

► 1. The scale and nature of immigration

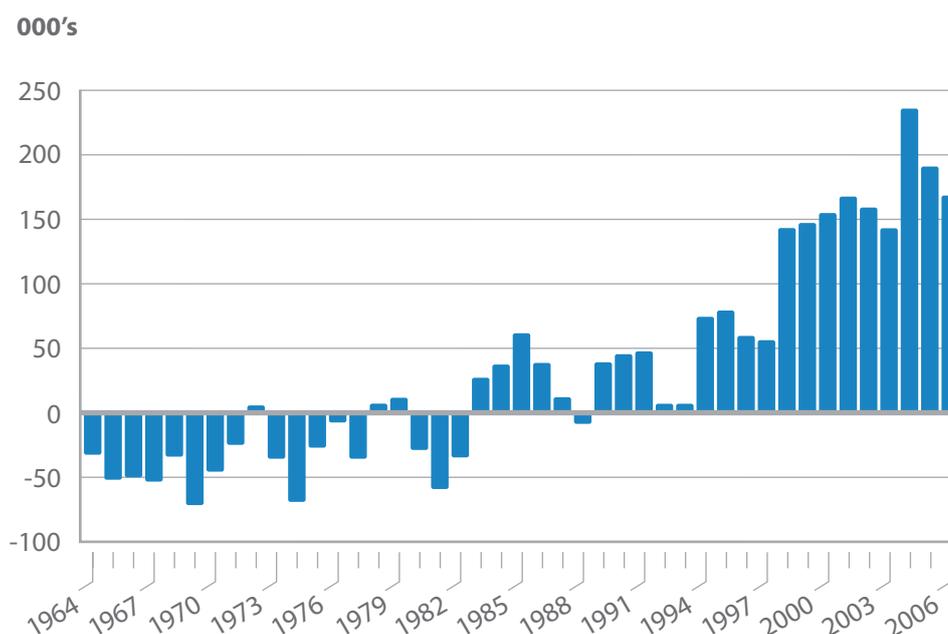
- Public concern about immigration has grown rapidly as immigration has risen.
- Large scale immigration is a new phenomenon, largely the result of errors in government policy.
- Most immigrants come from outside the EU. Work permits, spouses and asylum seekers have been the main categories. But successful asylum seekers now account for only about 3% of immigrants.
- Most East European migrant workers will return as their home economies strengthen relative to the UK economy.
- Until recently, Britain has had one of the most stable populations in Europe. It is only in the last 25 years that the number of people coming to Britain has exceeded those who have left.

Large scale immigration: a new phenomenon

It is seldom realised that until 1982 there was a net outflow of migrants from Britain.

Between 1982 and 1997 average net immigration was about 50,000 a year. It has climbed rapidly since 1997 to reach a peak of 244,000 in 2004. This has now fallen to about 190,000 a year. International migration to England is illustrated in the following bar chart:

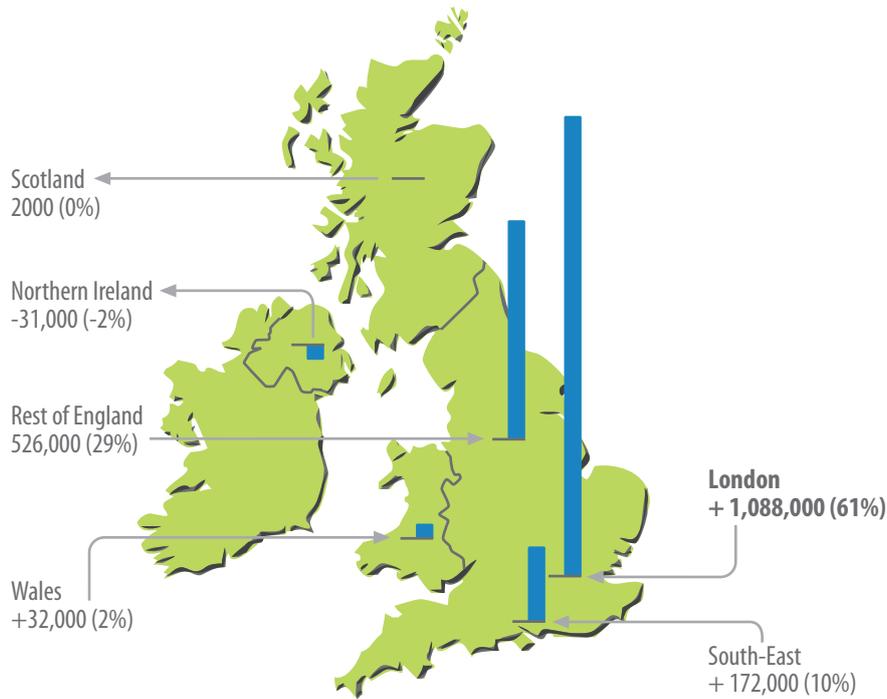
Fig.1: Net migration into England 1964-2006



