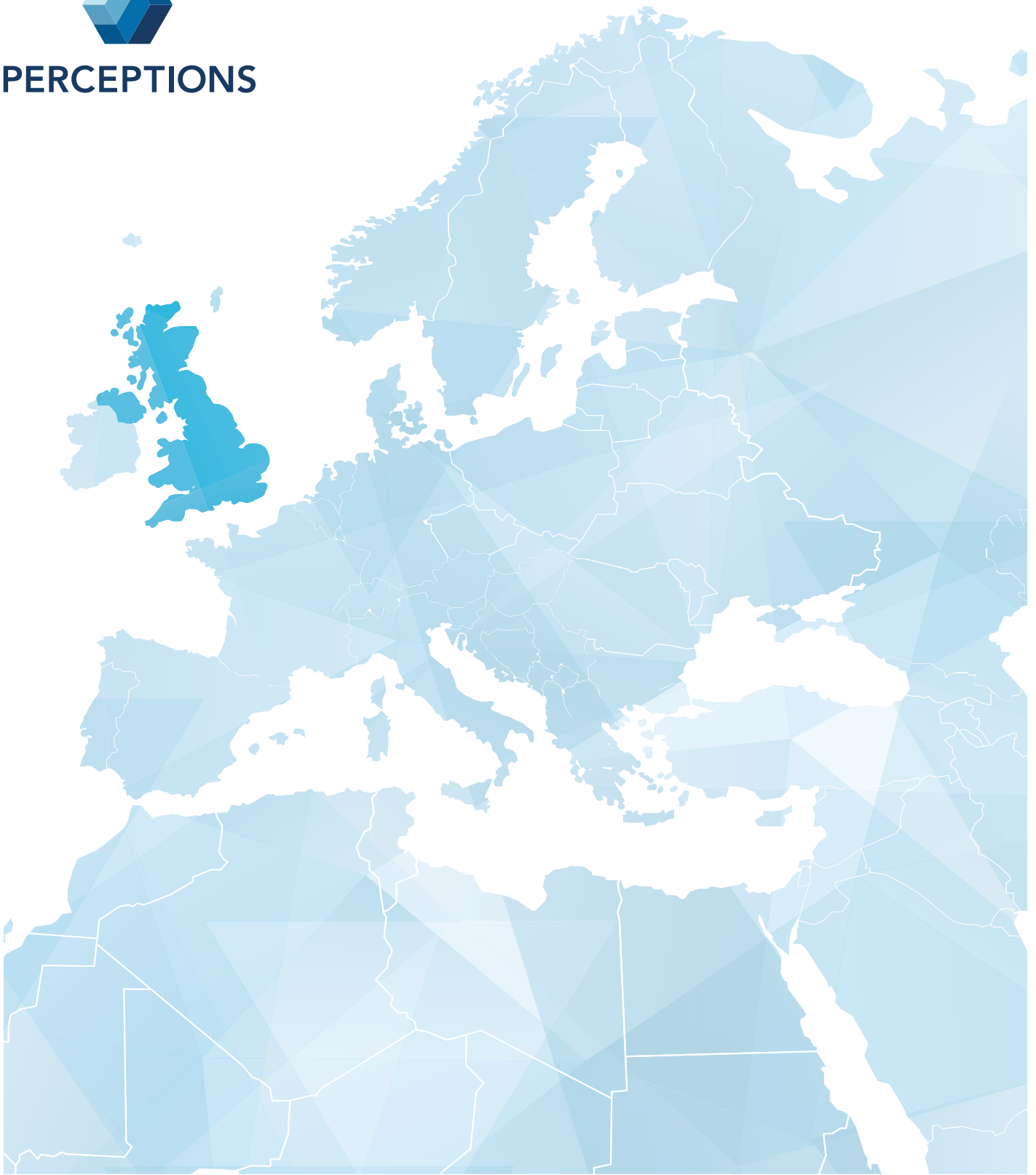




PERCEPTIONS



# United Kingdom

PERCEPTIONS  
Country Report

# PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH:

## Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices

### DISCLAIMER:

Disclaimer: This report is based on desk-research conducted between 2019 and 2022 and covers major development between the period of 2015-2019. For more updated information on the country profile, please check the additional institutional links at the end of the document.



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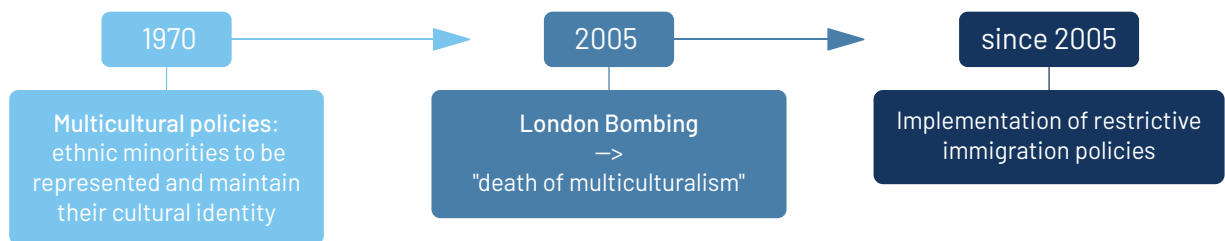
## a) Geographical map



