



Non-UK entry grants under the post-Brexit immigration system

Immigration Policy: MW 507

Summary

1. The government promised that its post-Brexit immigration system would *reduce overall immigration levels* and deliver ‘firmer’ border control. Yet the opposite has happened, as we show below with analysis of Home Office (HO) data. **In 2021, there were over 800,000 longer-term entry grants to non-UK nationals for work, study, family and resettlement.** Meanwhile, illegal arrivals have tripled since 2018. The public sense that something is wrong (7 in 10 say Ministers are failing on immigration, YouGov). Yet official transparency on immigration is inadequate (and worsening). Key statistics are being delayed, and the picture of what is happening is being occluded as non-UK arrivals rise.

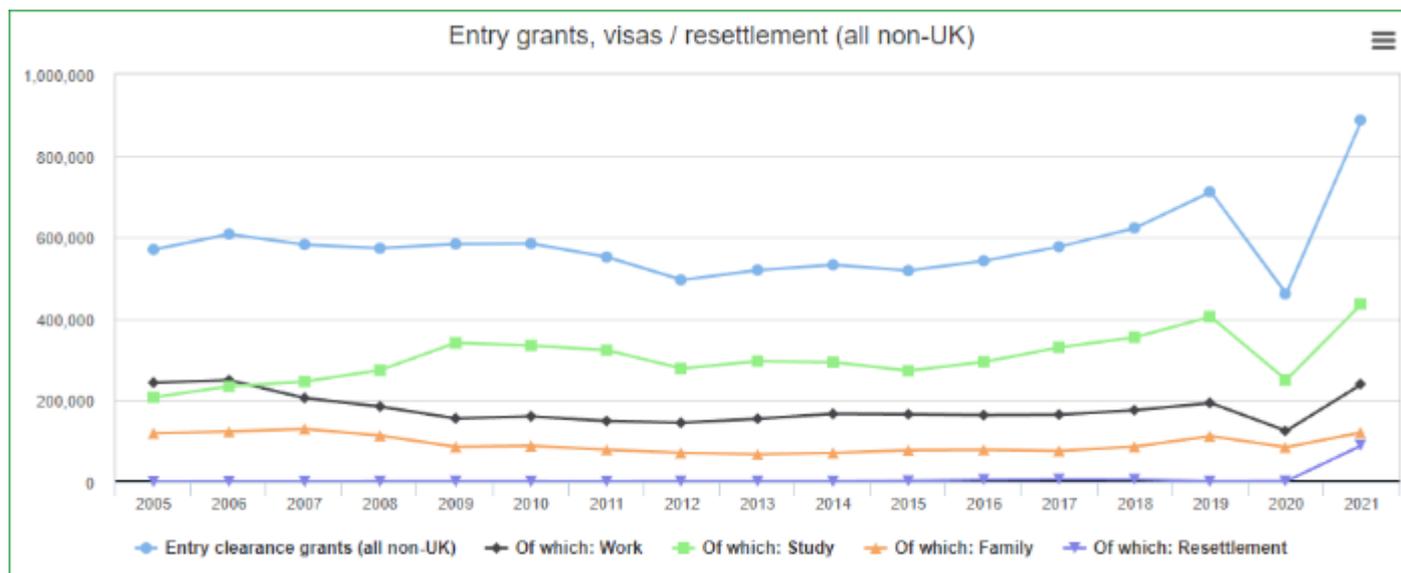
Introduction

2. Entry clearance grants for longer-term stays for work, family, study and resettlement were more than 800,000 in 2021, with 95% from outside the EU. Just 50,000 entry clearances were to EU citizens – who since 2021 have required visas for longer stays. **Longer-term non-EU entry grants stood at about 780,000.** There has been no recent public estimate of outflows due to repeated delays in the publication of both 2021 immigration estimates and exit checks analysis.

Detail

3. 2021 was the post-Brexit visa system’s first year of operation. This – we were told by the government - would enable renewed control of immigration following the UK’s departure from the EU, and a reduction in overall numbers. Previously EU citizens could come to the UK to live without visas under free movement rules but they are now included in the visa system for the first time in recent history. As would be expected, this has led to an increase in the total number of visas granted compared with the pre-Brexit figures. Figure 1 below shows that there were more than 880,000 entry grants (EU/non-EU) for work, study, family or resettlement in 2021. When short-term study/temporary work visas are excluded, the total is about 830,000. Around 50,000 (5-6%) were from the EU¹.