Source: Parliamentary written answer WA91-17.01.2005 and ONS International Migration Statistics November 2007

Virtually all immigration goes to England, nearly three quarters to London and the South East – as the following map indicates:

Fig.2: International migration to UK Regions 1993 – 2006 (ONS)

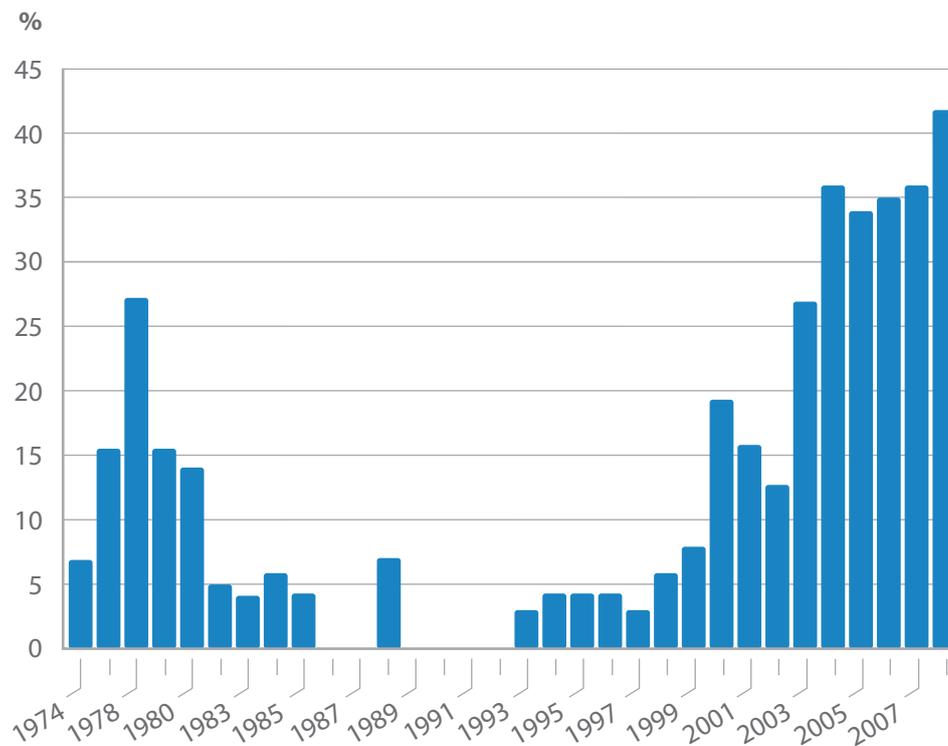


Net foreign immigration is officially defined as the number of foreigners arriving in the UK intending to stay for more than a year, minus the number who leave intending to be away for more than a year. **In 2006 arrivals reached 510,000 (about one per minute)** and 194,000 left; so the net figure was 316,000. This amounts to 0.5% of our population every year, and is 25 times higher than any previous wave of immigration (see Appendix A).

