

Countering false claims about migrants and refugees

A fact sheet produced by Cambs Stand Up to Racism

Immigrant are not a burden on the UK economy

Claims about immigration are often based on misinformation or selective interpretation of data. In reality, immigrants' contribution to the UK economy is overwhelmingly positive. Migrants are not a burden on the welfare state, on the contrary, they actually fill skills and labour shortages in vital services like health and education as well as in many other parts of the economy.

Why do politicians spread dangerous and misleading information?

Politicians find migrants and refugees an easy target. The interests of refugees and migrants are often presented as opposed to those of the rest of society. Blaming them is easier than accepting responsibility for increasing inequality and a long term lack of investment in services.

It is absurd to try to scapegoat a tiny 0.6% of the population for the inequality in society. A recent Oxfam report¹ notes that UK billionaires saw their collective wealth increase in 2024 by £35 million a day to £182 billion. Britain is now the second most economically unequal of the larger developed countries after the US. It is wealth inequality not migration that is causing hardship in the UK.

What are the consequences of blaming immigrants?

Blaming migrants and refugees is a dangerous false narrative and can fuel racist ideas. The evidence shows overwhelmingly that economic and political migrants are vital to the UK economy. Some people make a distinction between good and bad migrants turning their dissatisfaction with migration towards cultural and social differences, or what some call 'culture wars'. What starts as an argument about access to housing or healthcare, becomes an argument about religion, lifestyle or what it is to be British. Instead of focussing on why public services, pay or public housing has been cut, people can be led to believe that someone from a different culture has jumped the queue, is taking their job or is threatening our living standard.

Busting the myths

This document outlines a number of common misconceptions in order to help counter the myth and false narratives around migration in Britain today.

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/billionaire-wealth-surges-three-times-faster-in-2024-world-now-on-track-for-at-least-five-trillionaires-within-a-decade/>

MYTH 1: BENEFITS

“Migrants come to Britain to take advantage of the generous benefit system”

There is a false narrative that immigrants are a major burden on the UK welfare system and that benefits in the UK are more generous than in other parts of Europe

REALITY:

Immigrants find it difficult to access state support and actually contribute far more in taxes than they take out in state benefits. In the UK, and the majority of EU countries, migrants are less likely to access contributory benefits (eg. pensions, healthcare, maternity and Job seekers allowances etc) ²

The UK is one of the few countries in Europe where migrants can not access benefits in the same way as non migrants. The UK spends 12.9 % of GDP on social benefits to households. Germany (16%), France (20%) and Italy (21%) all pay more, as does the USA (20%). ³

Although some migrants do claim benefits, on the whole migrants tend to be younger, more likely to be employed and are in the workforce for longer that they are not. This significantly reduces the strain on pensions, public services and the welfare system. ^{4 5}

MYTH 2: JOBS

“Migrants are taking jobs away from British citizens.”

REALITY:

Migrant workers tend to fill skill shortages and do not reduce overall employment for UK-born workers. In fact migrants and refugees often create jobs by starting businesses and contributing to the economy. ^{6 7}

In the 1930s there was very little immigration into Britain—yet there was mass unemployment. In the 1950s and 1960s British bosses and government ministers actively recruited migrants. Workers' wages rose throughout those decades and there was full employment.

² https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tr_jrc116591.pdf

³ Source OECD <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-63129705>

⁴ National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR)

⁵ The Migration Advisory Committee

⁶ UK's Migration Advisory Committee

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

MYTH 3: OVERWHELMING NUMBER

“Asylum seekers are exploiting the system and arriving in large numbers.”

REALITY:

The UK receives a relatively small proportion of the global refugee population (1%) . In 2021, the UK received about 20,000 asylum claims, while countries like **Germany** and **France** received over 100,000 each. 89% of inward migration into the UK is for work and study through visa applications. ^{8 9}

MYTH 4: SMALL BOATS & ILLEGALS

“Most migrants are illegal and are crossing the Channel in small boats.”

REALITY:

Most migrants arriving in the UK are **not undocumented** but are seeking asylum or are coming through legal channels like work or student visas. ¹⁰

There is no such thing as an “illegal” person seeking asylum. Under international law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in any country that has signed the 1951 Convention and to remain there until the authorities have assessed their claim. There are very few routes to travel to the UK, using safe and regular means. The few existing safe and regular routes to travel to the UK, such as those relating to Ukraine and Hong Kong, are extremely restricted by nationality and number.

