Horizon scanning for the migration sector in Yorkshire and Humber – February 2024



Summary

- National picture: HS promise to cut net migration through new measures. Efforts to stop Channel Crossings and implement measures from the Illegal Migration Act dependent on Rwanda Bill.

- Elections: A general election likely in 2024, as well as local elections in May.

- Asylum: continued efforts to stand up large alternative accommodation sites for new arrivals, close hotels, and clear the backlog of outstanding claims, including those affected by different inadmissibility policy.

- Children: the implementation of scientific age-assessment methods and the development of the National Age-Assessment Board.

- Resettlement: A cap on safe and legal routes is expected to be announced. The UKRS will see more diverse arrivals of resettled refugees into local areas.

- Ukraine: the winding down of the scheme with the closure of the family scheme and the extension scheme. Ukrainians will be able to start applying to extend their leave in the next year.

- Hong Kong: a reduction in funding will impact the support available.

- EU nationals: changes affecting the ability to make late applications could see some EU nationals left without status.

- Modern slavery: focus on the health and social care visa and exploitation. Measures from the Illegal Migration Act to affect potential victims of modern slavery.

- Cohesion: housing crisis, and cost of living challenges and new proposals around social housing eligibility. There are also various celebratory events planned.

The national picture

2. The implementation of government policy on migration this year needs to be caveated with the fact that a general election is likely to take place, which could see a change in government result resulting in a change of direction or a

delay to the implementation of any plans.

3. The government will shift its focus from illegal migration to legal migration this year as it seeks to bring down net migration. While the ONS have predicted that net migration could fall in the coming years, the Migration Observatory believe forecasts may actually be underestimating future net migration growth.
4. We'll see the introduction of initiatives to reduce net migration, such as the new salary requirements for sponsors on the family migration route, increased salary threshold for jobs on the skilled worker route and a removal of the ability for dependents to join on the health and social care visa. Changes will be phased with some introduced in April 2024. This is based on plans set out by the Home Secretary in 2023. There could be some backlash as these measures take effect, such as from employers unable to meet the sponsorship requirements or families separated by more restrictive visa criteria.
5. The Migration Advisory Committee will review salaries for job roles earmarked to be included in the new Immigration Salary List which will replace the Shortage Occupation List. They will also review the graduate visa route.
6. Changes to student visas could accelerate the already falling number of international students coming to the UK. New measures came into force in January 2024, stopping most student visa holders from bringing dependent family members with them, and restricting the ability to switch from a student to a work visa. There are already concerns

about the impact of these measures from universities as the number of international students arriving is declining.

7. We will start to see the impact of the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) after it increased by £624 to £1,035 per year in February 2024. This will affect all visa applicants going forward, including those applying to extend leave in the UK.
8. Local authorities could see an increase in presentations of destitute and homeless migrants as a result of the cost of living and an increase in the IHS fees affecting those extending visas. This could include people with leave to remain across various routes such as Hong Kong BN(O), family migration route, health, and social care visa or on a skilled worker visa. The risks of destitution from EU Nationals or those leaving the asylum system could also increase in the coming year, placing more pressure on local authorities around homelessness and where there are statutory duties to support.
9. The government remains committed to tackling small boats and illegal migration. The Safety of Rwanda Bill is expected to pass through parliament in early 2024. Government ministers have already stated that they hope to complete the first removals of asylum seekers to Rwanda by Spring 2024.
10. Expect to see more countries added to the list of designated safe countries and government will likely attempt to develop new agreements with more countries regarding third country asylum returns. Reforms in the

Illegal Migration Act 2023 and Nationality and Borders Act 2022 enabled the government to treat more asylum arrivals as inadmissible and be removed to a third country. The Safety of Rwanda Bill is imperative for the government to proceed with implementing these reforms as it needs agreements with designated safe third countries to facilitate the large numbers of removals that would be required to make this approach work.