Public concern

Public opinion on immigration has changed sharply in recent years. There was a peak of concern around the election of 1979 when immigration was an issue. However, it was hardly an issue at all for the following twenty years. It appears that public concern has mounted as the number of immigrants has increased. **Immigration is now frequently the top concern of the British public, including among members of ethnic minority communities.**

Fig.3: Percentage who say race and immigration is the most important or one of the other important issues facing Britain today



Source: MORI Political Monitor: What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today (spontaneous)? What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today (spontaneous)? Percentage saying race relations/immigrants/immigration. (Figures mainly at April except for 74, 77, 78, 82, 05 and 08.)

How did large scale immigration come about?

The Government imply that these massive levels of immigration came about due to globalisation, claiming that “global migration has doubled since the 1960s”.¹

This seems intended to suggest that the massive increase in immigration to Britain is part of some long-term, worldwide process. Such an explanation does not fit the facts. There was a net outflow from Britain until the mid-1980s and a small inflow for the next 10 years (see Figure 1 on page 6). The turning point was in the mid-1990s, since when net foreign immigration has trebled.

The following are the main government policies which have contributed to this massive increase in immigration:

- Removal of embarkation controls for EU destinations in 1994 and for the rest of the world in 1998.
- Allowing marriage to be used as a means of immigration from 1997.
- Doubling the number of work permits issued in 2002.²
- Opening the labour market to new EU members without restriction in 2004.
- Opening new immigration routes to the UK through the highly-skilled migrants programme and the graduate work scheme.

1 Liam Byrne MP, Speech to Progress, 3 June 2008

2 The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP, Speech to the Social Market Foundation, 26 June 2002

Today's immigrants

A number of myths and inaccuracies surround the debate about today's immigrants to the UK. For example, **by no means all ethnic communities consist of immigrants**: about half were born here and are therefore British citizens like any other. And, of course, there are many immigrants – perhaps a third – who share a European heritage. Furthermore, as explained below, immigrants from Eastern Europe (such as Poles) account for a minority, not a majority of immigrants. People also confuse immigrants with asylum seekers – who are declining in number.

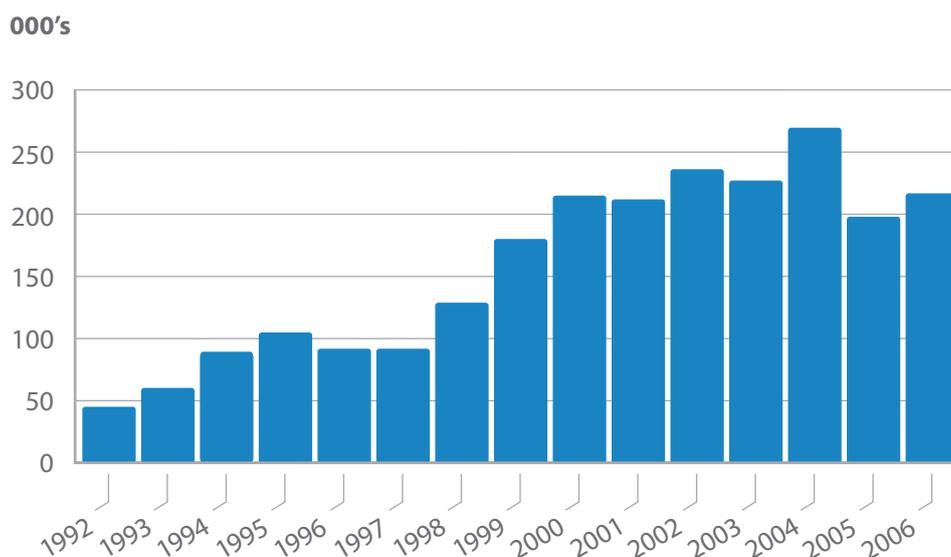
People do not distinguish between immigrants who come to study here and then leave, and those who come to settle and live permanently in the UK. This is understandable since **the technical definition of an immigrant is someone who changes his country of residence with the intention of staying for a year or more**. Foreign students often come for courses of more than a year, but they normally return home after the course. They are not therefore a major source of immigration.

This section explains the main sources of immigration, and addresses the myths and inaccuracies set out above.

Most immigrants come from outside the EU

The Statistics Commission has confirmed that, leaving aside the movement of British citizens, **68% of foreign immigration in 2006 was from countries outside the European Union**.¹ The development of non-EU immigration since 1992 is shown in Figure 4.

