

Here To Stay? Estimating the Scale and Cost of Long-Term Migration

By Karl Williams

NOTE: The Office for Budget Responsibility fiscal data contained within this report is the subject of dispute, meaning that the overall cost estimates should not be used. We will be publishing an updated estimate in due course. This does not impact on the visa data or projections for the numbers likely to gain ILR on different visa routes.

- Between January 2021 and June 2024, over 2 million visas were issued that could result in migrants obtaining Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in the UK after a period of five years. The first of these migrants will be eligible for ILR beginning in January 2026.
- ILR gives individuals the right to live in the UK indefinitely and ends the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) conditions to which migrants are subject. They gain access to the NHS, social housing, Universal Credit and other benefits on the same terms as British citizens. After paying National Insurance for 10 years, they are also entitled to the state pension.
- Due to the unprecedented surge in immigration under the last government, we estimate that between 742,000 and 1,224,000 migrants are likely to get ILR in the coming years, based on historical trends and the composition and observed behaviour of the post-2021 wave.
- In our base case scenario, more than 801,000 recent migrants would receive ILR, the vast majority before 2030. In our alternative scenario, adjusted to take account of early evidence on the behaviour of the post-2021 immigration wave, it could be as high as 1.24 million.
- The first scenario sees daily ILR grants running at almost twice the average rate seen in the 2010s, themselves a period of historically high migration; in the alternative scenario, the rate would be 1,000 grants per day, three times the rate in the 2010s. As previous CPS work has shown, there is significant doubt about the UK's capacity to absorb migration at its current pace, in particular in terms of impacts on housing and infrastructure.
- While there are many uncertainties around the long-term fiscal impacts of migration, their overall fiscal impact is likely to be strongly negative – particularly given the huge numbers of low-paid workers on the health and care visa.
- In our central model, using the OBR's extremely optimistic assumptions about migrant earnings, the lifetime net fiscal cost to the state would be £234 billion – equivalent to a bill of £8,200 for every UK household, albeit spread out over decades. Under more pessimistic assumptions, the costs could be very significantly higher.
- Kemi Badenoch recently raised concerns about the hundreds of thousands of migrants who will soon be eligible to apply for ILR, and called for the period of eligibility to be raised to 10 years. There is a strong case for this or similar reforms, not least in order to give the country time to debate and decide who we want to put on a pathway to ILR and eventual citizenship.

Introduction

The recent wave of migration to the UK has been unprecedented in scale. As the Centre for Policy Studies has pointed out in multiple papers, there are significant question marks not just around the impact on the country's housing and infrastructure, but on the impact on the public finances.

Traditionally, migration has been seen as an unmitigated economic good, not least in official modelling. But the change in the nature of the immigration system has led to the arrival of many hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers, in particular in the health and care sector, plus very significant numbers of dependants.

Initially, the majority of these new arrivals came on time-limited visas. But as Sam Bidwell of the Adam Smith Institute has pointed out, very large numbers from the 2021-24 wave are likely to claim Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) starting from January 2026.¹

ILR (alternatively, a 'grant of settlement') is typically available to a migrant after they have been in the UK for five years on a valid visa or series of valid visas, though some wait considerably longer before applying. Applying costs £2,885 per applicant and requires proof of English language proficiency, successful completion of a 'Life in the UK' test and a clean criminal record.

With ILR, immigrants have:

- a right to live in the UK indefinitely and to apply for citizenship after a further 12 months
- entitlement to the NHS, social housing, Universal Credit, and disability and other benefits²
- entitlement to state pension after 10 years of National Insurance (NI) contributions
- entitlement to student loans and grants for universities on the same basis as citizens
- the right to bring family members to join them, who in due course will be able to claim ILR
- the right to British citizenship for any children born in the UK (before or after getting ILR)

The costs, or benefits, of these new arrivals are rarely accounted for in public spending projections. For example, the forecasts produced by Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to accompany each Budget have a five-year horizon – stopping just short of when any new cohort of migrants in the forecast would gain full access to the welfare state.³

The OBR did make a welcome attempt to model the long-term fiscal impacts of migrant workers in its 2024 'Fiscal risks and sustainability' (FRS) report. But compared to the fiscal cost-benefit analyses of immigration produced in European countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands, this was pretty rudimentary.⁴ For example, there was no modelling of migrant earnings by nationality, despite the huge differences in the available statistics.

Nevertheless, what data and modelling we do have should be a cause for significant concern, especially in light of post-2020 migration trends.

The new immigration system, the Future Borders and Immigration System (FBIS), came into operation on January 1, 2021. This (nominally) points-based system was calibrated such that record levels of immigration followed. Net migration peaked at 906,000 in the year to June 2023 – three

times the 2015 surge that helped precipitate Brexit, and almost four times the annual average for the 2010s (242,000).⁵

Indeed, over the January 2021 to June 2024 period, total net migration was almost 2.5 million people, with an inflow of around 4.3 million people only partially offset by an outflow of roughly 1.8 million (including 400,000 British citizens).⁶ (Immigration numbers and visa numbers – 3.8 million – differ mainly due to the inflow of British citizens, and EU citizens who have Settled Status and who therefore don't require a visa) In particular, there was a very sharp rise in migration from non-EU countries – notably India, Nigeria, Pakistan, China and Zimbabwe.⁷

As per the table below, during this period, 3.8 million long-term visas were issued across various work, study, family and humanitarian routes.⁸ (Long-term means non-visitor, non-temporary visas, where the holder is allowed to stay in the country for a period of at least 12 months, as per the UN definition.)⁹

Long-term visas issued, Jan 2021 to June 2024

Visa route	Number of visas issued	Share of total visas issued	Share on route issued to non-EU nationals
Skilled worker visa	360,473	9.5%	87.7%
Workers	204,066	5.4%	83.1%
Dependants	156,407	4.1%	93.7%
Health & care visa	647,134	17.0%	99.4%
Workers	269,999	7.1%	98.8%
Dependants	377,135	9.9%	99.8%
Other work visa	248,665	6.5%	88.3%
Workers	174,876	4.6%	85.5%
Dependants	73,789	1.9%	88.2%
Sponsored study visa	1,743,262	45.9%	96.3%
Students	1,399,254	36.8%	95.4%
Dependants	344,008	9.0%	99.8%
Family visa	218,094	5.7%	97.4%
Other (inc. humanitarian)	584,202	15.4%	81.7%
Ukraine	261,184	6.9%	100.0%
Hong Kong (BNO)	169,892	4.5%	100.0%
Other (inc. EEA Family)	153,132	7.3%	53.4%
Grand total	3,801,836	100.0%	95.9%

The ILR door will begin to open for these new arrivals at the start of 2026, less than a year from now. Yet as far as we are aware, no government department has even begun planning for the potential impact of this on public services and spending. Indeed, there is apparently no official estimate for the number of people likely to claim ILR, let alone their fiscal impact, if the official response to a recent Parliamentary Written Question submitted by Jack Rankin MP is any guide.¹⁰

In an attempt to grapple with this problem, this briefing looks at a range of scenarios for how many immigrants are likely to claim ILR, and via what routes. In the final section, we then look at the potential fiscal implications.

How many immigrants are likely to get ILR?

If we are to estimate the number of ILR grants to migrants who were issued visas during this period – now generally described by its critics as the ‘Boriswave’ – we need to determine two things: the number of these immigrants who could be eligible for ILR, and proportion who are likely to stay.

1) How many immigrants could be eligible for ILR?

Many of the visa routes created under the new system do not provide a direct route to applying for ILR. These include sponsored study visas (1.74 million) and visas for Ukrainian refugees (260,000). (This may seem cruel, but the Ukrainian government itself argues that it will need its citizens to return to rebuild.)¹¹

However, other major routes such as the skilled worker and health and care visa routes can lead to ILR, both for actual workers and their dependants (1.01 million visas), as can other niche work routes (many of the 250,000),¹² the Hong Kong (BNO) route (170,000) and a wide range of family (220,000), humanitarian and other visas (150,000).¹³

In other words, between January 2021 and June 2024, more than 1.7 million visas were issued that could enable their holders to apply for and gain ILR, the vast majority after five years. That equates to 46% of all long-term visas issued to migrants outside of the UK’s borders.

We also need to think about those switching from non-ILR-eligible visas to ILR-eligible visas after arriving in the UK. In particular, from study to either work, family or humanitarian visas.

The Home Office publishes fairly good data on visa extensions, which also covers immigrants moving between types of visa.¹⁴ From this data we can see that in the years 2021-2023, just under 23,000 people switched from study to family or ‘other visas’ – which will include, for example, the 5,000 international students who claimed asylum in the year to March 2023 within 12 months of having arrived in Britain.¹⁵

We can also see that a much larger number switched to work visas. But included in this category is the two-year Graduate visa, which is not itself a direct route to ILR on the five-year route (although it can be counted towards a separate 10-year route).¹⁶

Fortunately, the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford has obtained data on the breakdown of international students moving into the skilled worker route versus the Graduate visa route for 2021-2023.¹⁷ In 2022, 53.3% switched onto the skilled route and 46.7% on to the Graduate route; in 2023, it was 57.9% and 42.1% respectively. We therefore know that around 200,000 students had switched into the skilled worker visa route by the end of 2023.