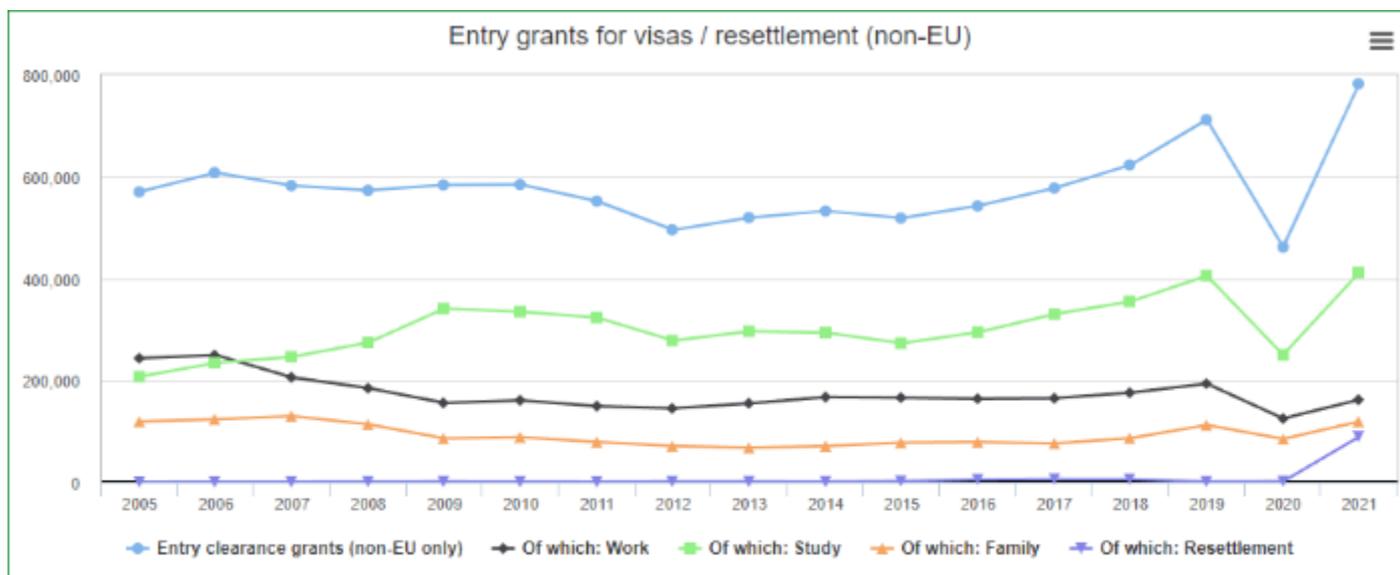
Figure 1: Entry grants, visas / resettlement (all non-UK)².



4. These HO figures include EU citizens for the first time. Therefore, when looking at historical trends, we consider data for non-EU nationals only (below).

5. There were 835,000 entry grants to non-EU nationals in 2021, of which about 780,000 were for long-term purposes³. The 35,000 or so illegal arrivals that the UK experienced in 2021 (over 90% of whom claim asylum and the vast majority of whom are from outside the EU) will also add to total arrivals.

Figure 2: Entry grants for visas / resettlement (non-EU)



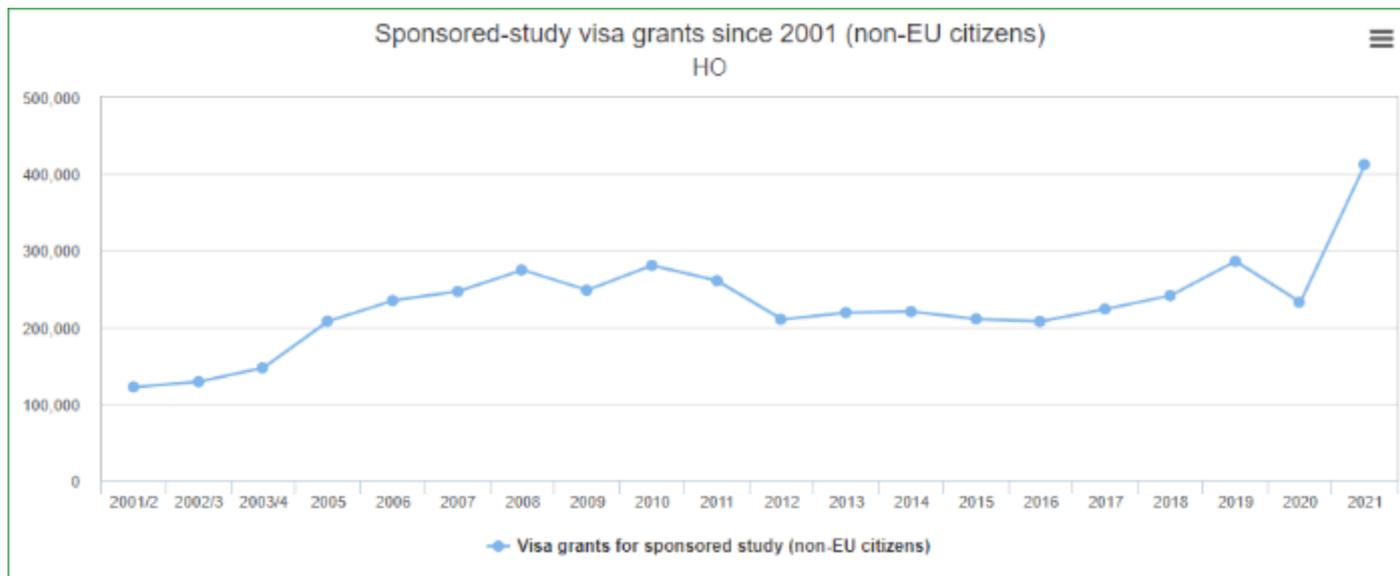
Which routes witnessed significant increases in 2021?