## b) Short summary

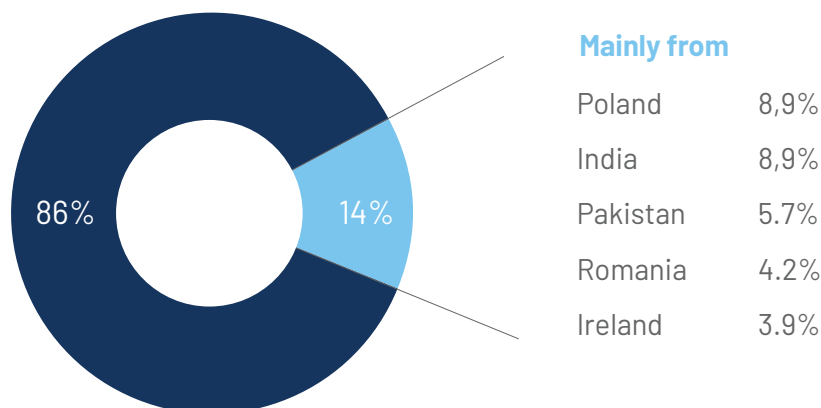
Although the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020, it remained subject to EU law and part of the EU customs union and single market during the transition period. In its 2017 White Paper on Brexit and Fair movement of people, the Welsh government is calling for a managed but more flexible approach to migration, making a strong case for regional policy variations and closely linking migration to employment to address skill shortages and gaps in construction, manufacturing and hospitality. Although the UK has a long history of migration, it only became an immigration country in recent years. Before the mid-1980s, the number of UK citizens emigrating to the United States, Canada and Australia was higher than the number of immigrants coming from the former colonies. The so-called "refugee crisis" had an impact on the 2016 referendum to leave the Europe Union, as images of people intending to seek safety in Europe were used to fuel the narrative of "migrants" as economic and security threats that justified the need to take back control of the UK borders.

## c) Facts & figures



(Back et al., 2012; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010)

### Population of UK in 2018



## c) Full document

### Institutional setting

The UK is a unitary parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy that consists of four constituent countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Home Office is responsible for immigration, security, law and order in all four constituent countries. Border Force is the law enforcement command within the Home Office that is responsible for conducting immigration and customs checks, patrolling the UK coastline, gathering intelligence and alerting the police and security services (UK Government, n.d.). Although not part of the Schengen Agreement, the UK has contributed to FRONTEX operations since 2015 (Taylor, 2017) and is allowed to conduct border controls on the French side of the channel. Integration strategies are the responsibility of the devolved governments (see HM Government, 2019; Scottish Government, 2018).

The UK signed the Refugee Convention in 1954. Protection is provided via the UK asylum system and via resettlement programmes such as the Gateway Protection Programme, the Mandate Scheme, the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme, or the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme. The UK has a selective relationship with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It participates fully in the Dublin System—to determine which Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in the EU—and the Eurodac database of the fingerprints of asylum seekers (European Union Committee, 2019). However, the UK is already out of step with EU asylum standards as it chose not to opt into the most recent round of CEAS Directives on reception conditions, asylum procedures, and qualification for international protection. UK withdrawal from the Dublin System after Brexit may result in the loss of a safe, legal route for the reunification of separated refugee families in Europe. Vulnerable unaccompanied children would find their family reunion rights curtailed, as Dublin offers them the chance to be reunited with a broader range of family members than under current UK Immigration Rules. The UK has never taken part in European responsibility sharing mechanism for asylum seekers (hotspot system)

that was presented by the Commission as part of the European Agenda on Migration of April 2015.

Although the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020, it remains subject to EU law and part of the EU customs union and single market during the transition period that is set to end on 31 December 2020. To preserve their rights to live and work in the UK, EU, non-EU EEA, Swiss citizens, and their eligible family members living in the UK must apply to the EU settlement scheme (UK Government, n.d.). Although migration policy is not devolved, the Welsh government has responsibility to economic migrants living in Wales under its housing, health, education, social service functions. Policies towards economic migrants coming to Wales in order to work are developed in the context of the Welsh Government's strategic agenda, specifically the Equality Act 2010 and the Programme for Government (2011). In its 2017 White Paper on Brexit and Fair movement of people, the Welsh government is calling for a managed but more flexible approach to migration, making a strong case for regional policy variations and closely linking migration to employment to address skill shortages and gaps in construction, manufacturing and hospitality.