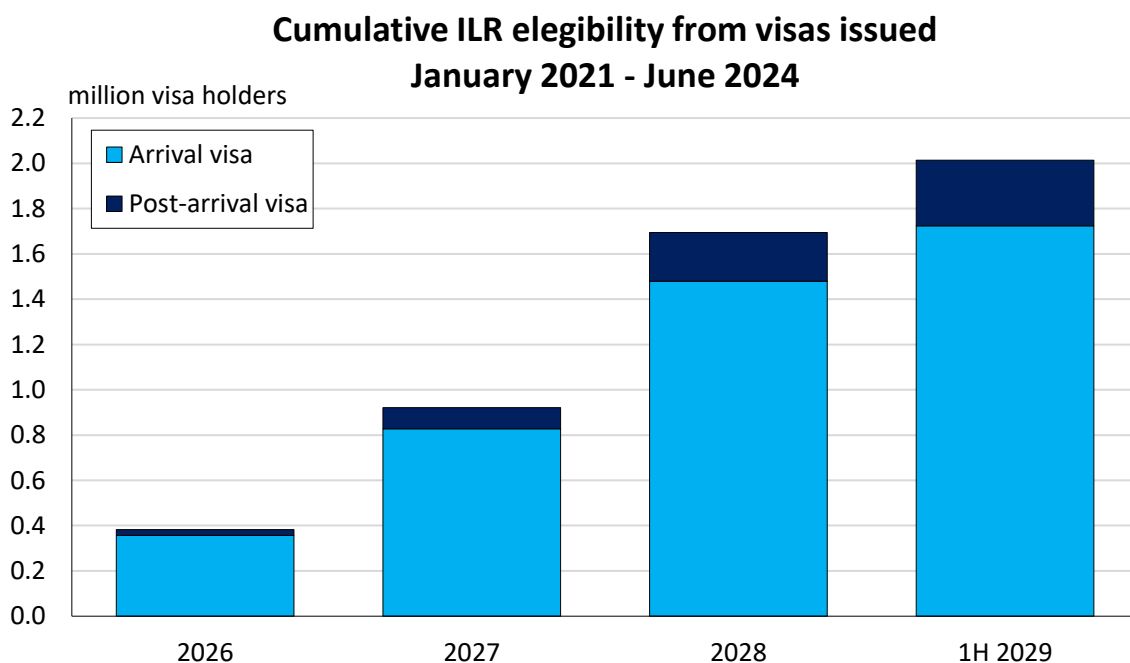
This fits with the argument made by Neil O’Brien MP, co-author of the CPS paper ‘Taking Back Control’, that many of the new one-year taught masters courses offered by universities are designed to accommodate those on ‘Deliveroo visas’, whose priority is access to the UK labour market rather than higher education. Fully 88% of the increase in international student numbers between 2018/19 and 2022/23 was driven by taught postgraduate courses.¹⁸ And sure enough, as Migration

Observatory analysis has found, only around a quarter of those switching to from study into skilled worker visas were actually doing graduate level jobs – in fact, the majority were going into the low-paid social care sector.¹⁹

As a result, the contrast with the pre-2021 trend is stark. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of international students switching to new visa routes averaged 9,900 per annum – roughly 2%. In 2022 and 2023, it averaged 145,000 – 20% the total.²⁰ The Home Office has not yet published visa extension data covering the first half of 2024. However, if we use the 2023 figures and ratios, we can reasonably assume about 50,000 switchers to ILR-eligible work and non-work routes in the first half of 2024. So overall, we can say that around 250,000 immigrants who arrived on student visas have since switched to other visa routes and will be eligible for ILR by mid-2029 at the latest.

But there is one further factor to consider. Analysis published by the Home Office indicates that a substantial proportion of students who switch to the Graduate visa go on to switch again from that route, to other visas that are ILR-eligible.²¹ In 2023, a very considerable 46% of Graduate visa holders switched to work routes, 6% to family routes and 5% to other routes (such as asylum). That’s another 14,500 visas to add to the ILR pile. Applying the same rates to Graduate visas that were set to expire in the first half of 2024 adds another 24,800.

In total, therefore, the theoretical pool of recent immigrants who could get ILR is over 2 million: more than 1.7 million via the visa route they entered the UK on and a further 289,000 students who have acquired a different type of visa post-arrival. These visa holders will start to become eligible for ILR from January 2026 (five years on from January 2021), and eligibility reaches the theoretical maximum at the end of June 2029 (five years on from June 2024). The graph below shows cumulative ILR eligibility over this period.



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

Of course, many migrants will end up leaving the country before they become eligible for ILR. Indeed, many will have already done so. The next step, therefore, is to work out what share of the more than two million ILR-eligible visa holders are likely to actually end up claiming ILR.

2) What share of these immigrants will actually stay and apply for ILR?

When it comes to immigration post-2020, the past is a limited guide to the future – because the change in the immigration mix has gone hand in hand with a change in behaviour.

For example, stay rates so far appear to be higher than historically has been the case, and more migrants are switching visa routes while in the UK. Hence the repeated revisions to ONS net migration estimates, as old assumptions have been updated on the basis of observed trends.²² In November 2024, the ONS revised the net migration figure for the year ending June 2023 up by 166,000 – a 22% increase on the previous estimate. The initial estimate for 2022 was 606,000. It now stands at 872,000.

Nevertheless, looking at the historical data does at least allow us to establish a baseline for how many of the 2 million visa holders we might expect to get ILR – even if this proves to be an underestimate.

There are two Home Office datasets that together give us some insight into historical ILR grant rates, which in turn allows us to make some broad-brush predictions of future ILR grants. The first is the ‘migrant journey’ dataset, which attempts to track how migrants’ leave status changes as they journey through the immigration system until the point where they acquire ILR.²³

This data has its limitations. It tracks ‘journeys’ rather than individual migrants per se, so for example, if an individual is granted new leave more than a year after their previous leave expired, a ‘new journey’ begins; conversely, if a new visa is granted within a year of previous leave expiring, it is not counted as a new journey. This means the number of journeys recorded is always less than the number of visas issued. It also makes it hard to isolate visa switchers in the data.

Additionally, the migrant journey data is mostly only relevant to non-EEA migrants. Before 2021, under Freedom of Movement, EEA migrants did not need a visa to live and work in the UK, and so mostly do not show up in the data. However, since the vast majority of recent immigration is non-EEA in origin (96% of visas granted since January 2021 went to non-EEA nationals), this is not a massive problem for our purposes.²⁴

Finally, ILR-eligible immigrants need not claim ILR immediately after five years and instead can wait much longer. This limits what we can infer about ILR rates for more recent immigrant cohorts.

That being said, as analysis below shows, the vast majority of a cohort who do get ILR do so within three years of being eligible. So even if the most recent migrant journey data is not perfect, it can still be a useful guide.

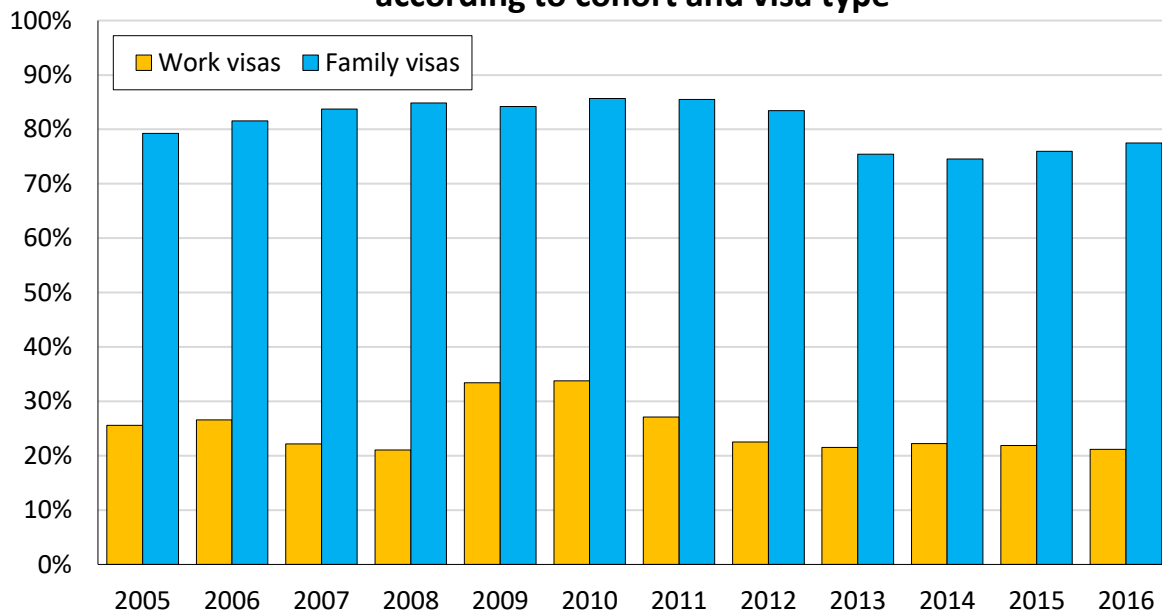
The oldest cohort of migrant journeys for which we have data is 2005, when 210,000 migrant journeys began on work visas. By 2023, 54,000 of those held ILR and another 4,000 held valid leave to remain (i.e. they were on a valid visa but had not claimed/been granted ILR). Around 152,000 had

seen their leave expire and left the system (and in theory the country).²⁵ In short, 26% of the cohort gained ILR, and another 2% still had potential to gain it at some point in the future.

Among the 50,000 who began their migrant journey on family routes in 2005, conversion rates were significantly higher. Some 39,000 (79%) had gained ILR by the end of 2023, with just over 500 (1%) on valid leave but not yet with ILR, and the other 10,000 having left the system.

As per the chart below, the migrant journey data suggests that on average, around 25% of those who enter the country on work visas eventually get ILR, and around 81% of those who initially enter on family visas. Rates on other visa routes (mostly humanitarian and niche family/dependant visas) are closer to the family route than the work route; if you put family and other routes into the same non-work bucket, the combined ILR rate is around 73%.

