

Debate Pack

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By Greg Oxley,
Melanie Gower,
Daniel Harari,
Andrew Powell,
Georgina Sturge

E-petition: Suspending legal and illegal immigration

Summary

An e-petition on suspending legal and illegal migration ([e-petition 700824](#)) is being debated in Westminster Hall on 10 March 2025. The petition is seeking to temporarily suspend all immigration to the UK for five years. The subject for this debate has been chosen by the Petitions Committee, and the debate will be opened by Dave Robertson MP.

1 Background

The e-petition [Close the borders! Suspend ALL immigration for 5 years!](#) is being debated in Westminster Hall on 10 March 2025. The petition states that “our country is facing serious challenges both from legal and illegal migration” and the petitioners say “the only way to deal with this is to suspend all immigration temporarily for 5 years.”

The petition is open until 26 May 2025 and had received over 218,000 signatures by February 2025.

1.1 Government response

In its [response to the petition](#), given on 17 January 2025, the government stated that it is:

taking the tough action required to reduce both illegal immigration and overall net migration, without the economic damage that would come from suspending immigration entirely.

The government’s response provided details of its plan to reduce net migration through the “continuation of tough measures on visas alongside the introduction of new employment legislation, ensuring that the visa and employment systems are strongly aligned.”

The government has retained the [changes to work and student visa rules introduced by the previous government](#), including restricting most overseas students from bringing family members to the UK, restricting the ability of care workers to bring dependants with them, increasing the general salary threshold for those arriving on Skilled Worker visas from £26,200 to £38,700 and abolishing the 20% going rate discount so that employers can no longer pay migrants less than UK workers in shortage occupations.

The government also stated that new employment legislation would be introduced to reduce the reliance on overseas labour by giving workers in the UK the skills and training needed to fill vacancies in key sectors. Further details will be set out in an Immigration White Paper which is expected to be published later this year.

The government’s response to the petition also set out its plans for reducing illegal immigration by “[dismantling the criminal smuggling gangs \[...\]](#), [cracking down on illegal working in the UK](#) and [increasing the removal and returns of people with no right to be in the country.](#)”

Details of the government's plans to tackle unauthorised immigration is available in the Library briefing on the [Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill 2024-2025](#).

Finally, the government response stated that it “values the contribution that controlled migration plays in supporting many sectors of our economy” and that the approach suggested by the petitioners “would be harmful to the UK economy.”

2 Suspending all immigration

2.1 How many people come to the UK each year, and why?

In the year ending June 2024, an estimated 1.2 million people migrated to the UK and 479,000 emigrated from it, leaving [net migration \(the balance of immigration minus emigration\) of 728,000](#).

This figure was high by historical standards but lower than the recent peak, where net migration was estimated to have reached 906,000 in the year ending June 2023.

Over the past two years, the two main reasons for immigration have been work and study. Recent years have also seen a much higher number of people arriving for humanitarian reasons than in the past, notably via the Ukraine schemes, the Afghan resettlement schemes, and as British National Overseas (BNO) status holders from Hong Kong.

Changes to the UK immigration system following the UK's exit from the EU have also changed the volume of immigration and its characteristics:

- Since the new immigration system began in 2021, far more non-EU nationals have migrated to the than in the past, while the number of EU migrants has declined.
- Nearly half (49%) of the one million work visas issued in 2022 and 2023 combined were for ‘health and care’ workers, after this occupation was added to the list of eligible occupations. The number has since declined following changes to the rules on bringing dependents.
- The proportion of dependents to main applicants among non-EU arrivals is now higher than it used to be. For example, in 2023, there

were 1.03 dependents per main work visa applicant compared with 0.6 in 2019.

Migration is currently a source of population growth and migrants tend to be younger on average than the general population. According to the [Office for National Statistics](#):

“Net migration is projected to be the only source of population growth in the UK over the next 25 years. Over the 25-year period between mid-2022 and mid-2047 it is projected that there will be 1.1 million more deaths than births. During this period, it is projected that the population will grow by 8.9 million, with projected net migration totalling 10.0 million.”

This is based on an assumption that net migration will decline each year until 2028 before settling on an average of 340,000 per year. Migration projections are highly uncertain and based entirely on past trends.