11. Should the Rwanda scheme not happen, we could see government revisit the prospect of the UK leaving the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). There are already clauses in the Safety of Rwanda Bill that give powers to override some influence from European Courts.
12. Small boats arrivals are certain to continue throughout 2024 and it could be some time before we see how significant the impact of government reforms will affect these numbers. In comparison with last year, the data has fluctuated up and down in 2024 making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about its trajectory. Notably, the Migration Observatory have commented that any fall as a result of measures to stop crossings from Albanian nationals will be difficult to replicate with other groups.
13. We should expect the Home Office’s response to the many recent inspection reports published by The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration. These include inspections on asylum casework, the use of hotels for accommodating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and the use of citizenship depriving powers. With the

inspector’s post now vacant, there will be concerns over the absence of scrutiny over the Home Office’s work as it potentially implements significant policy reform in the coming months.

14. There are also inspections set to be carried out in 2024 including, an inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector, and an inspection on contingency asylum accommodation.
15. Individuals will be contacted by the Home Office to start the process of transferring their proof of status to the new online systems as Biometric Residence Permits are being phased out by the end of 2024.
16. The review of Civil Legal Aid remains ongoing with a call for evidence submissions in early 2024, although no publication date is known. This includes legal aid for asylum and immigration matters.
17. Reports from several government and non-government consultations and inquiries are likely to be published this year. These include the Commission on the Integration of Refugees and the All-Party Parliamentary Group’s inquiry into the effects of immigration and asylum policy on poverty.

Elections

17. A general election is due and needs to be held before the end of January 2025. The Prime Minister has said that he expects a general election to take place in the second half of 2024.,

although changing indicators which suggest it could be called earlier. Immigration policy will likely be an important campaign matter for competing parties and any change in government will result in changes in ministers, cabinets, and policy. Topics like small boats and net migration could feature in party manifestos.

18. Local elections are set for 2 May. All council areas in our region (except Doncaster, East Riding, North Yorks, North Lincs and York) will have them.

Asylum and new refugees

19. The government has pledged to continue its campaign to stop small boat Channel crossings. Other plans include to continue clearing the asylum backlog, closing asylum hotels, the implementation of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the passage of the Safety of Rwanda Bill.

20. The government has reiterated that it feels hotels are not appropriate as asylum accommodation and plans to close them will continue throughout 2024. The Home Office has not provided an exact target date to end the use of hotels but following recent work to close 50 hotel sites by January 2024, Home Office communicated that efforts to close more sites will follow soon with a second tranche of closures underway. As sites close, Home Office will continue to source new large-scale alternative accommodation sites for new arrivals, and we will likely see the development of such sites in our region in the future, with one site in Kirklees already in progress.

21. We may see some new towns and areas receive asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation as the Home Office is still working on plans to implement full dispersal as it seeks to utilise available housing in newer areas, traditionally not considered asylum dispersal areas. Long-term Home Office plans around the regional and national distribution of dispersed asylum seekers are not yet known to local authorities.

22. There will likely be increased coverage/scrutiny of the still growing asylum 'flow backlog' of outstanding claims and presumably a lot of the people whose claims were treated as inadmissible could come back into the system where third country returns are not concluded. Whilst the government says it has met its pledge to clear the legacy backlog claims in 2023, the current flow backlog remains high. The Home Office will have an additional challenge processing different cohorts as differing systems apply based on when someone arrived in the UK, and some of the policy around this remains undecided. This is a result of provisions from Nationality and Borders Act and Illegal Migration Act coming in to force at different times. Home Office has already announced a pause on processing some claims affected by inadmissibility decisions in light of the Rwanda judgement. There's also the possibility of increased numbers of refusals being challenged in the courts and withdrawn claims coming back into the system. The complexity of understanding the different cohorts is likely to cause confusion for stakeholders, services and asylum claimants themselves.

23. Local authorities and VCS groups will likely continue to face challenges supporting newly granted refugees amid housing pressures, as asylum decision-making is expected to continue to be high as the Home Office work to clear the backlog and make space in the asylum accommodation estate for new arrivals.

24. As the general election nears, it is anticipated by anti-racism campaigners that far-right groups could look to exploit community tensions where asylum hotel sites or dispersal communities are located. Local authority community safety teams and policing will be aware that this issue is ongoing.