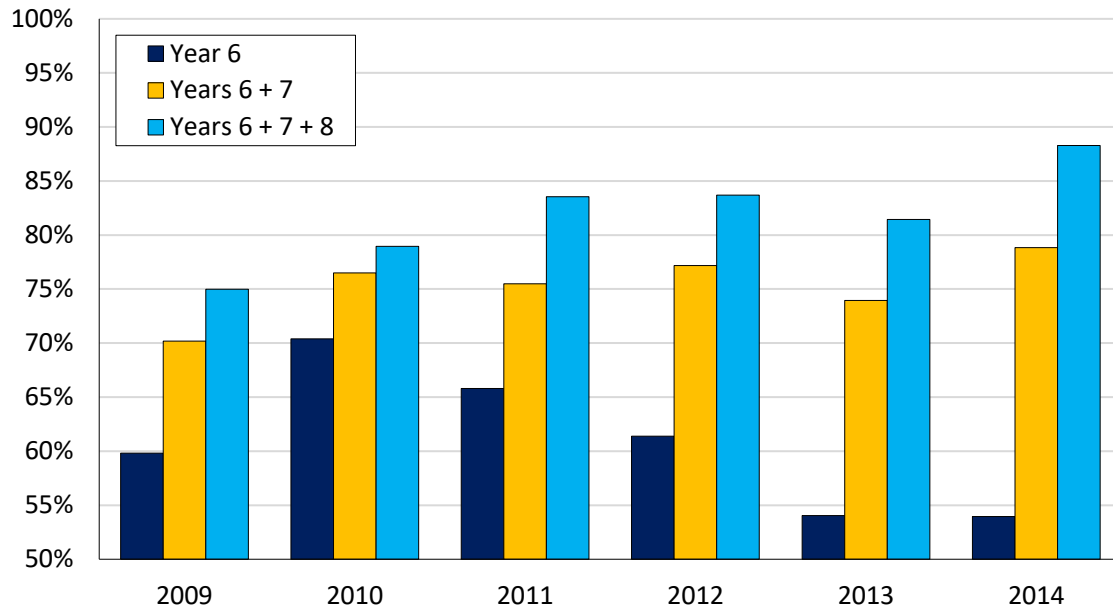
**Non-EEA immigrants with ILR by the end of 2023
according to cohort and visa type**



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

The migrant journey data also shows that while not all immigrants who go on to get ILR do so at the first opportunity, the vast majority do so within three years of becoming eligible. For non-EEA migrants from any given cohort who start on an ILR-eligible visa, on average 61% have ILR by the end of year six of their migrant journey, rising to 75% by the end of year seven and 82% by the end of year eight.

Cumulative settlement grants as share of total recorded grants by year of initial visa grant and time elapsed since initial grant



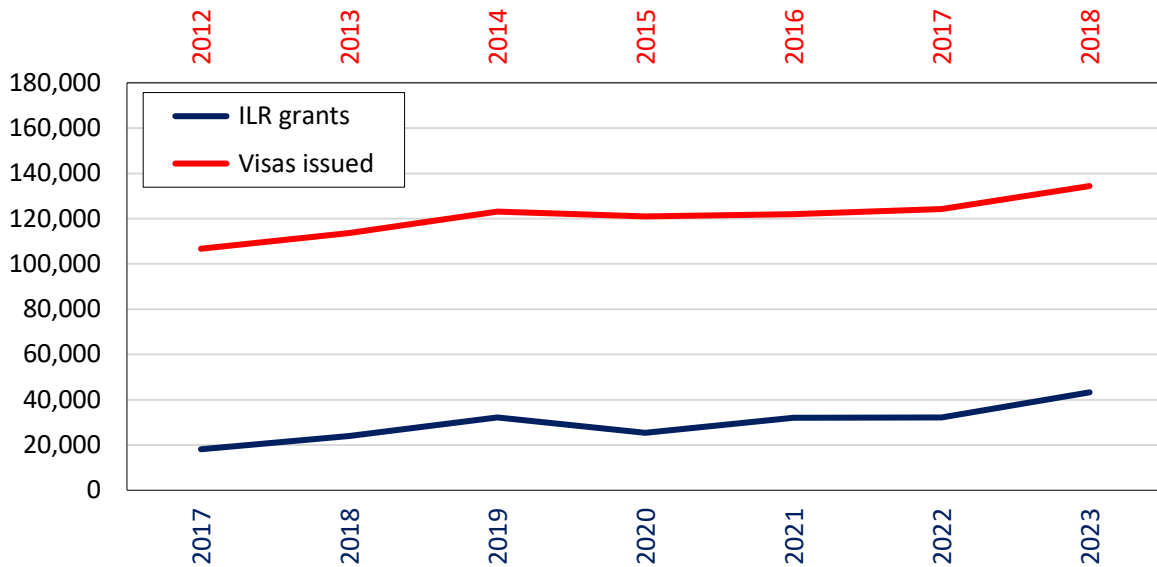
Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

For example, if we take the cohort of migrants who arrived in 2009, 93% of those who have so far obtained ILR did so by the end of 2014. There is then a long tail of diminishing numbers receiving ILR in each subsequent year, down to 99 or 0.3% of the total in 2023.

Then there is another Home Office dataset we need to consider, the Settlement dataset it publishes in its regular quarterly update of the immigration statistics.²⁶ This contains data on ILR grants up until the end of 2023.

In the charts below, we have compared the number of work visas issued with the number of ILR grants five years later.²⁷ The relationship between the two is remarkably consistent, suggesting that a relatively predictable proportion of those arriving on work visas will convert into permanent UK residents.

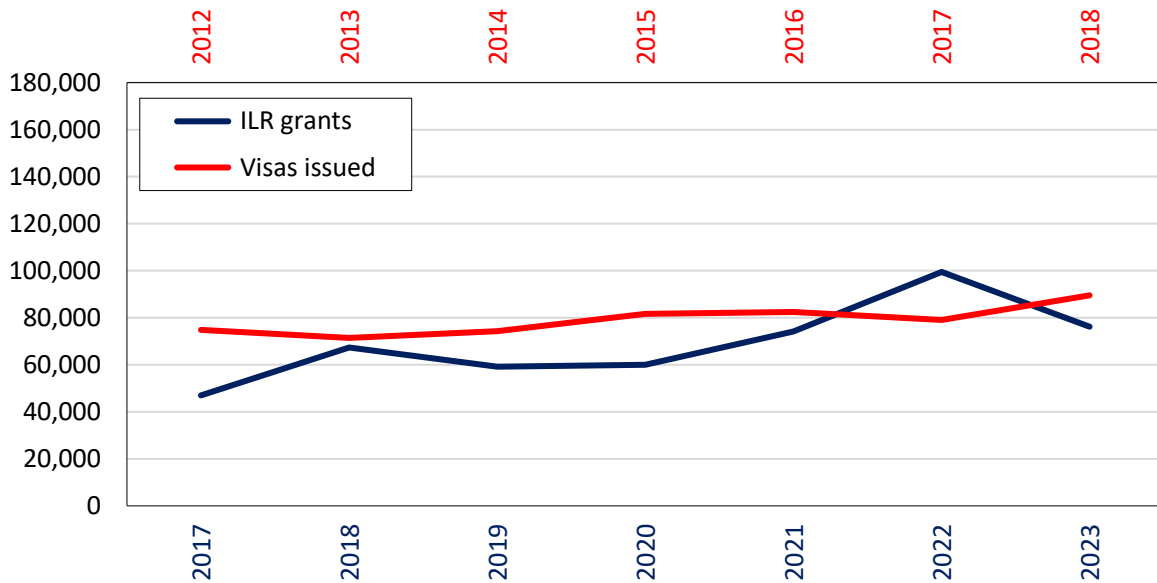
Work visas and ILR grants, five-year lag



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

What about those on non-work visas? As the graph below indicates, the relationship is looser. (These are mostly family or humanitarian visas, but the ILR categories in the settlement dataset do not map neatly on to visa categories or the categories used in the migrant journey data, so we have had to consider all non-work visas together.)

Non-work visas and ILR grants, five-year lag



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

This provides us with two ways to estimate the proportion of migrants who will end up receiving ILR, from two different datasets – either a straightforward extrapolation from the number of visas issued five years previously, or a calculation based on the trends in the ‘migrant journeys’ dataset. And fortunately, the two match up extremely well.

For example, we know that over the period 2012-2018, 844,897 work visas were issued. On the migrant journey trendline, we would therefore expect to see 207,432 ILR grants over the period 2018-2023. In fact the total was 206,993 – a difference of just 0.2%.

On non-work visas, this methodology is less accurate. We would have expected to see 408,167 ILR grants over this period, but there were 483,554 – 18% higher than projected. However, this discrepancy seems to be mainly due to various refugee schemes in recent years that have granted ILR in year zero.²⁸ For example, the ‘Afghan citizens resettlement scheme’ opened in January 2022; over 16,000 Afghans received ILR by the end of the year.

It is worth noting that two ten-year routes to ILR were introduced in 2012: the ‘Private Life’ and ‘Family Life’ routes. The first migrants on the 10-year routes to get ILR did so in 2022 – but this was only 142 individuals in total.²⁹ Numbers appear to be rising but at this stage it is very hard to know what effect the 10-year route will have on ILR grants, for as the Migration Observatory noted in 2021: ‘Aside from the nationality and previous immigration status of people on ten-year routes, there is no published information available about this group,’ noting further that ‘annual Migrant Journey publication does allow for calculation of length of time until settlement, but again is not structured in such a way that migrants originally placed on ten-year routes can be identified’, among a litany of data gaps with regards to the route.³⁰

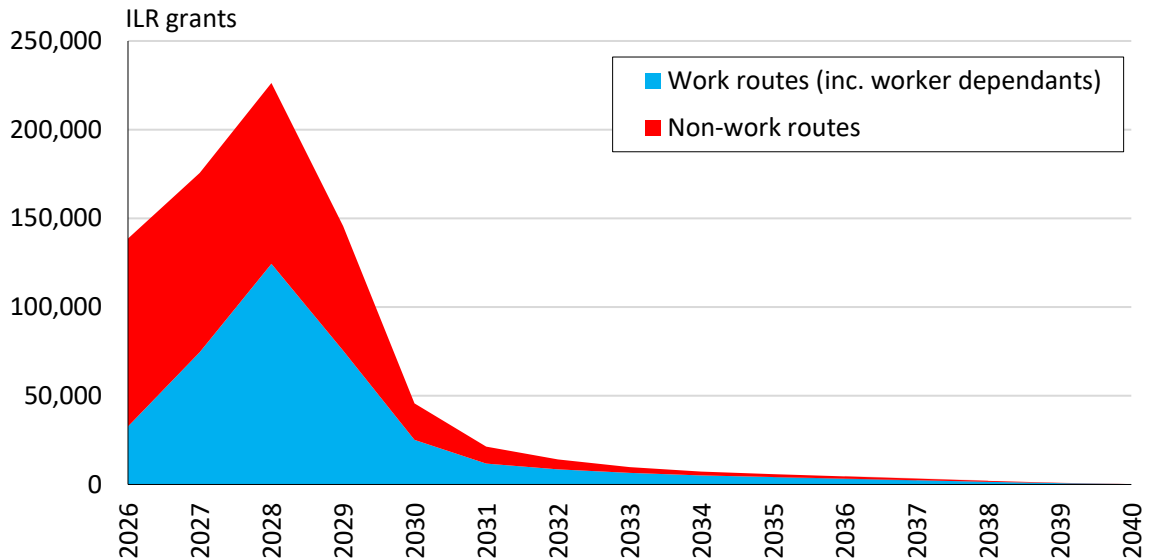
But to return to our main theme, in summary, we can assume that around 25% of those arriving on a work route, and 73% of those on other ILR-eligible routes, will end up getting ILR – at least for a ‘base case’ forecast. These same rates, 25% and 73%, can also be applied to those who we know are switching to the work and non-work routes from student visas.

