

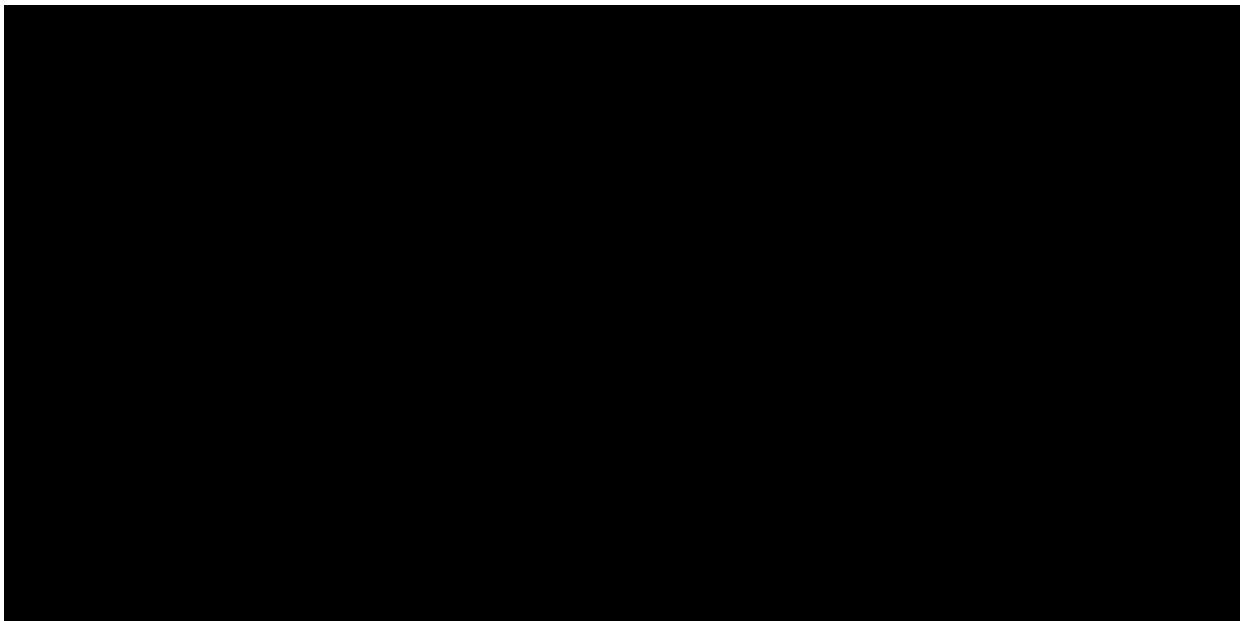
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## UK Migration Soars to Record Despite Sunak's Vow to Cut Arrivals

- Country added estimated 606,000 people last year, ONS says
- Newcomers from outside Europe continue to surge post-Brexit



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WATCH: The UK is using drones to clamp down on the illegal trafficking of migrants in the English Channel. *Source: Bloomberg*

By [Lucy White](#) and [Kitty Donaldson](#)

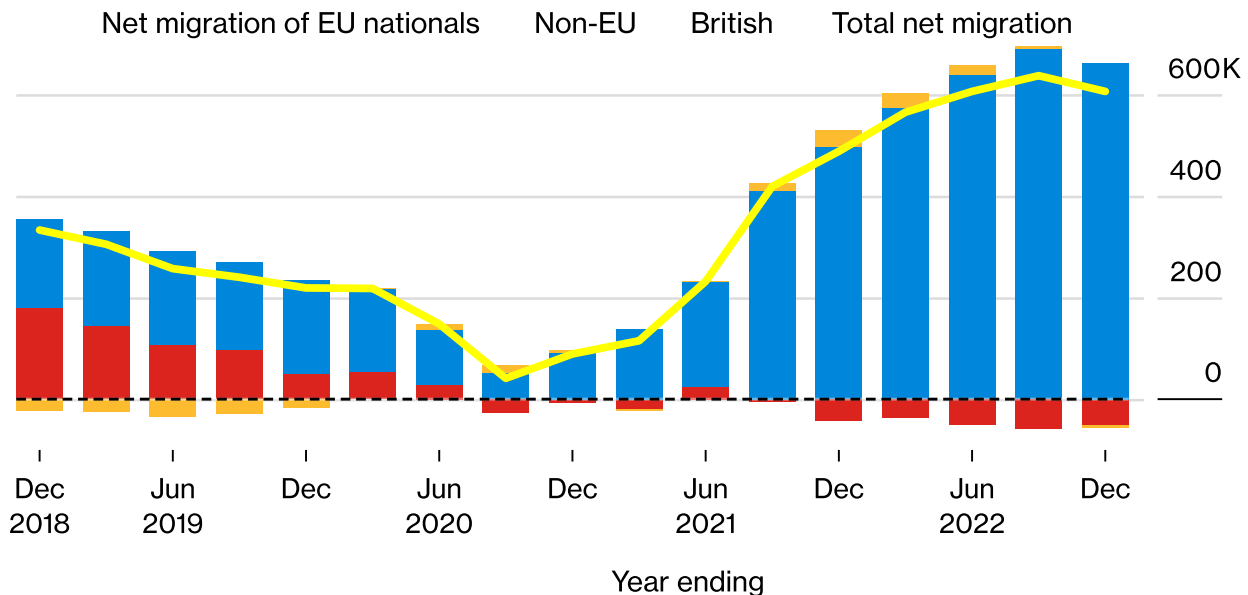
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The UK said a record number of migrants arrived last year, a trend that lays bare the divides in the ruling Conservative Party and highlights the economy's urgent demand for new workers.