25. Local authorities will be awaiting news from Home Office on whether a new round of asylum grant funding will be made available. This current funding is due to end at the end of March 2023 and it remains unknown if Home Office plans to continue supporting local authority responses and to what extent.

Children

26. 2024 could see the practical implementation of some important changes affecting unaccompanied children. This includes sections of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 that reform elements of the National Transfer Scheme and its operation such as placing duties on local authorities to comply with requests within specific timeframes or face the risk of penalty orders. Moreover, the Act provides powers for the Home Office to accommodate and support unaccompanied children as well as end placements with local authorities and transferring their care

to the Home Office. If utilised we could see Home Office use these powers to end a child's looked after status with a particular local authority with a view to transferring them to other local authorities more rapidly.

27. We could begin to see the use of scientific methods as part of the age-assessment process in the coming year. The Immigration (Age Assessments) Regulations 2024 which legislated the use of scientific methods of age-assessing children came into force in January. There may be some backlash from medical bodies and campaign groups in response to this.

28. We should expect to see the National Age Assessment Board (NAAB) take more responsibility for overseeing age-assessments across the country. The NAAB was launched last year and continues to build capacity nationally as its recruitment process continues,.

Resettlement

29. For 2024 anticipate a 20 percent rise in global resettlement needs when compared to 2023, equating to a total of over 2.4 million people. Globally, Syrians continue to represent the highest number in need of resettlement, but it is also expected that large numbers from Afghanistan, Sudan, Myanmar and Democratic Republic of Congo will continue to present with resettlement needs. UK resettlement policy could develop once we know the outcome of the Home Office Safe and Legal Routes Cap consultation, where local authorities were asked to submit a

figure for the maximum number of refugees they could support for the 2025 calendar year. The annual cap will come into force in January 2025 and includes the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), and the Community Sponsorship Scheme. The consultation closed in January 2024 and further information is expected in the spring.

30. The Home Office has confirmed 2024 will see an increase in UNHCR referrals to the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). Provisional numbers cite 350 new referrals for the financial year, likely to be largely Syrian individuals currently displaced in Iraq and Lebanon. With recent focus being on arrivals through the Afghan schemes, this should bring more diversity in the refugee groups being resettled into local authorities. There are currently no plans for additional resettlement routes.

31. Ongoing UK Government commitment to resettle Afghans via the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme (ARAP), supported by the Ministry of Defence, and those at risk of deportation from Pakistan (and from other countries) via the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS); Pathways 2 and 3.

32. There could be a risk of homelessness presentations where resettled refugees, who were housed in Ministry of Defence and Home Office accommodation, seek to leave supported accommodation to be closer to existing community links or extended family relationships within the UK. Previous experience has found that families sometimes make further moves or

choose to leave the resettlement programme in order to reunite.

33. Ongoing challenges for local authorities in procuring affordable properties at Local Authority Housing (LHA) rate in a challenging housing market will likely continue. The competing housing demand of multiple programmes alongside general need can force rental price increases on what were otherwise affordable property stock. The need for housing for resettled Afghans has been alleviated to some extent by cohort-specific initiatives (Flexible Housing Fund and Local Authority Housing Fund), and although the latter is set to continue, it is unknown whether the Flexible Housing Fund will be extended beyond March 2024.

34. A new Afghan sponsorship scheme (DLUHC-led) is to be piloted in a number of regions in the UK. The project builds on the Community Sponsorship scheme and will welcome 100 households from the ACRS cohort. Sponsor groups and local authorities will receive funding, and the VCS sectors will have a key role in recruiting and training groups, and supporting sponsors and families.

Ukraine

35. Recent government announcements confirm that the Ukraine Scheme will start winding down in the coming months. The Ukraine Family Scheme closed in February 2024, whilst the Ukraine Extension Scheme is set to close in May 2024. The

Homes for Ukraine scheme will remain open but new applicants will only be able to receive 18 months leave to remain rather than 30 months.