So to recap, we have established that:

1. There over 2 million recent migrants who will become eligible for ILR from January 2026 onwards – almost 1.5 million on work visas (including their dependants) and 576,000 on non-work visas.
2. On a historic basis, around 25% of migrants on worker visas (including dependants) and 73% of migrants on non-work visas will end up gaining ILR.

We should therefore expect that out of a potential 2 million, around 801,000 migrants – 376,000 on work visas (including dependants) and 435,000 on non-work visas – will eventually obtain ILR. Based on historic patterns, around 686,000 of them should do so by the end of the decade (86% of the total), with the remaining 115,000 doing so by 2040.

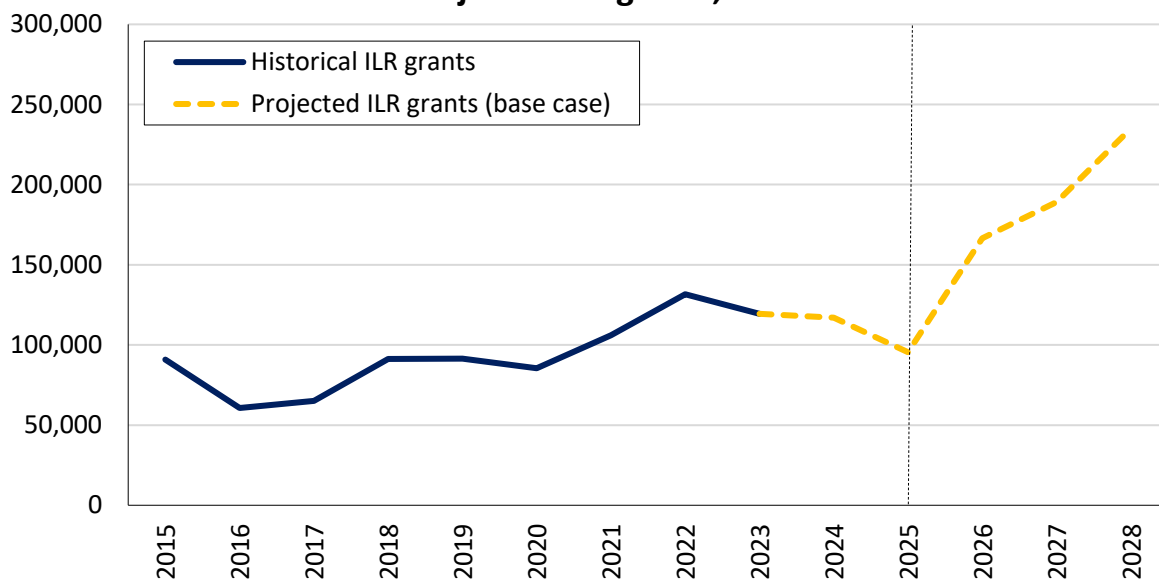
Projected timing of ILR grants, based on visas issued



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

If we combine these projections with the backlog of ILR grants we would expect from pre-2021 immigration, then we would expect ILR grants to rise to 235,000 by 2028, as per the graph below. That's 644 per day, compared to an average of 327 per day in the 2010s – so very nearly double the previous rate. (The vertical lines shows where migrants who arrived under the new immigration system will start to become eligible for ILR – after 2025.)

Projected ILR grants, 2024-2028



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

Of course, it is also worth considering alternative scenarios, where ILR uptake rates are lower or higher than the historical average. For example, if we use the first and third quartile of the historical ranges of ILR uptake (21.8% and 26.7% for work, and 71.7% and 76.5% for non-work), we get different numbers: 742,000 recent migrants ending up with ILR by 2040 in the low case (329,000 work and 403,000 non-work); and 844,000 in the high case (413,000 work and 441,000 non-work).

Indeed, before we move on to looking at the potential fiscal implications, there is one more thing we ought to ponder.

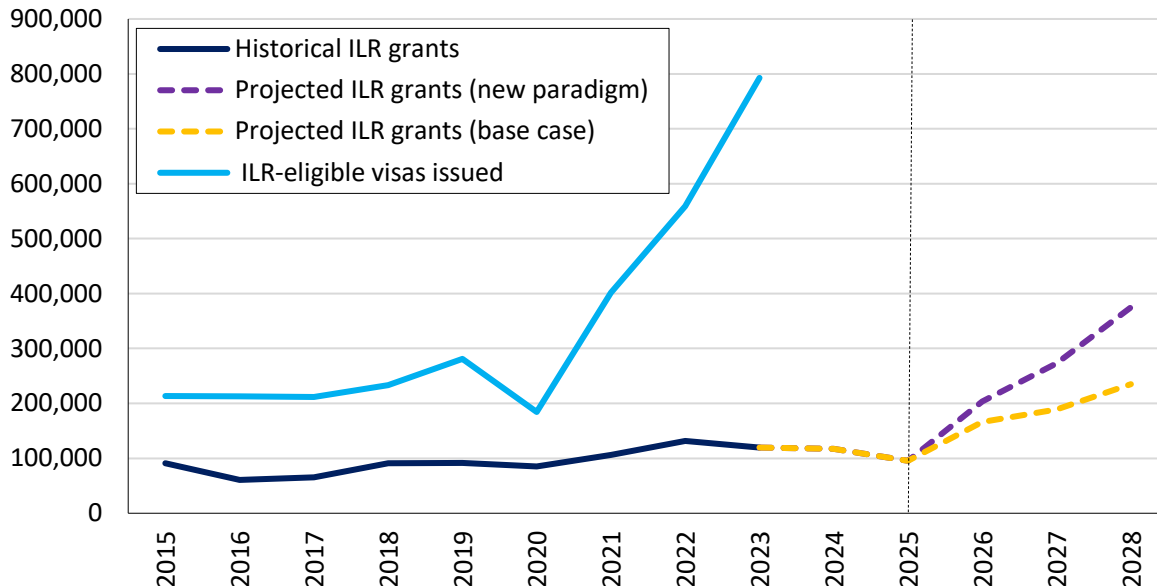
As noted above, we know that the profile and behaviour of immigrants post-2020 seems to be very different to the pre-2021. Above all, there was the switch from EU to non-EU. There was also a very relaxed attitude towards dependants. On the main skilled worker route, there are 0.76 dependants for every actual worker; on the health and care route, there are 1.40 dependants for every worker. In comparison, in the 2010s there were 0.57 dependants per worker on average each year. Similar trends have been playing out with student visas.

If more workers are bringing family members with them, does this suggest that more workers are coming with the intention of settling in the UK long-term? It's certainly a possibility. Given that we are taking many more people from poorer countries – GDP per capita in India is \$10,166, Nigeria \$6,207, Pakistan \$6,037, and Zimbabwe \$3,820 – there is a strong case that they would be more motivated to stay in the UK than those arriving from wealthier countries under the old migration system, especially as there is now a significant existing diaspora from such countries to settle into.³¹

So let's consider what a post-2020 'new paradigm' scenario might look like. In the base case, 25% of work visa holders get ILR. But what if settlement patterns among those holding work visas post-2020 are closer to the historical patterns we see for those on the family routes? In that group, projected ILR rates are around 81%.

What happens if we assume, for the sake of argument, that 53% (the midpoint of 25% and 81%) of immigrants on work visas get ILR after five years? Leaving the rate on non-work routes the same as in our base case, this would result in 1.224 million immigrants getting ILR: 799,000 on work visas (including workers' dependants) and 425,000 on non-work routes. Certainly, as per the graph below, this 'new paradigm' trajectory looks rather more compelling than the base case, given overall visa trends.

Projected ILR grants, 2024-2028



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

Finally, before we move on to considering fiscal costs, a note on ‘chain migration’, i.e. when ‘individual members of a community migrate and then encourage or assist further movements of migration’, often through family connections.³² Each migrant who receives ILR will have the right to bring over spouses and children on family visas. Given the flaws and gaps in the official data, we have excluded this phenomenon from our analysis. But it is another reason to think that the range of numbers we have arrived at represents a baseline rather than an average – indeed, we could be substantially underestimating the long-term consequences of the post-2022 immigration surge.

So to conclude this section: we have looked at different scenarios for ILR uptake stemming from immigration to the UK across the January 2021 to June 2024 period. The summary table below specifies the total projected ILR grants in each scenario, as well as the implied average daily rate of ILR grants in 2028, when three years’ worth of new migrants will be eligible for ILR. This is five years on from what seems to be the peak of the post-2020 immigration wave (net migration was 906,000 in the year ending June 2023, and 728,000 in the year ending June 2024 – though both figures could be subject to further revisions). By way of comparison, ILR grants averaged 327 per day in the 2010s. In our base case scenario, the 2028 peak rate is almost double that average. In our ‘new paradigm’ scenario, it exceeds triple that rate, with around 1,000 migrants getting ILR per day.

ILR projections for 2028

Scenarios	Indefinite Leave to Remain grants	Average number of grants per day
Low case	742,000	570
Base case	801,000	620
High case	844,000	650
New paradigm	1,224,000	1,000

What is the likely long-term fiscal impact of post-2020 immigration?

