caribbean had been controlled by Britain in the past and had strong cultural links with Britain, including the language. Many arrived in the hope of building a new life for their young families.

The descendants of these immigrants are now the teachers, the footballers, the TV presenters, the musicians and the politicians that shape British society. There are numerous ethnic newspapers, magazines, TV programmes, radio stations and internet sites for each community. The largest groups live in and around the capital London and many other groups are concentrated in the industrial centres in Yorkshire, The Midlands and the South East.

Ethnic minorities timeline

- 19th century: Jewish arrivals from Russia/Poland, escaping persecution; Irish people escape from poverty in rural Ireland
- 1948 –50s: Caribbean workers invited to help rebuild post war Britain
- 1950s-60s: Asians from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh escape poverty
- 1970s: East African Asians escape persecution and Vietnamese escape war
- 1980s: Eastern European refugees arrive from war and political unrest in Romania and the former Yugoslavia.

Ethnic groups in the UK (6.5% of the British population are from ethnic minorities)

- White – 53,074,000 (includes Irish, Polish, Italian etc).
- Black Caribbean – 490,000
- Black African – 376,000
- Black other – 308,000
- Indian – 930,000
- Pakistani – 663,000
- Bangladeshi – 268,000
- Chinese – 137,000
- Other Asian – 209,000 (includes Vietnamese, Malaysian, Thai)
- Other – 424,000 (people who did not think they fitted the above categories)