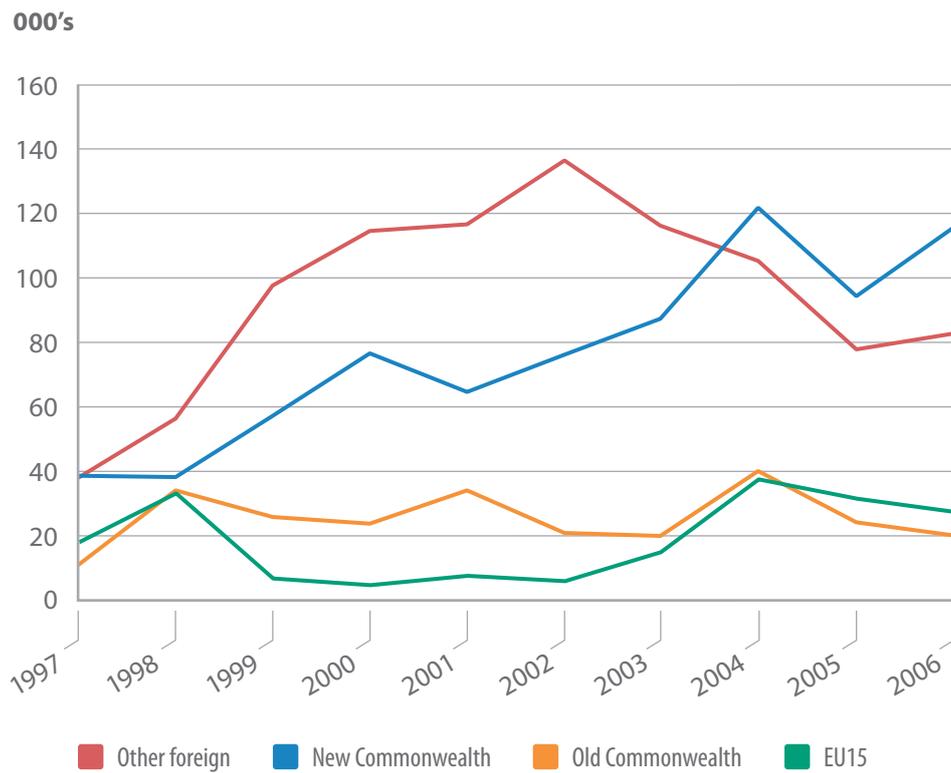
Fig.4: Net non-EU migration into the UK



Source: ONS

Figure 5 shows that net immigration from the EU and the Old Commonwealth (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa) has been relatively small. Most of the recent increase has been from the New Commonwealth and other foreign countries.