We are now in a position to begin working out the fiscal consequences of these new migrants moving from short-term migrants to permanent residents. To do so, we need to assign a lifetime fiscal impact to those migrants we project to obtain ILR. There are two key variables we need to consider:

- 1) The age at which these migrants arrived in the UK – since those of prime working age are more likely to be net contributors than those who are very young or old
- 2) The likely earnings of these migrants – since the more a migrant earns, the more taxes they will pay to any offset services and benefits consumed (and the less likely they are to draw on the benefit system)

However, this exercise is likely to be extremely difficult – since, as CPS Director Robert Colvile recently pointed out, and we lamented at length in our paper ‘Taking Back Control’, the quality of data on recent migrant earnings in the UK is desperately poor.³³

For countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, extremely detailed analysis of the lifetime fiscal impact of immigration has been built up using a wealth of government data.³⁴ These analyses slice immigration by route, age at arrival, nationality and host of other variables, and take into account factors like differential educational achievement, crime, employment and earnings outcomes.³⁵

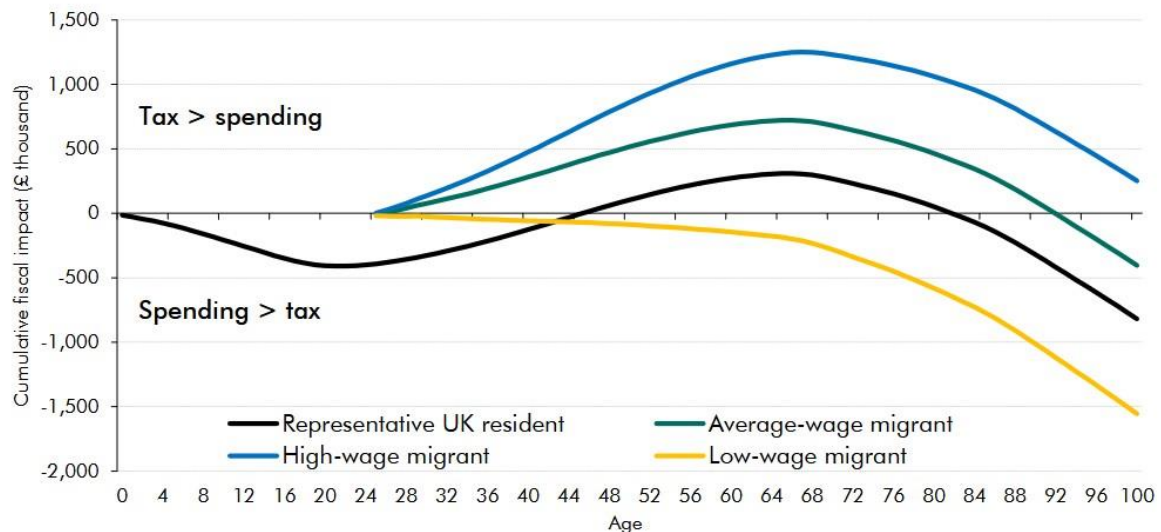
The Danish government found that, for example, immigrants from non-Western countries and their descendants cost the public finances 31 billion kroner (£3.6 billion) in 2018, the equivalent of 1.4% of GDP. In particular, migrants from ‘MENAPT’, or the Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan and Turkey, accounted for 50% of non-Western migrants and 77% of the costs – the equivalent of 85,000 kroner (£9,800) per migrant.

Unfortunately, the quality of data and analysis in the UK is depressingly rudimentary in comparison. Both the OBR and the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) have begun to look into replicating the Danish and Dutch approach. But so far the MAC can only give a snapshot focused on the year of arrival, which covers only a few types of migrant household – all of them headed by a migrant on a skilled worker visa.

The OBR, meanwhile, has made useful attempt at life-cycle analysis for ‘low-wage’, ‘average-wage’ and ‘high-wage’ migrant workers.³⁶ But this is produced using the Labour Force Survey (LFS), whose data is so unreliable that it is being shelved and overhauled. It is particularly unreliable, sadly, when it comes to migrant families and those on low earnings.

In addition, the OBR modelling also uses highly stylised assumptions: the migrants it models arrive age 25 and have no dependants. Since the ratio of dependants to workers on the skilled visa routes is about 1.3 to 1, and historically a non-trivial number of migrants have arrived at much older ages, we need to be cautious about these assessments. Nor are profiles provided for migrants arriving on family or humanitarian visas. However, in lieu of anything better, the OBR analysis is where we shall have to start.

Last summer, the OBR provided the below chart and accompanying data on the lifetime net fiscal contributions of its three profiles of skilled migrant who arrive aged 25. In the OBR analysis, these low-wage migrants are a net fiscal burden from day one, average-wage migrants are net positive until relatively old age, and high-wage migrants are a boon to the country even if they live to 100.



Note: Cumulative fiscal impact include the cost of a skilled work visa, NHS surcharge, indefinite leave to remain and immigration skills charges for employers. Figures for migrants includes the fiscal spending required to keep public capital stock per person constant.
Source: OBR

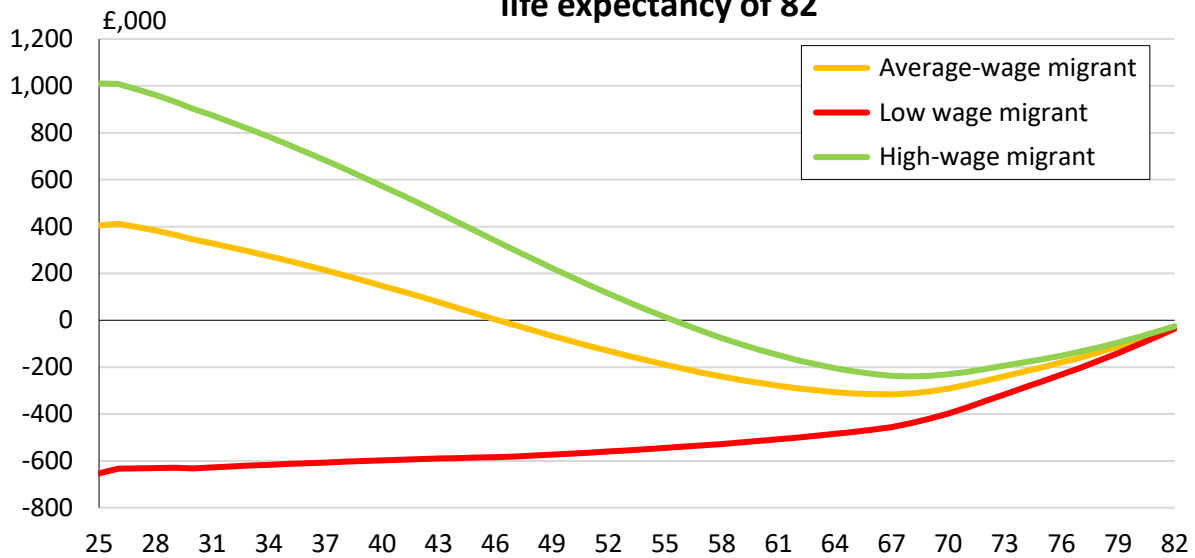
But what about if the migrants arrive at younger or older ages than 25? Well, if they arrive as a child, we would expect the lifetime fiscal profile to look more or less as it does for the 'representative UK resident', at least if they go on to become an average-wage worker. But if they arrive when they are older than 25, the picture is more complicated.

Helpfully, the OBR has published the underlying data in sufficient detail for us to be able to see the change in the net contribution between each year in a given fiscal profile – and therefore to assign a number to each specific year of life. For example, an 'average-wage' migrant worker in the 50th year of their life will accumulate a net contribution of around £21,000 over the course of that year; if they arrived age 25, that would take their lifetime contribution to date up to around £516,000.

If we assume an average life expectancy of 82, we can use these OBR figures to work out a rough estimate of the lifetime net fiscal impact of a migrant arriving on a skilled worker visa, based on the age they arrive.³⁷ For example, as the graph below shows, an 'average-wage' migrant who arrives aged 25 will make a net lifetime contribution of around £405,000 if they live to the age of 82. But if they arrived aged 40, their net contribution would total £147,000. If they arrived at any age older than 46, they would end up being a net drain on the public purse.

A 'high-wage' migrant, meanwhile, could arrive aged 55 and still just about be a net contributor if they lived to the age of 82. A 'low-wage' migrant would probably not be a net contributor at any age (though somewhat paradoxically, from a purely fiscal point of view, the older they arrive the better, as they will accumulate less of a deficit before reaching 82).

Net lifetime fiscal impact based on age of arrival, assuming life expectancy of 82

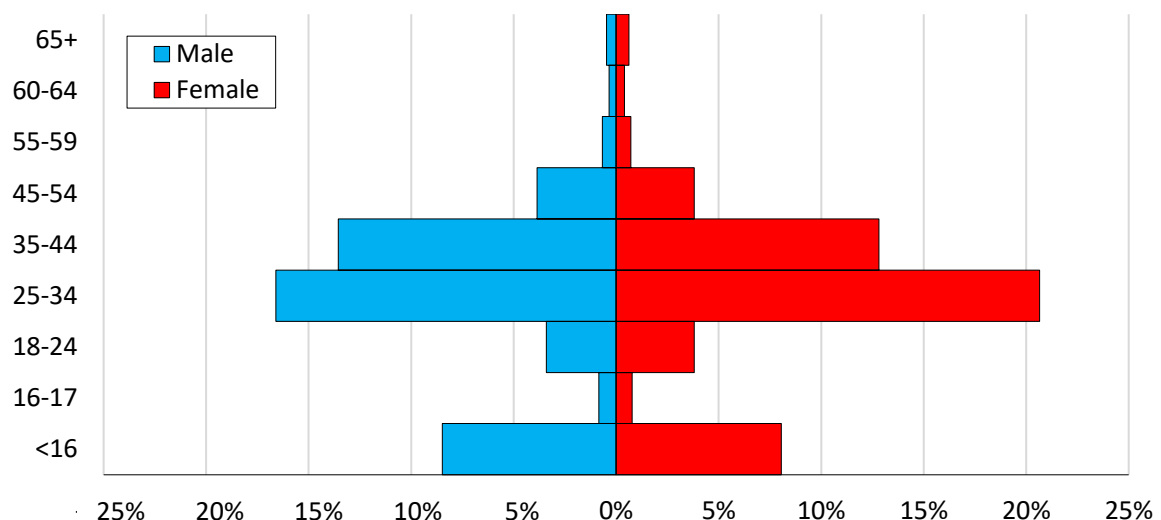


Source: OBR, CPS analysis

1) What is a plausible age distribution for the migrants we project to get ILR?