### Short migration overview

Although the UK has a long history of migration, it only became an immigration country in recent years. Before the mid-1980s, the number of UK citizens emigrating to the United States, Canada and Australia was higher than the number of immigrants coming from the former colonies (Fassmann & Reeger, 2012). In 2018, net migration to the UK was 258,000 (Sumption & Vargas-Silva, 2019). Until 1962, all Commonwealth citizens could enter and stay in the UK without any restriction. As the need for labour increased after the end of World War II, the UK encouraged this immigration by, for instance, bringing citizens of the West Indies to work in the UK on board of the SS Empire Windrush (Taylor, 2020). Eastern European refugees living in camps in Germany and Austria were brought to the UK after the war via the European Volunteer Worker

scheme (Kay & Miles, 1988). Immigration from India and Pakistan also increased after independence. In 1968-1976, unrest in Kenya and Uganda led to many African-Asians to settle in the UK as Commonwealth citizens. With the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 and Immigration Act 1971, however, immigration controls for Commonwealth countries became stricter (Hardill, Graham, & Kofman, 2001). In contrast, the 1988 Immigration Act facilitated immigration from Europe by allowing freedom of movement in the European Community (ONS, 2016). Although non-EU citizens continue to account for a slightly larger share of immigration compared with EU citizens, this gap has been narrowing in recent years (ONS, 2016). In 2018, people born outside the UK made up an estimated 14% of the UK's population (Varlas-Silva & Rienzo, 2019). The main countries of birth represented were Poland (8.9%), India (8.9%), Pakistan (5.7%), Romania (4.2%), and Ireland (3.9%).

In the 1970s, the UK adopted multicultural policies, through which the state sought to enable ethnic minorities to be represented and maintain their cultural identity (Favell, 2001). However, since the 2000s, and in particular, the 2005 London bombing, commentators have proclaimed the "death of multiculturalism" (Back, Sihna & Bryan, 2012, p.140). A narrative shift was observed that criticized multiculturalism for undermining common values, supporting reprehensible practices, and facilitating the emergence of terrorism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). This narrative was framed around the conception of immigration as a threat and was used to legitimise the implementation of restrictive immigration policies (Back et al., 2012).

### Key development since 2015

Net migration dropped in the year 2012, before reaching a peak of over 300,000 in 2015 (ONS, 2015). From 2010, UK's migration policies shifted towards stricter "population control" measures aiming to cut net migration "from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands" (Conservative Party, 2010: 21). The stricter migration control approved by the Parliament in 2012 restrict access to welfare benefits, the renewal of residence/work permit and mostly focused on non-EEA nationals such as irregular migrants, over stayers and asylum

seekers denied refugee status (Cangianco, 2016). It has since then decreased again, dropping down to 240,000 in 2019 (Sturge, 2020). 2015 also witnessed a peak of 32,414 asylum applications (UK Government, 2016). Applications mainly came from nationals of Eritrea (3,729), followed by Iran (3,248), Sudan (2,918) and Syria (2,609) (UK Government, 2016). Although this was the highest number of asylum applications in the UK since 2004, it remains a small number compared to the 441 800 claims made in Germany (Eurostat, 2016), the 1,255,640 asylum applications made in the EU (Eurostat, 2016), and the 65.3 million people who were forcibly displaced worldwide that year (UNHCR, 2015).

Yet, the so-called "refugee crisis" was largely covered in mainstream media and fuelled negative narratives in political discourses that were used to justify the intensification of the border regime (Goodman, Sirriyeh, & McMahon, 2017; Ibrahim & Howarth; Webber, 2019; Yuval-Devis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2018). The Immigration Act 2016 provides that employers who hire undocumented migrants face criminal sanctions, and migrants who do not have permission to be in the UK can have certain privileges revoked, including their bank accounts and driving licenses. It is also a criminal offence for a landlord to knowingly rent premises to a migrant in an irregular situation. These controversial new laws are designed to supplement the immigration system and create what former Home Secretary Theresa May has openly called "a hostile environment for illegal immigrants" in the UK (Kirkup & Winnett, 2012). A notable consequence of the hostile environment policies implemented in the Immigration Act 2014 and 2016 is the "Windrush scandal". By forcing employers, bank staff, NHS staff, and private landlords to conduct immigration checks, these policies led members of the "Windrush generation", who had been brought to work in the UK from the Caribbeans in the 1960s, at a time when they were considered as British citizens, to provide evidence that they had lived in the country legally. This led to people who arrived in the UK legally, and had lived most of their lives, to be wrongly deported, or denied access to essential services such as housing, employment and health care.

The so-called "refugee crisis" also had an impact on the 2016 referendum to leave the Europe Union,

as images of people intending to seek safety in Europe were used to fuel the narrative of "migrants" as economic and security threats that justified the need to take back control of the UK borders (Virdee Brexit vote was also a result of anti-immigrant sentiments towards Eastern European migrants in the UK (namely Polish, Bulgarian and Romanian migrant workers) and not just refugees/asylum seekers.

The narrative of migrants as threats is also embedded in recent policies such as the new points-based immigration system, which highlights the aim to "take back control of our borders", "improve security", and "reduce overall levels of migration and give top priority to those with the highest skills and the greatest talents" (UK Government, 2020).

**For more information, see:**

IOM UK:

<https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/>

Foreign Affairs:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office>

Interior Affairs:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>



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