Migration news roundup week commencing 12 January 2026

Image

View of Houses of Parliament from bridge over river Thames

This Migration News Roundup presents a selection of news, policy, research and statistics from the previous week on migration-related topics. The contents of each story do not necessarily reflect the views of Migration Yorkshire.

- UK borders and migration policy
- Specific migrant groups
- Cohesion and integration
- International news
- Stories that inspired us this week

UK borders and migration policy

New criminal offences related to small boat Channel crossings are now in force, following the passing of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act. Relatedly, the first person has been charged with ‘endangering others during a sea crossing’; the 18-year-old Afghan pleaded not guilty, saying he was forced to pilot the boat. Finally, campaigners have expressed concerns about new powers for intrusive searches of mobile phones and SIM cards, planned to start this week at Manston processing centre in Kent. (Sources: The Crown Prosecution Service, BBC, the Guardian)

Nearly 41,500 people arrived in the UK via small boats last year, a rise of 5,000 from 2024 but still lower than the peak of around 46,000 in 2022. This analysis recommends the UK and other European governments are responsive to rapidly evolving criminal smuggling patterns, such as the use of social media platforms, and involvement in other organised crime. Relatedly, a Turkish man thought to have supplied equipment including boats and engines used in about 50% of 2023 small boat crossings, has been jailed for 11 years following a joint operation between the National Crime Agency (NCA) and its Belgian counterparts. (Sources: BBC, RAND, NCA)

How can people seeking sanctuary come to the UK legally and safely? This article offers an overview of the available routes. (Source: Free Movement)

New visa restrictions have been announced for people travelling from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the UK. This follows its government's failure to agree measures to facilitate returns from the UK. (Source: BBC)

Here are a couple of recent stories, both relating to citizenship. Firstly, this article tells the story of a UK-born youth worker Olu Sowemimo, who at age 20 started a 15 year process to be granted citizenship. Meanwhile, there have been calls for activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah, recently released from an Egyptian jail, to be stripped of his citizenship in light of previous social media posts; the Home Office has decided not to take this step. (Source: the Guardian)

2025 was an eventful year for migration news and policy; this review looks back at some of the key moments. Another new briefing looks back further, analysing net migration patterns over the past couple of decades, and concluding the UK has a similar size overseas-born population to countries such as France and the USA. (Source: Migration Observatory)

Specific migrant groups

On asylum, campaigners against the use of Crowborough Barracks in East Sussex to house people seeking asylum have been told by the Home Office there are no planned dates yet to move people into the accommodation. Meanwhile, the Highland Council has stated they have not received notification of when people seeking asylum are due to arrive at Cameron Barracks in Inverness. Plans for both sites have faced considerable local opposition. (Sources: The Argus, The Inverness Courier)

The government is facing accusations of 'degrading treatment' from 80 people detained under the 'one in, one out' scheme. They are calling for a UN investigation into welfare conditions at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre. Meanwhile, the first removal flight of 2026 was cancelled at short notice. (Source: the Guardian)

An inspection reported that 'staff-detainee relationships were a clear strength' of the Derwentside immigration removal centre. However, inspectors raised concerns about failures of the Home Office to identify some women's safeguarding concerns prior to detention. (Source: HM Inspectorate of Prisons)

On modern slavery, there is new analysis of data on migrants and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) from 2014-2024. Meanwhile, a new report disputes the claim that the modern slavery system is being widely 'abused' by people seeking asylum. For example, the authors point to high levels of positive NRM decisions for individuals referred from detention. (Sources: Migration Observatory, Bright Blue)

On Hong Kong, following the announcement of the end of destitution funding for local authorities for BN(O) visa holders, there have been calls for the government to urgently address the funding gap for councils supporting migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), especially since the proposed immigration and asylum reforms are likely to increase local authority spending on this

group. (Source: NRPF Network)

Another case of injustice relating to Windrush compensation left a woman hospitalised due to increased stress. (Source: The Independent)

Cohesion and integration

51% of people think Britishness is something one can 'become with effort', while 36% believe that being 'truly British' is based on birth. In response to this poll, a letter was published by 'a British citizen married to a non-UK spouse', who shared how changing attitudes to Britishness undermine legal residents, harm cohesion and damage the notion of an inclusive British identity. (Sources: IPPR, the Guardian)

Migrant doctors are increasingly quitting their roles as the UK is now seen as an 'unwelcoming, racist country'. Further, the number of new international nurses and midwives joining the NHS has fallen sharply. (Source: the Guardian)

This article explores the increasing politicisation of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, the impact of cuts to ESOL provision over recent years, how current English learning requirements can harm integration and how ESOL tutors and activists are organising to take a stand. (Source: The Conversation)

International news

South African authorities raided a US refugee processing site in Johannesberg. The site focused on controversial US refugee programme for white South Africans. However, following a meeting in Washington DC, South Africa will now allow the programme to continue. (Source: Reuters)

Asylum applications continued to decline in Europe during 2025 due to tougher policies in the EU and changing migration dynamics. (Source: Info Migrants)

Germany passed landmark legislation at the end of December to crack down on criminal gangs involved in people smuggling to the UK. (Source: the Home Office)

Stories that inspired us this week

Community sponsorship schemes are helping refugee families settle, integrate, and rebuild their lives with support from local residents, as well as helping to build trust and stronger, more diverse communities. (Source: the Guardian)

Residents, churches and charities in Northallerton have worked together to provide food, clothing, language lessons, social events, and companionship, helping people seeking asylum to feel welcome. These efforts are being coordinated by the Refugee Council, alongside strong local grassroots involvement. (Source: Financial Times)

Contact us about research

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