In theory the Home Office should hold data on the ages of all migrants issued with visas. But this is not something the department chooses to publish in its quarterly statistical updates. This leaves us relying on historical ILR data. Thankfully, the Home Office does break this down by age – though again, we must enter the caveat that the past is probably a less useful guide to the future than it was before 2021. Nevertheless, the graph below shows the age distribution for all non-EEA migrants who obtained ILR from 2010 to 2023, by their age at the time they obtained it.

Age distribution at grant of ILR, 2010-2023



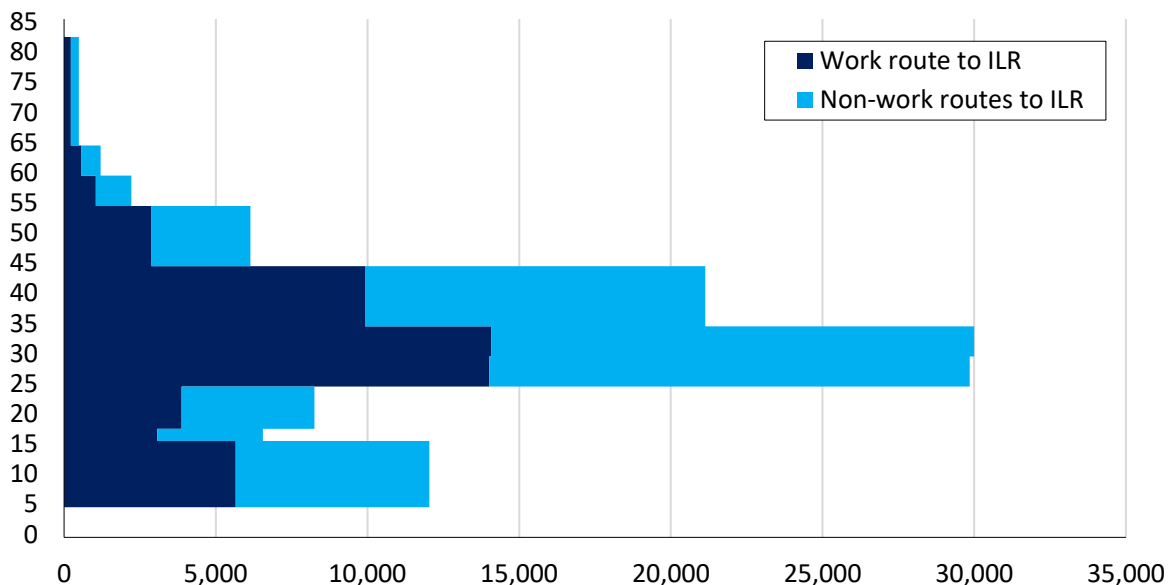
Source: OBR, CPS analysis

Of this cohort, just over 37% fall in the 25-34 age bracket. Based on what we know about the typical delay between arriving in Britain and gaining ILR, most of these migrants will probably have arrived between the ages of about 17 and 29. Similarly, the 26% in the 35-44 age bracket will have mostly arrived in the UK from their late twenties until the age of 39. These migrants are the most likely to have positive fiscal profiles. This is obviously less the case for the 16% arriving as young children, and even less so for the roughly 2% who would have been over 55.

The next step in the modelling process is to apply this population pyramid to the number of migrants we have projected will get ILR across the work and non-work routes. Obviously this will mean a large number of migrants on work visas are treated as children. However, since the data we have been working with for ILR via work visas includes dependants, this actually captures this dynamic quite neatly. And in terms of the fiscal impact, we can use the same fiscal profile the OBR applies to the representative UK resident. We appreciate this is an imperfect process, but would argue that it is still more realistic than assuming everyone arriving in the country is aged 25.

In fact, if anything, this approach probably slightly understates child dependant numbers. There are 62,000 in the base case ILR scenario, which represents 0.38 child dependants per worker, whereas the MAC estimates that there are an average of 0.5 child dependants per worker across the skilled worker (including health and care) routes.³⁸ As such, our analysis could well be underestimating the fiscal costs of ILR by shaving off some of the expenditure associated with healthcare and schooling. We are also implicitly ignoring the costs of any children born in the UK to recent migrants who then go on to get ILR.

Age profile of migrants at point of claiming ILR, base case projection



Source: Home Office, CPS analysis

One slight quirk of this approach is that in effect, we are assuming that a migrant arriving aged 77 will get ILR aged 82, and then drop dead before they can incur any of the massive fiscal costs associated with extreme old age (indeed, we are also assuming that no migrants arrive aged 78 or older). In the OBR analysis, the net fiscal cost of the average 70-year-old is about £16,060 for that

single year of their life. Aged 80, it is £29,460. At 90, £48,020. Again, this means we will probably be underestimating fiscal costs (though at the upper end of the age distribution this time).

2) What are recent migrants earning?

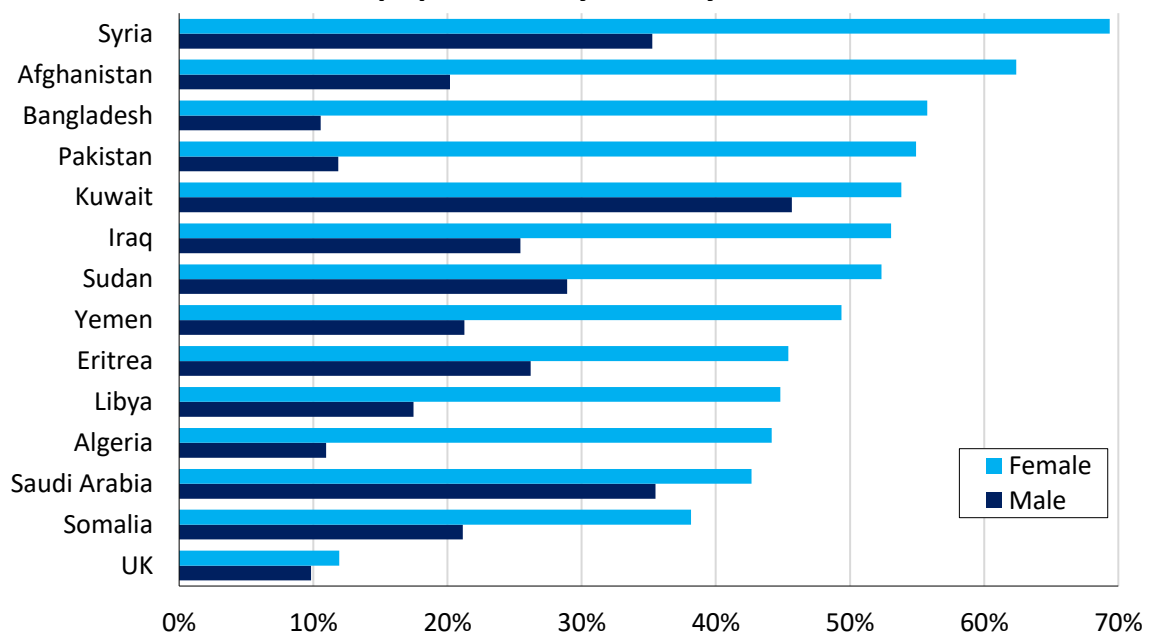
For migrants on skilled work visas, the OBR thinks that the earnings distribution is pretty close to that for UK-born residents. The earnings of its ‘average wage’ migrant are roughly in line with the median salary of existing UK residents. The earnings of the ‘low-wage’ migrant worker are 50% lower and roughly in line with the 25th percentile of UK-born workers; the earnings of the ‘high-wage’ migrant are 30% higher and roughly in line with the 75th percentile of UK-born residents.

It is these difference in earnings potential which drive the difference in the OBR’s three migrant life-cycle profiles, as state spending on each is assumed to be the same, based on the same age-adjusted fiscal and economic profile, with just earnings (and hence tax receipts) adjusted.³⁹

If we follow the OBR in its distribution of worker earnings, then of the recent migrants getting ILR from work visas, we would expect around 25% to be ‘low-wage’, 50% ‘average-wage’ and 25% ‘high-wage’. On the assumption that the children of migrants will end up with comparable earnings to their parents (again, the UK data is lacking, but this seems to be the case elsewhere in Europe),⁴⁰ then we can divide the fiscal profiles in the same way among the under-18s.

Spouses coming over as dependants on work visas are more tricky to allocate fiscal profiles. As the Migration Observatory has noted, dependants on work visas face no salary thresholds on the work they can legally do.⁴¹ Given their much lower barriers to the labour market, we have almost no idea what they are earning as distinct from any other group – if indeed they are working at all.

Adults who were unemployed and had never worked, as a share of the population by country of birth, Census 2021



Source: ONS, CPS analysis

However, as per the graph above historical data shows that economic inactivity has been relatively high among certain groups. For instance, according to the 2021 census, 55% of all adult women born in Bangladesh or Pakistan but now living in England and Wales were not just unemployed but had never worked in their lives (at least in the UK). That compares to 12% of all adult women – of any ethnicity – born in the UK.⁴²

We know that 62,000 Bangladeshi or Pakistani dependants arrived on work visas as part of the cohort we are studying. If, as above, around half of these dependants are children, most of the rest will be spouses (and a smattering of elderly dependants). Even if we in turn assume only half are women (and over the 2013-23 period, the ratio was actually two-to-one, 48,000 wives versus 23,300 husbands),⁴³ that's still 15,500 migrants who are much less likely to be in work than the UK average.

In our base case ILR scenario, we would expect about a quarter of these migrants to end up getting ILR – 3,860. If historical patterns hold, around 55% of these will probably never work.

However, for the sake of simplicity, we have assumed in our model that all adult migrants on work visas will be working, rather than incorporating dependants who may have essentially zero lifetime earnings. Instead, we assume the same earnings distribution among adult dependants as we do among adult workers – though once again, we might therefore be significantly underestimating the fiscal costs.

In total then, in our base case scenario, we have 376,000 migrants getting ILR via work visas, of whom we are assuming 94,000 have fiscal profiles roughly cognate to the OBR's 'low-wage' migrant worker, 188,000 to the 'average-wage' migrant worker and 94,000 to the 'high-wage' migrant worker.