The Library’s [briefing paper on migration statistics](#) contains a longer term summary of the UK’s migration figures.

The latest official estimates of overall migration flows can be found in the ONS’s [Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2024](#). More recent Home Office data on visas issued up to the end of December 2024 can be found in its [immigration system statistics](#).

2.2

Economic impact of immigration

There is limited research on the impact on the economy of suspending all immigration, so this section provides a short review of research on the effects of immigration on the economy and the number of non-UK nationals in the UK labour market.

GDP

In March 2024, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published [analysis of the economic impact of different net migration scenarios](#). The OBR provides official forecasts for the economy and public finances that the UK Government uses when making policy.

The OBR analysis found that lower net migration – the difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants – led to lower GDP, although the size of this effect is less clear.

However, the impact of lower migration on GDP per person is less clear and depends on the characteristics of migrants, particularly the productivity level of migrants compared with the existing population. The OBR highlighted the factors that influence GDP per person:

“The age, education, skill level, and participation rate of migrants, alongside the investment response of businesses, are all factors that determine the impact of migration on per person output.”

In its 2024 Annual Report, the Migration Advisory Committee commented that [“having highly skilled, productive and high-earner migrant workers”](#) provides wider economic and fiscal benefits, even if they are not filling a skills gap in a particular sector of the economy .

Public finances

The Migration Observatory provides a summary of past research into the effects of immigration on the UK’s public finances in its publication [The Fiscal Impact of Immigration in the UK](#). As with the effects on the broader economy, the impact on public finances will be determined by migrants’ characteristics such as skills and earnings.

In 2024, the OBR looked at the [net impact on the public finances over the lifetime of a migrant](#), depending on the migrant’s average earnings. This analysis [made a number of assumptions](#), including that the representative migrant arrived in the UK aged 25 (the average age of newly arrived migrants) and that they use public services at the same rate as the average UK resident.

The OBR estimates that a migrant arriving in the UK aged 25 with earnings equal to the UK average over their career has a positive lifetime contribution to the UK’s public finances until they reach age 92. The same representative migrant has a more positive lifetime fiscal contribution than a UK-born worker on the same salary, because the migrant has not previously consumed UK public services, particularly education and health services, in their childhood.

The OBR also found that low-wage workers have a negative lifetime impact on UK public finances, while high-wage workers had a positive one. The estimates are provided in a chart showing the [cumulative fiscal impact of representative migrants](#). There’s more discussion of the figures in the [paragraphs 4.29-4.43](#) of the OBR’s report.

The Centre for Policy Studies 2024 report [Taking Back Control](#) argues that large-scale immigration has not delivered significant GDP per capita growth in the UK and has put pressure on public services and housing. Authors of the report include the Conservative MPs Robert Jenrick and Neil O’Brien.

Labour market

The Migration Observatory published a March 2023 briefing on the [Labour Market Effects of Immigration](#). They found that research has shown that immigration has little or no impact on employment or unemployment of existing workers, or on average wages. However, when an impact was found, the group of existing workers who are most likely to be negatively impacted

are those with lower levels of education. The impact was more likely to be positive for people with higher levels of education.

The Office for National Statistics publishes statistics on [employment by country of birth and nationality](#).

In October to December 2024, there were 4.70 million people working in the UK who were not UK nationals, 13.9% of all people in employment. This included:

- 2.14 million people who were nationals of the 27 EU countries (6.3%)
- 2.57 million people who were nationals of countries outside the EU (7.6%)

The number of non-UK nationals in employment is greater than the 3.5 million people aged 16 to 64 (UK and non-UK nationals) who were out of work in October to December 2024 but who wanted to work. Of these, 1.5 million were unemployed, meaning they were actively looking for a job, while 2.0 million were economically inactive, meaning they were not able to work.

This means that a suspension of immigration for five years is likely to lead to labour shortages across the UK's labour market.

Further analysis of the UK labour market is provided by the Migration Observatory in their June 2024 briefing [Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview](#). This includes an analysis of the occupations and industry sectors that are particularly reliant on workers who were born outside the UK. The transportation and storage, hospitality and IT sectors were all more likely to have workers who were born outside the UK, and therefore these sectors could be particularly impacted by such a suspension.

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