Migration news roundup week commencing 25 May 2026

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.

Content warning: This week's news roundup contains brief references to themes around suicide and death that readers may find distressing.

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UK borders and migration policy

The latest Immigration Statistics for the year to March 2026 show a fall in arrivals through the main visa routes and in asylum claims. Net migration figures for 2025 show a continued reduction, to 171,000 people, following the downward trend from the high of 944,000 in 2023. Key data points include:

- Study continues to be the top reason for coming to live in the UK, followed by work.
- A 3% increase in small boat arrivals to almost 39,300 people (although as previously reported, numbers in 2026 are lower than the equivalent period last year).
- A 12% fall in asylum applications, to around 93,500. The top nationalities of claimants are Pakistan, Eritrea, Iran, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Sudan. 42% of asylum claimants arrived by small boat while 39% already had a valid visa or other leave before claiming (people claiming asylum already holding a work visa now are more numerous than those with a study visa).
- The number of people waiting for an initial decision has fallen by 55% to less than 48,800 people.
- 6,400 people were age-assessed. 57% of decisions confirmed an age under 18, and 43% found people to be adults (some of whom were later found to be children).
- The number accommodated in hotels has fallen by more than a third to nearly 20,900 people.
- The grant rate has fallen by 10% to 39% of cases being granted asylum at initial decision, a similar rate to pre-2020. Sudan and Eritrea had the highest grant rates (93% and 87% respectively) while, in contrast, the grant rate for Syrian applications has fallen from 98% to 9%.

(Sources: Home Office, ONS)

The UK-France 'one in, one out' pilot scheme has reportedly been extended until October. As of the end of April, 605 people

had been returned to France, and 581 people had been transferred to the UK. An Eritrean man is no longer facing imminent removal to France after attempting to take his own life . Meanwhile, arrests for people smuggling have increased by more than 55% over the past year to around 300. (Sources: the Guardian, National Crime Agency)

Cohesion and integration

A new 'National Conversation' project has been launched to gather the views of the British public on the subject of community and identity. Led by the Independent Commission on Cohesion and Integration, the project will gather survey responses, voicenotes and community discussions up to the end of August to inform a report on strengthening social cohesion. (Sources: the Guardian, The Together Initiative)

Ahead of the release of new migration statistics and despite ONS data showing net migration levels falling substantially over the past three years, the latest results of an Immigration Attitudes Tracker find that 49% of the public think net migration has increased, with 51% thinking it will go up again in the next year. (Source: British Future)

Specific migrant groups

On children and young people:

- The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) urged social workers to oppose the changes to support for children and families without secure immigration status outlined in the government's Family Returns Consultation and encouraged social workers to submit a response. (Source: BASW)
- The same professional body also warned against the government's proposed changes which would see all age assessments completed by the National Age Assessment Board as binding on local authorities. (Source: BASW)
- The British Red Cross spoke out against the government's ongoing suspension of refugee family reunion, highlighting that up to 1,360 children could remain separated from their family for every month the suspension remains in place. (Source: the Guardian)

News on international students includes:

- In light of the latest net migration figures, the data confirms that study visas issued continue to fall, with nearly a third fewer study visa acceptances than a year ago. Students from Pakistan have the greatest increase in visa rejections, at more than 40% compared to 6% the previous year. This reflective article looks at the evolution of current student policy, describing it as being delivered 'by stealth'. (Sources: The PIE, Wonkhe)

- Two women medical students from Sudan describe their deep disappointment at being prevented from taking up their places at university, a consequence of the UK's abrupt visa ban for nationals of four countries where asylum claim rates are high. (Source: Telegraph)

A fifth of jobs in the UK are held by people from outside the country, according to this data briefing on migrants in the labour market. A new report explores the specific precarity experienced by migrant fishers working on UK vessels, who are often without formal immigration status as employers can hire them as being 'in transit'. (Sources: Migration Observatory, FLEX)

On modern slavery:

- The latest statistics show a 13% increase in potential victim referrals to the National Referral Mechanism compared with the same period last year, with just over 6,000 referrals between January and March 2026. The top three nationalities were UK, Eritrea and Somalia. The number of cases awaiting a decision has fallen by 18% since the end of 2025, to just over 4,700. (Source: Home Office)
- In case you missed it, this data briefing explores geographic and demographic patterns of exploitation in the UK highlighting, for example, differences between inland and urban areas compared to rural and coastal places. (Source: Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre)

- There's now a support line for the seasonal worker scheme. Some further background information is available. (Sources: Unseen, Stronger Together)

International news

A declaration was signed by all 46 member states of the Council of Europe in Moldova to clarify how the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) should be interpreted and applied, including in the context of transferring people seeking asylum to third countries. (Source: Council of Europe)

A Norwegian appeals court blocked the extradition of a migrant rights activist to Greece, ruling that the charges against him are not crimes under Norwegian law. (Source: the Guardian)

Announcing his party's hardline immigration policy, Australia's opposition leader claimed that many migrants are a 'net drain' on the country. This analysis argues that migrants generally contribute more to taxes than they receive in public services, making a positive fiscal impact on Australia. (Source: the Guardian)

Stories that inspired us this week

Read the story of Ishag, who was studying dentistry when he was forced to flee conflict in Sudan. Now in Birmingham, he

receives support from a 'Move On' project enabling him to rebuild his life, volunteer in his community and work towards his goal of becoming a dentist. (Source: Refugee and Migration Centre)

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