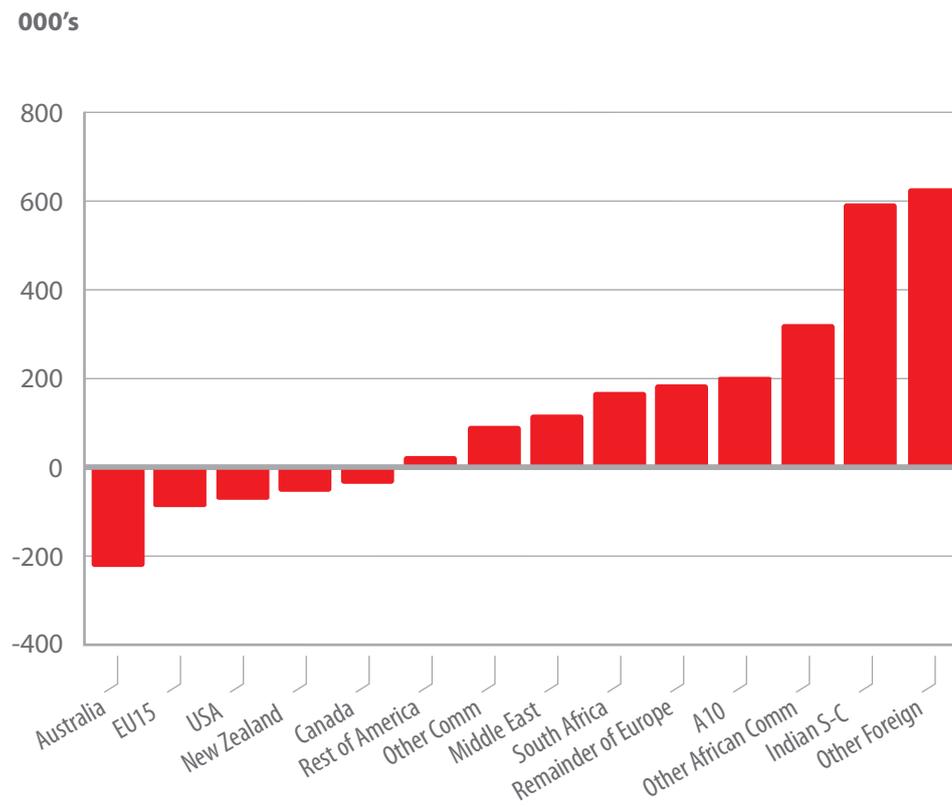
Fig.5: Net migration to the UK



Source: ONS Total International Migration Series MN33 table 2.2

Long-term immigration to Britain is almost entirely from outside the EU. Between 1991 and 2006 there was a net inflow of 2.3 million people to the UK. Only 205,000, or 8%, came from the new East European members of the EU (known as the A10) as illustrated in Figure 6.

Fig.6: Net migration 1991-2006 by source/destination



Source: ONS : Total International Migration Series MN33 table 2.2

The number of asylum seekers is falling

Asylum is entirely different from immigration. Asylum is granted to those who have a genuine fear of persecution, and the laws on asylum are governed by the 1951 Vienna Convention. Applications are made to the Home Office and appeals are heard by immigration judges.

In recent years only about 40% of applicants have been granted asylum or other forms of protection. Meanwhile the number of asylum claims has fallen sharply, as shown in Figure 7. In 2007 there were only 28,000 claims including dependants, so we can expect that about 10,000 people will be granted permission to stay. **Asylum only amounts to just over 3% of net foreign immigration.** A 16% rise in the first quarter of 2008 (compared with the same period in 2007) is still very small compared with overall immigration.

Fig. 7: The main sources of immigration

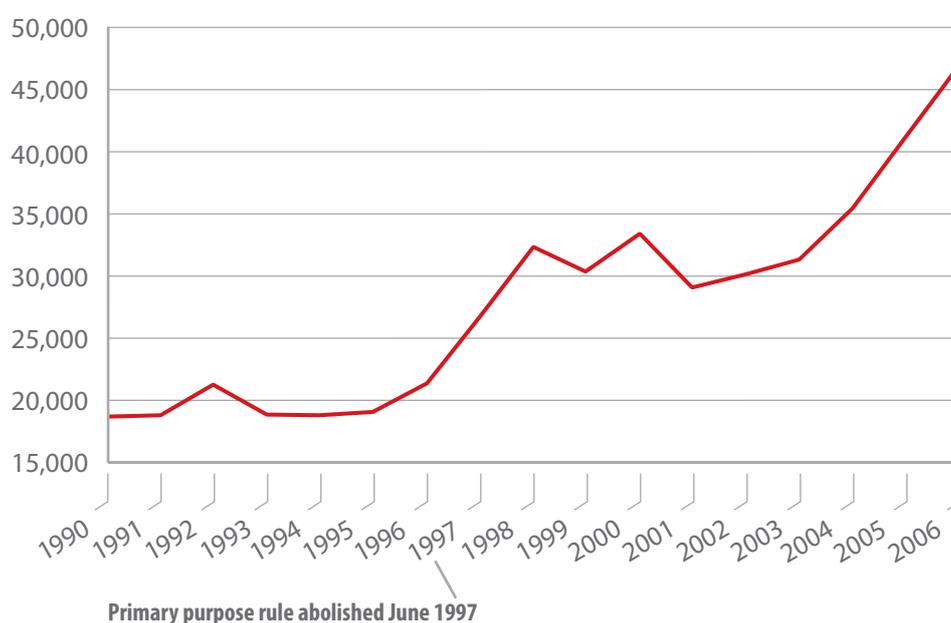


Source: ONS News Release International Migration Statistics 02.11.2006

Spouses

Previously, someone who was marrying a UK citizen had to satisfy the immigration officer that it was “not the primary purpose of the intended marriage to obtain admission to the UK”. This rule, known as the Primary Purpose Rule, was in place for seventeen years but was criticised as requiring the applicant to prove a negative. It was abolished in June 1997. Numbers have increased substantially since then.