Finally, that leaves us to contemplate the fiscal profiles of the migrants getting ILR on non-work routes – 425,000 in our base case ILR scenario. This is far from straightforward, for again no comprehensive analysis of the lifetime costs on migrants on non-work visa routes has been produced in recent years.

By the very nature of the routes, many of those arriving will not be working – though we would expect at least some of the children arriving by these routes to eventually enter the labour force.

In general, European analysis shows that migrants arriving as refugees have by far the worst fiscal profiles of any group, 'mainly due to the very weak labour market and performance and high benefit utilization', on top of 'the costs of integration and especially the reception of asylum seekers'.⁴⁴ Indeed, whereas the average 'non-Western' migrant arriving on a family visa was assessed as having a lifetime net fiscal cost of €263,000, the average 'non-Western' migrant who gained asylum in the Netherlands was estimated to have a 65% worse outcome, with a lifetime net fiscal cost of €433,000.

Insofar as there are migrants arriving on these routes and going into work, we would instinctively expect those arriving on Hong Kong BN(O) visas to be among the most fiscally positive. Yet even so, studies have found that only 52% of those who arrived via this route are employed. Moreover, almost half (47%) of those who are working say they are doing so at a level below their skills and qualifications. According to Dr Heather Rolfe, writing for UK in a Changing Europe last summer, the cost of living crisis forced many 'to take low paid jobs in warehouses, supermarkets and restaurants rather than hold out for jobs that match their skills'.⁴⁵

Bearing all this in mind, we would expect the average migrants arriving on non-work routes to have an even worse lifetime fiscal outcome than the ‘low-wage’ migrant worker in the OBR’s analysis. However, in lieu of more detailed data, we shall forbear from attempting to construct a fiscal profile, and instead treat these migrants as similar to the OBR’s ‘low-wage’ migrants – even though that will yet again leave us underestimating rather than overestimating the long-term fiscal costs.

Across our four different ILR scenarios, the breakdowns of how the fiscal profiles are allocated are set out in the table below.

Allocation of fiscal profiles in different ILR scenarios

	Low case	Base case	High case	New paradigm
Work route to ILR*				
Low-wage	82,331	94,038	100,836	199,784
Average-wage	164,661	188,077	201,672	399,568
High-wage	82,331	94,038	100,836	199,784
Non-work route to ILR~				
Low-wage	412,882	424,974	440,522	424,974
Total	742,202	801,128	843,867	1,224,111

**Includes worker dependants and visa switchers. ~ Includes visa switchers.*

By applying our matrix of age distributions to these groups of fiscal profiles, we can finally derive projections for the lifetime net fiscal impact of the recent migrants who get ILR.

Before we do that, however, it is worth entering some final caveats. As noted above – and as we have explained in detail elsewhere⁴⁶ – there are strong grounds for scepticism about the distribution of migrant earnings used in the OBR’s analysis.

As the OBR noted at the time, the Labour Force Survey data on which it was based were so flawed that ‘low sample sizes and volatility in recent periods means that these figures should be interpreted with caution’.⁴⁷ Survey response rates have collapsed since the pandemic; the Governor of the Bank of England has described the LFS as a ‘substantial problem’. Migrant interview data seems to have been the worst hit by the pandemic,⁴⁸ though the MAC have long held strong doubts about its use.⁴⁹

Bearing this in mind, in our paper ‘Taking Back Control’, we highlighted analysis that cast some doubt on the LFS distribution of migrant earnings. Looking at skilled worker visas, we found that more than 50% were issued for what were essentially minimum wage jobs, often in social care.

Indeed, the health and care visa is the elephant in the room here. The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) estimated 6,000 migrants a year would make use of it. Other departments thought the number could be as high as 40,000. These were woeful underestimates. In 2023 alone, 348,000 migrants received a health and care visa – 58 times the DHSC projection.

The majority of these workers, moreover, were not doctors (0.5%) but low-paid care workers (58%).⁵⁰ So low-paid in fact, that the Migration Advisory Committee estimated the average worker on such a

visa would pay £6,500 a year in income tax and National Insurance, vs £22,800 a year for the rest of those coming in on the main skilled worker route.⁵¹

On top of which, there were huge numbers of dependants to consider. Overall, 647,000 migrants received health and care visas in the period we are studying – but 377,000 of those were dependants. That’s 1.4 dependants per worker.

We believe there is a very strong case that the average salaries of this new migrant cohort are substantially lower than the OBR suggests, and that optimists such as Professor Jonathan Portes claim. Of course, as Professor Portes says, average salaries for new arrivals tend to rise over time, and early PAYE data suggest this might be happening more rapidly with the post-2020 migrant cohorts.⁵² As he also noted, this could be driven by ‘selective out-migration’ rather than a huge improvement in their skills or salaries – in other words, migrants on low wages leave, pushing up the salary average for that cohort, while new migrants on low wages arrive. But if so, that might result in a better fiscal outlook overall for the group who do eventually get ILR – which we would certainly welcome.

But against this is the data on earnings by nationality obtained by Neil O’Brien MP via FOI requests to HMRC. In his analysis of this data, he found that the average salaries of various groups strongly represented in the post-2020 migration wave – such as Indian and Nigerian nationals – have absolutely cratered in the last few years, especially among those aged 22-40.⁵³ On average, these nationals – not just the new cohort, but all nationals who have arrived and remained in the UK – now earn less, not more than UK nationals. This contrasts strongly with pre-2021, and is consistent with a very large number of lower earners from those countries arriving and staying. So again, this supports our thesis that the LFS has been overstating the distribution of migrant earnings.

All that said, even if we take the OBR figures as gospel – putting the most optimistic gloss possible on the fiscal contribution of these new arrivals – we find that the long-term fiscal impact of those likely to be granted ILR is negative.

Lifetime net cost impact for different ILR scenarios

ILR Scenario	Number of ILR Grants	Lifetime net fiscal cost	Cost per UK household
Low Case	742,000	£233 billion	£8,100
Base Case	801,000	£234 billion	£8,200
High Case	844,000	£241 billion	£8,500
New Paradigm	1,224,000	£168 billion	£5,900

In the base case ILR scenario, the lifetime net fiscal cost of recent arrivals who receive ILR comes in at around £234 billion in total, or over £8,000 per existing household.

This might sound like an impossibly large number. Nevertheless, we have consistently erred on the side of caution: potentially significantly underestimating the costs of very old age; and the costs of very young age; the costs of migrants getting ILR via family and humanitarian visas. We have also, as outlined above, adopted what we strongly believe to be an overestimate of recent migrants’ earnings, for want of any more useful data.

Interestingly, therefore, the scenario that turns out best (or least bad, anyway) is actually one where we have the highest number of recent migrants getting ILR, namely the ‘new paradigm’ scenario. This is because there would be a sufficiently high number of ‘high-wage’ migrant workers with extremely positive fiscal profiles offsetting much of the cost associated with the ‘low-wage’ fiscal profiles of those gaining ILR through family and humanitarian visas, or through low-wage work. Of course, if we are right that salaries for many in this recent migration wave are much lower than the OBR suggests, then the same scenario also becomes by far the most costly.

There is admittedly a counter-argument that many of those already in the UK are taking more from the state than they contribute, so why should we object to new arrivals doing the same? That may be true. But it is little use exacerbating the problem by importing more people who will not pay their way, even if the costs will be spread out over very many years.

Indeed, it is commonly argued that immigration is needed to stop our public services from collapsing. But whatever the veracity of this claim over the short term, the recent migration wave looks likely to load more pressure on to public services over the longer term. As we argued in ‘Taking Back Control’, we need a long-term plan for weaning public services off high levels of immigration (which is why the ‘NHS Long Term Workforce Plan’ was such a welcome step).

As we have consistently argued, what really matters from a purely fiscal perspective is not raw numbers, but the earnings potential of immigrants. This is one of the reasons why we have championed a much more selective immigration system – the ‘grammar school of the Western world’ approach – under which migrants should be overwhelmingly high-skilled, high-wage workers.

Conclusion

We have explored a range of possible scenarios for how many of the recent wave of migrants, arriving between January 2021 and June 2024, might end up claiming ILR. We have looked at how much they might earn, and hence their fiscal impact when taking into account their likely age of arrival. We have been dealing with a lot of unknowns throughout. Nevertheless, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the lifetime fiscal costs of these migrants, if they do get ILR, is likely to be measured in the hundreds of billions of pounds.

Under our central scenario, over 800,000 migrants will gain ILR, with grants of ILR running at a peak rate of 620 per day by 2028. This results in a net fiscal impact over the next several decades of £234 billion. That equates to a bill of £8,200 for each and every household in the country.

Of course, many of these people will be those we want in this country, and/or have a moral obligation to accept. Skilled NHS workers, talented entrepreneurs, research scientists training at Russell Group universities, residents of Hong Kong who prefer to live in a democracy than an autocracy.

But in many other cases, it is much harder to see why a short-term work visa should be translated into a permanent entitlement to British residency. Other countries in Europe, such as the Netherlands and Sweden are already revisiting their assumptions around their equivalents of ILR and naturalisation that will apply to existing residents.⁵⁴

Kemi Badenoch has announced that it is Conservative policy for the ILR eligibility period to be extended to 10 years instead of five, and for citizenship after ILR to take a further five years, rather than 12 months. Given the need to assess the likely impact of the post-2020 migration wave on the public finances once they start to get ILR before that happens, this is a welcome and timely intervention.

In particular, as Sam Bidwell of the Adam Smith Institute has pointed out, the Home Secretary has the power to change the Immigration Rules ahead of January 1, 2026. In the first instance, this would not even entail primary legislation. Indeed, Britain has done this before. In 2006, then Home Secretary Charles Clarke extended the length of time required to obtain ILR from four to five years, a change which applied retroactively.⁵⁵

Such a move would inevitably cause disruption, not least to those who have already made plans for their lives. But even just postponing the ILR grants – possibly with exemptions based on salary, occupation or nationality – would buy time for the Government to commission a proper study into the likely rates of ILR among recent migrants, and the long-term fiscal implications of their settlement. We think – or at least hope – that the government has access to much richer internal datasets, which would allow the MAC and the OBR to go into more depth than we have been able to.