An estimated 606,000 more people moved to Britain than departed, according to Office for National Statistics data published Thursday. That represents an increase of 118,000 from the previous year. Almost a fifth of the rise came from asylum seekers that were added to the total for the first time, complicating analysis of the data.

### Migration Is Being Driven by Arrivals From Outside the EU



Source: Office for National Statistics

Note: Net migration is the difference between long-term arrivals and departures

While the figure was far higher than many in the Tory Party were aiming for, it fell short of estimates that the Centre for Policy Studies made before the report putting potential net migration from 700,000 to 997,000.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is still under pressure to deliver on a long-standing Conservative Party promise to bring down the numbers – a central argument

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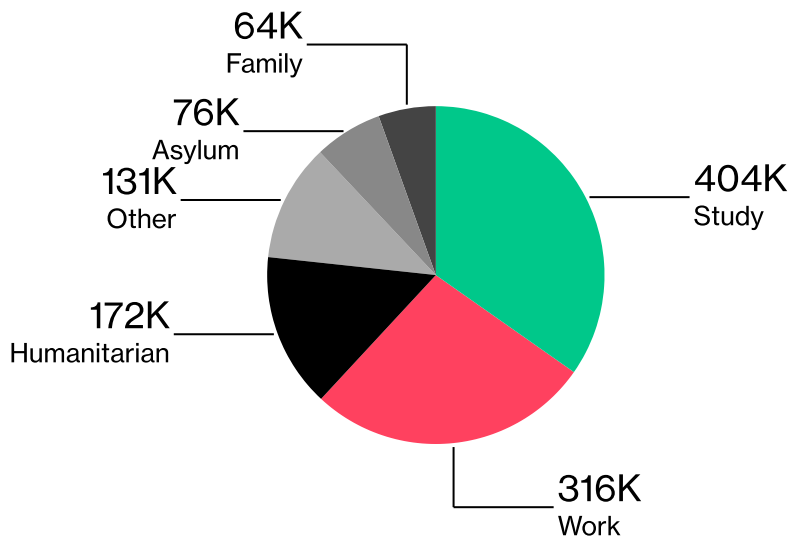
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informal routes, such as on small boats across the English Channel.

## Immigration to the UK Soared to Almost 1.2 Million in 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics

Note: Humanitarian includes Ukraine, Hong Kong and resettled refugee programs

While Sunak will be able to do little to bring down migration for work, since businesses face issues with recruiting staff in a tight UK labor market, he has vowed to crack down on those arriving in small boats.

Ahead of a general election expected next year, the opposition Labour Party has vowed to tackle migration. The party's Shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper said the record-high migration data "show the Conservatives have no plan and no grip on immigration."

"Net migration should come down, and we expect it to do so," she said.

The problem for Sunak is that he has nowhere to hide on the issue. Immigration is now entirely in the hands of his government after EU nationals lost the automatic right to live and work in the UK in 2021.

In fact, EU migration has gone into reverse. A net 51,000 EU nationals left the country in 2022. Net migration was driven by the addition of 662,000 non-EU citizens who came into the country under Tory-sanctioned policies.

In previous years, a large chunk of the non-EU nationals migrating to the UK have done so for study reasons. But this proportion sank to 39% in 2022 from 47% the previous year. Meanwhile, the share of migrants arriving on humanitarian routes, including Ukrainian schemes, increased from 9% to 19%.

But the data show just how dependent the UK has become on overseas workers. An estimated 235,000, or 25% of non-EU arrivals, came on work-related visas – up from 137,000 in 2021.

The Tories have moved away from a promise under former Prime Minister David Cameron, to bring the net migration number below 100,000 a year. That pledge was dropped by Boris Johnson and Sunak committed last week to bringing it below the level he inherited, or around half a million.

Tory MP John Hayes, a close ally of Home Secretary Suella Braverman told Times Radio the numbers of immigrants is “unprecedented and unacceptable.”

### **Population Growth**

“The scale of population growth can’t be sustained,” Hayes said Thursday. “Just housing that number of people is unfeasible. I mean, imagine if it went on for two years, three years, you’d be talking about the combined populations of Newcastle, Nottingham, Lincoln, Cambridge, all added together. And if it went on for 10 years. You’d be talking about a city the size of London.”

But his colleague, former Cabinet minister Robert Buckland, called for a “measured” debate at a time when immigration had been fueled by “exceptional circumstances” – underlining the divide in the Tory Party.

“Clearly, the figures are high,” Buckland told Sky News. “But when you start to disaggregate and, in particular, look at the student figures and the exceptional circumstances in Ukraine and Hong Kong, then isn’t it time for us to have a more measured and calm debate?”

Jonathan Portes, professor of economics and public policy at King’s College London, said the “narrative that immigration is spiraling ever upwards or is out of control is simply false.”

He noted that many students would leave as their courses ended, and that worker migration was being driven by a demand for staff which would eventually ease.

The ONS said there were signs that net migration to the UK may soon begin to fall back, as the surge in students post-Covid lockdowns eases and the number of migrants fleeing from strife in Ukraine and Hong Kong slows.

“As lockdown restrictions were lifted in 2021, we saw a sharp increase in students arriving,” said Jay Lindop, director of the ONS’s Centre for International Migration. “Recent data suggests that those arriving in 2021 are now leaving the country. In contrast, those arriving on humanitarian routes increased over the 12 months.”

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(Adds commentary. A previous version of this story corrected net migration from EU and non-EU countries, and the contribution of asylum seekers to the overall increase)

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