Fig.8: Leave to enter of spouses and fiancés



Source: Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2000-6

Clearly a British citizen has, and must continue to have, the right to marry whoever he or she might choose – provided, of course, that it is a genuine marriage. There are three problem areas:

a) Sham marriages

The Government have tightened the regulations to deter sham marriages but the courts have ruled that each case must be considered individually.

b) Forced marriages

The Government have set up a specialised Forced Marriage Unit to help those who fear being forced into a marriage. They handle more than 5,000 enquiries a year and investigate 400 cases. According to the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, over 70 per cent of marriages which include a foreign spouse have some element of coercion or force.¹

c) Immigration marriages

It is sometimes difficult to know when marriage is forced and when it is a result of intense family pressure. The regulations need to be tightened to prevent marriage being used as a means of immigration. This would also reduce the pressures on young people, especially Asians, to marry people from overseas.

Illegal immigration: an unknown quantity

It is, by definition, impossible to know precisely the number of people illegally present in Britain. A paper commissioned by the Home Office and published in June 2005 contained a central estimate of 430,000.¹ **The true figure for illegal immigration could be anywhere between half a million and one million.**

These numbers are, of course, largely additional to the official numbers (described above) which are based on a voluntary survey of passengers as they arrive and depart.

There are three main ways in which people can become illegal immigrants:

a) Asylum seekers whose claims have failed but who refuse to return home

Foreigners have a right under the 1951 Convention to claim asylum. It is only after their claims have failed and they stay on that their presence becomes illegal. There are perhaps a quarter of a million failed applicants in this category, although a significant number have subsequently been granted permission to stay because of the long delays in the Home Office deciding their cases.

b) Illegal entrants

These are largely people who enter clandestinely, perhaps on the back of a truck. Both their entry and their presence are illegal.

c) Overstayers

Some people enter Britain entirely legally as visitors, students or workers on a short term permit but remain here beyond their permission to stay. Their presence thus becomes illegal. The number of visas issued has risen by 50% in the past six years to about two million every year.

Should there be an amnesty for illegal immigrants?

A number of bodies, including the Liberal Democrats and the Roman Catholic church, prefer the term “irregular migrants” and are calling for “an earned route to citizenship” beginning with a two year work permit. This would apply to those who have been in the UK for perhaps 10 years, and citizenship would be subject to a number of conditions (such as a clean criminal record and an English language and civics test).

There are several very serious objections to an amnesty for illegal immigrants:

- a) It would be completely ineffective since those who were regularised would soon be replaced by others from countries where the wage rates are far lower than in the UK. This has been the actual experience of Italy (which has granted five amnesties) and Spain (which has granted six) in the past 20 years; on almost every occasion there were even more applications than for the previous amnesty. This suggests that amnesties increase, rather than decrease, illegal immigration.
- b) It would be extremely expensive. The net cost would be £1 billion a year¹ – but it could be much higher; the truth is that nobody knows how many would claim to be eligible.
- c) Any such programme would be extremely difficult to administer since, by definition, there would be no documents to prove when the applicant arrived and whether his residence had been continuous.
- d) Those granted an amnesty would be immediately entitled to apply for social housing, adding half a million to the waiting list (which is already over 1.5 million for England alone). They would also be entitled to bring over their families, thus moving up the queue which is largely based on “need”.
- e) It is wrong, in principle, to reward illegal behaviour with a lifetime’s access to the welfare state. The presence of illegal immigrants holds down the wages of low skilled British workers and enables unscrupulous employers to compete unfairly with honest ones who pay the full minimum wage.