95% of those arriving via the channel crossing are seeking protection under international law, the vast majority of these claims are upheld. ¹¹

⁸ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

⁹ House of Commons Library

¹⁰ *UK Home Office*

¹¹ *National Audit Office (NAO)*

MYTH 5: CRIME

"Migrants are responsible for high crime rates in the UK."

REALITY

The Home Office has found that immigrants are less likely to be involved in criminal activity compared to the native population.¹²

There is no evidence that immigrants are disproportionately responsible for crime. In fact, some studies suggest that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born individuals. Crime rates in the UK have generally fallen in recent years, even as immigration has increased.

The majority of studies, including those by the Migration Observatory, suggest that migration has little or no impact on overall crime rates.

Foreign nationals are less likely to report being a victim of crime than British nationals.

MYTH 6: HOUSING

"Immigration drives up housing prices and reduces availability."

REALITY

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), while immigration contributes to population growth, housing supply is the primary driver of price increases. Additionally, immigrants often live in shared accommodation, which doesn't necessarily contribute to the housing crisis as directly as some might suggest.¹³

The Chartered Institute of Housing¹⁴ says that practically all recent migrants either use the private rented sector or use tied accommodation (farm workers, hospitality workers), student residences or share with others. This means they have much less impact on housing demand than their numbers suggest.

¹²<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-and-crime-evidence-for-the-uk-and-other-countries/> *University of Oxford*

¹³<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-and-housing-in-the-uk/#:~:text=Migrants%20have%20lower%20homeownership%20rates,a%20deposit%20to%20buy%20it>

¹⁴<https://www.cih.org/blogs/dispelling-myths-about-migrants-and-housing/>

MYTH 7: FALSE ASYLUM

“People seeking asylum are not genuine and just want to come to live in Britain”

REALITY

The majority of those seeking asylum in the UK stay less than 20 years after arriving.¹⁵

It is a common myth that those seeking asylum are not genuinely seeking asylum and are cheating the system in order to stay in the UK forever. The majority of those seeking asylum are fleeing war or political persecution and most go home once it is safe to do so.

- 40% of those seeking asylum in the UK stay less than 10 years
 - 62% of those seeking asylum in the UK stay less than 20 years
 - 86 % of those seeking asylum in the UK stay less than 20 years
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MYTH 8: STUDENTS

“Overseas students are taking advantage of the UK education system”

REALITY

Overseas students represent a sizable part of the UK economy, contributing a net impact of £37.4bn.

The average net impact of each overseas student is £98,000. ¹⁶

MYTH 9: LOW WAGES

“Migrants who come to Britain mostly do low waged work.”

REALITY

Migrants are among some of the best paid people in the UK. Migrants make up just 15% of the UK population and are most highly represented in the top 1% of earners making up 24%. ¹⁷

¹⁵ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migration-to-the-uk-asylum/>

¹⁶ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/04/24/the-benefits-and-costs-of-international-higher-education-students-to-the-uk-economy/>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/sep/20/about-a-quarter-of-the-uks-top-earners-are-migrants-data-shows>

There is a common misconception that migrants enter the workforce in low paid jobs, but research by the CAGE Research Centre at Warwick University¹⁸ shows that migrants enter the workforce evenly across the workforce but are over represented in the top 5% of earners.

Four in 10 of the best-paid bankers are migrants, and they earn an average of £383,300 before tax. Just under 40% of the highest-paid people working at UK hospitals are migrants, earning an average of £160,400. In “web portal” work 51% of the best-paid people are migrants, and they earn £259,700 on average. In professional sport 31% of the top-paid workers are from abroad.

Across all levels of the economy research shows that migrant workers contribute more in taxes than they cost the state.

MYTH 10: ALL THE REFUGEES ARE COMING TO BRITAIN

“There are too many refugees and migrants coming to Britain and we take more than our fair share. They should stop in the first country they reach”

REALITY

Europe and other wealthier countries do not host the majority of the world's refugees. Poor low and middle-income countries host 76% of refugees.

Most refugees do stay in the first country they arrive in, with 70% living in neighbouring countries. For example, Jordan hosts 1.3 million refugees from neighbouring Syria, Turkey hosts 3.3 million. People who continue to the UK often have family ties, language connections, or view the UK as a place of justice and fairness.

The UK is home to just 1% of refugees, who have been displaced across the world. At the end of 2023, they made up around 0.6% of the UK population. Based on the number of asylum applications per head of population, the UK currently ranks 20th highest in Europe.¹⁹

¹⁸ https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/centres/cage/news/17-09-20-importing_inequality_immigration_and_the_top_1/

¹⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>