In the meantime, the Government should also develop more rigorous criteria for granting ILR to future migrants to the UK, criteria that prioritise high-skilled migrants who are very likely to be lifetime net fiscal contributors. For example, it could be that case that to get ILR, a migrant (or rather HMRC) should have to produce 10 or 15 years of tax returns, showing them to have been a significant net contributor over their time in the country. Or the Government could introduce an age restriction on ILR for key visa routes such as the skilled worker and health & care routes, to ensure that immigrants are arriving when they are young and most productive. Based on OBR fiscal profiles, our analysis suggest 45 years of age as the cap for ILR eligibility, although this could be raised for high earners, perhaps on a sliding scale.

There would doubtless be complaints from campaign groups that Britain had ripped up an implicit contract with those arriving. And of course the changes would need to be sensitively handled. But the purpose of the immigration system, and of the grant of ILR, is to do what is best for this country, not the world. We still have a window to prevent the permanent resettlement here of a great many people who are hugely unlikely to be fiscal contributors to the country – indeed, will under the most optimistic modelling we could produce represent a long-term cost to the country in the hundreds of billions. It is not too late for the Government to think again, and remedy at least some of the error made in establishing the new visa system on such a generous and unselective basis.

Endnotes

¹ S. Bidwell, 'Britain's ILR Emergency', ASI (December 2024). [Link](#).

² In certain limited situations, migrants without ILR can be exempted from the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) stipulation, for example if a child would otherwise be left homeless. But this is the exception, not the norm. See: UKVI, 'Guidance: Public Funds' (11 October 2024). [Link](#).

³ For more on how the OBR factors immigration into its modelling, see: R. Jenrick, N. O'Brien & K. Williams, 'Taking Back Control', CPS (May 2023), pp.79-81. [Link](#).

⁴ OBR, 'Fiscal risks and sustainability – September 2024' (12 September 2024), esp. pp.106-108. [Link](#). MAC, 'Annual Report 2024' (17 December 2024), esp. pp.34-39. [Link](#). Danish Finance Ministry, 'Economic analysis: Immigrants' net contribution to the public sector finances in 2018' (October 2021). [Link](#). J.H. van de Beek et al., 'Borderless Welfare State: The Consequences of Immigration for Public Finances', University of Amsterdam (June 2023). [Link](#).

⁵ ONS, 'Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2024' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).

⁶ ONS figures are still provisional for the year beginning September 2022 onwards. Given the recent tendency of the ONS to massively revise up its provisional figures with each new iteration of its Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) estimates, the eventual net migration figure for January 2021 to June 2024 could be substantially higher than 2.5 million. On the ONS methodology and revisions to numbers, see: ONS, 'International migration research, progress update: November 2024' (28 November 2025). [Link](#).

⁷ See for example: S. Ashworth-Hayes, 'Britain is running out of time to fix a £61 billion mistake', *The Telegraph* (9 January 2025). [Link](#). M. Jones, 'Explaining the Boriswave', *The Critic* (21 December 2024). [Link](#).

⁸ This number is lower than the total inflow because British citizens do not need visas to return to the country. Similarly, foreign nationals with settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) do not need a visa. Some individuals who entered the UK in this period will also have obtained a visa in the 2020 calendar year. Finally, it is worth noting that not all visas issued will actually be used – although only a small number of visas go unused and ONS immigration numbers track Home Office visa numbers closely.

⁹ UN, 'Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration: Revision 1' (1998), p.10. [Link](#).

¹⁰ E. Reynolds, 'Answer: UIN 26715, tabled on 27 January 2025' (4 February 2025). [Link](#).

¹¹ See for example: V. Zelenskyy, 'New Year address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy', President of Ukraine Official Website (31 December 2023). [Link](#). A. Dudik, K. Chamonikolas & N. Ojewski, 'Ukrainians Who Fled Putin Get Caught in Economic Tug of War', *Bloomberg* (20 August 2024). [Link](#). B. Moens & J. Barigazzi, 'Ukraine wants EU's next migration rules to encourage returns', *Politico* (24 January 2024). [Link](#).

¹² Niche work routes that provide a direct route to ILR include various Tier 2 visas and post-2020 equivalents, the ECAA Businessperson visa, Tier 1 visas and most of their post-2020 equivalents and the UK Ancestry work visa. The High Potential Individual (HPI) visa is a notable exception. Some of the niche work routes have shorter waiting periods in certain circumstances, for example as little as two years on the Global Talent visa depending on your sponsorship and how much you have invested in the country. See: Gov.uk, 'Indefinite leave to remain if you have a business, investor or talent visa' [accessed 5 February 2025]. [Link](#). Some niche work routes do not count towards ILR on the five-year route, but instead can be used for the 10-year route, including the HPI visa.

¹³ In certain instances, refugees can and have been granted ILR immediately – see endnote 28, below.

¹⁴ Home Office, 'Exe_D02: Grants of extensions of stay in the UK, by current and previous category of leave' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).

¹⁵ For this figure and other abuses of the student visa route, see Jenrick, O'Brien & Williams, 'Taking Back Control', pp.83-93, esp. p84. [Link](#).

¹⁶ Although time spent on the Graduate route can count towards the 10 years of continuous residence needed on the two 10-year ILR routes (see page 10).

¹⁷ M. Sumption, P. Walsh & B. Brindle, 'Net migration to the UK', Migration Observatory (4 December 2024). [Link](#).

¹⁸ HESA, 'Where do HE students come from?' (12 September 2024). [Link](#).

¹⁹ B. Brindle & M. Sumption, 'International students entering the UK labour market', Migration Observatory (17 April 2024). [Link](#).

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- ²⁰ HESA, 'Where do HE students come from?' (12 September 2024). [Link](#).
- ²¹ Home Office, 'Analysis of migrants use of the Graduate route' (14 May 2024). [Link](#).
- ²² See for example: ONS, 'Update to estimates, in 'Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2024' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).
- ²³ Home Office, 'Migrant Journey: 2023 report' (23 May 2024). [Link](#).
- ²⁴ To be precise, from January 2021 until June 2024, just 4.1% of visas issued, and 4.9% of those with ILR eligibility, went to EU nationals.
- ²⁵ As the Home Office admits, however, the share of the 152,000 who actually left the country is unknown. Indeed, thanks to the abolition of exit checks in 1998, it is unknowable for much of the period to 2023 (though exit checks were gradually phased back in from 2010 to 2018). No relevant official statistics on exit checks have been published since March 2020. See: M.V. Cubius & P.W. Walsh, 'Unauthorised migration in the UK', Migration Observatory (21 January 2025). [Link](#).
- ²⁶ Home Office, 'Settlement detailed datasets, year ending September 2024' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).
- ²⁷ Historically there was a 10-year route to ILR for family members, but this was abolished in 2012. On the replacement 'Private Life' and 'Family Life' routes, see page 10.
- ²⁸ Home Office & UKVI, 'Guidance: Afghan citizens resettlement scheme' (16 August 2024). [Link](#). For an overview of the UK government's various refugee schemes, see: N. Timothy & K. Williams, 'Stopping the Crossing', CPS (December 2022), p.53-54. [Link](#).
- ²⁹ Home Office, 'Se_D02: Grants of settlement by category and type of applicant, grants and refusals' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).
- ³⁰ C.J. McKinney & M. Sumption, 'Migrants on ten-year routes to settlement in the UK' Migration Observatory (27 July 2021).
- ³¹ GDP per capita data from: World Bank, 'GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$)' [accessed 18 January 2025]. [Link](#).
- ³² European Commission, 'Chain migration', *Migration and Home Affairs Glossary* [accessed 18 January 2025]. [Link](#).
- ³³ For a detailed look into the widely recognised flaws in the LFS, see: R. Colville, 'How much are migrants earning? Not even Jonathan Portes knows', *CapX* (20 December 2024). [Link](#).
- ³⁴ See for example: Danish Finance Ministry, 'Economic analysis: Immigrants' net contribution to the public sector finances in 2018' (October 2021). [Link](#). J.H. van de Beek et al., 'Borderless Welfare State: The Consequences of Immigration for Public Finances', University of Amsterdam (June 2023). [Link](#).
- ³⁵ See the chart in: 'Why have Danes turned against immigration?', *The Economist* (18 December 2021). [Link](#).
- ³⁶ OBR, 'Fiscal risks and sustainability – September 2024', esp. pp.106-108. [Link](#).
- ³⁷ The resultant curves do not perfectly capture the timing when migrants will be paying visa fees, the NHS surcharge and ILR application fees. However, since the total contribution from these payments comes to around £12,500 per migrant in the OBR's estimation, the effect on the shape of the curves is negligible.
- ³⁸ MAC, 'Annual Report December 2023' (17 December 2023), pp.35-36. [Link](#).
- ³⁹ For the correct version of this chart as per the image reproduced here, see: OBR, 'Correction slip' (14 November 2024). [Link](#). On the interpretation of the chart, see OBR, 'Fiscal risks and sustainability – September 2024' (12 September 2024), pp.95-96, 106-108. [Link](#).
- ⁴⁰ See for example: van de Beek, 'Net contribution and integration of the 2nd generation', in 'Borderless Welfare State', pp.95-103.
- ⁴¹ B. Brindle & M. Sumption, 'Work visas and migrant workers in the UK' (30 August 2024). [Link](#).
- ⁴² ONS, 'Country of birth (extended), employment history and sex', *Census 2021* (28 March 2023). [Link](#). ONS, 'Age, country of birth (extended) and sex', (28 March 2023). [Link](#).
- ⁴³ Home Office, 'Se_D01: Grants of settlement by country of nationality and category and in-country refusals of settlement' (28 November 2024). [Link](#).
- ⁴⁴ See for example: van de Beek, 'Borderless Welfare State', pp.90-91.
- ⁴⁵ H. Rolfe, 'General election 2024 – what are Hong Kong BNO voters looking for?', *UK in a Changing Europe* (26 June 2024). [Link](#).
- ⁴⁶ Colville, 'How much are migrants earning? Not even Jonathan Portes knows'. [Link](#).
- ⁴⁷ OBR, 'Fiscal risks and sustainability – September 2024', p.112, fn.12. [Link](#).

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