36. Huge pressure remains on councils around homelessness and finding independent accommodation for Ukrainians. It's likely to become difficult to identify new hosts as the higher rate of funding is for those here over a year.

37. There may be a shift to assessing the longer-term integration needs of Ukrainians who have been here for longer than originally anticipated and have begun to put down roots.

38. The government has also confirmed that arrivals coming into the final year of their three year visa will be able to apply for an 18 month extension of leave. The Ukraine Scheme still does not contain a route to settlement either so clarity over the long-term futures for visa holders is still needed. Some Ukrainians could experience issues with accessing housing and employment with limited time remaining on their visas as many enter the final 12 months of their visa.

HongKongers with British National Overseas (BNO) visas

39. Funding for employment, mental health initiatives, and orientation delivered through the Hong Kong BN(O) programme are ending. While government funding for the programme has been extended until March 2025, it is reducing with only some

elements continuing, like funding for local authorities to cover English language provision and destitution, and regional welcome hubs.

40. Although the number of arrivals on this route have been steady, numbers of arrivals in the future could be affected by recent changes such as an increase to Immigration Health Surcharge, the relaxation of rules for unmarried partners on the BN(O) visa route and a continuing deterioration of the political situation in Hong Kong .

41. More BNO visa holders will start to access mainstream ESOL classes, apprenticeships and other employment and training related initiatives. We are now 3 years since the inception of the route and many BN(O) visa holders are starting to approach three years residency in the UK, giving them access to these opportunities.

EU nationals

42. Expect calls for clarity over the process of automatic conversion of pre-settled to settled status for those approaching the end of their leave. Individuals coming to the end of their pre-settled status are not required to apply for settled status, but it’s still not yet known how this process will be carried out and ensure nobody is left without status.

43. More EUSS applicants are likely going to require immigration advice at a level generally not provided from groups providing EUSS advice as Home Office guidance on late

applications was recently tightened. While the funding for organisations to provide support has been extended until March 2025, it doesn’t meet the complex needs of the applicants such as those required under a late application. This means many individuals may have to pay for private immigration advice.

44. More EU nationals should be able to access Universal Credit, following a recent court case regarding eligibility for Universal Credit for pre-settled status holders.

45. Due to the changes to the EUSS process, EU nationals, who arrived from January 2021 and have no eligibility under the EUSS, might seek support from LAs and there might be an increase in modern slavery referrals for this group.

Modern slavery

46. There is growing awareness of an emerging issue of increased exploitation in social care sector, and this is likely to continue to be a concern. Further, as arrivals on this route can no longer bring dependents this could place them at an additional vulnerability, due to the absence of support networks.

47. Meanwhile, reforms from the Illegal Migration Act 2023 could result in potential victims of modern slavery not being identified and supported if deemed ineligible to claim asylum, or even removed from the UK during the 30 day NRM reflection period. These issues are likely to be the focus of anti-trafficking campaign groups.

Integration and cohesion

48. The cost of living, energy prices and inflation will continue to add pressure at community level. This could manifest in local tensions and far right activity, particularly around election time and with more high profile or visible accommodation sites being likely to be targeted.

49. The outcome of the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities' consultation on social housing will be of importance for local authorities. The government is proposing reforms that would make many refugee and migrant groups ineligible for social housing. This has provoked criticism on the basis that it could be divisive and stoke community tensions. As may people face difficulties accessing housing, we could see community relations strained in some parts of the country as different groups may see each other as in competition for housing.

50. In Yorkshire and Humber, there will be celebrations as Calderdale celebrates its 50th birthday. In Sheffield the Migration Matters festival will take place in June. While Wakefield is celebrating Our Year across the year. Leading up 2025, Bradford will be building towards celebrating its status as UK City of Culture 2025.

51. Refugee Week 2024 takes place in June. The theme is Our Home. Events and celebrations will be held across the country including in towns and cities in Yorkshire and Humber.

About this briefing

This briefing was prepared by Stefan Robert in February 2024.

For further information, contact us at admin@migrationyorkshire.org.uk

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