6. An increase in non-EU entry grants was the chief driver of the increase in numbers overall. For example, there were: a) more non-EU study visas issued b) more direct resettlements of refugees than ever before c) more illegal immigration (driving a record number of asylum claims). Meanwhile, there were 210,000 entry

grants to non-EU nationals for work visas in 2021 - much higher than the average of 160,000 per year for the period 2010-20. This will be partially linked to weaker work permit rules, the scrapping of the annual cap on work visas and the recent creation of a special route for health-care workers.. 2021 also saw the most family visa grants / permits for non-EU citizens (119,000) since 2007.

7. Grants to non-EU nationals for sponsored study rose to 411,800, outstripping both their 2019 level of 285,500 as well as the previous high seen in the 2009-2010 period. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Sponsored-study visa grants since 2001 (non-EU citizens). HO.⁴



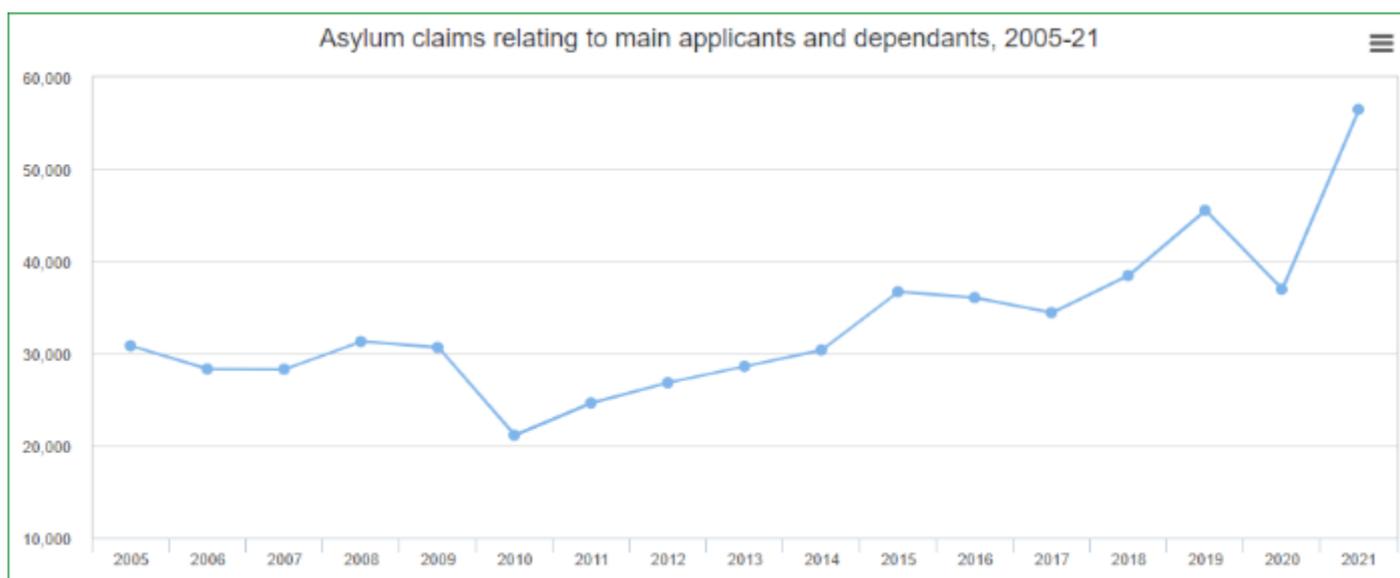
8. Another factor pushing the increase in non-EU immigration was the rise in resettlement grants / asylum claims to those escaping dangerous parts of the world – Table 1 below. There was a massive increase of about 95,000 compared with 2020, mainly due to arrivals of Hong Kongers but also Afghans.

Table 1: Entry grants to those resettled from places of danger or their relatives

Year	Total direct grants of entry to resettling refugees or relatives	Of which: Pre-existing or now closed resettlement schemes	Of which: Visas granted to relatives of refugees	Of which: Hong Kong B(NO) scheme	Of which: Afghan resettlement	Of which: Ukrainian refugees
2010	5,603	717	4,886	-	-	-
2011	4,765	461	4,304	-	-	-
2012	4,721	1,053	3,668	-	-	-
2013	5,088	967	4,121	-	-	-
2014	5,236	786	4,450	-	-	-
2015	6,714	1,865	4,849	-	-	-
2016	11,251	5,212	6,039	-	-	-
2017	11,411	6,212	5,199	-	-	-
2018	11,518	5,806	5,712	-	-	-
2019	13,068	5,612	7,456	-	-	-
2020	6,251	823	5,428	-	-	-
2021	101,496	1,587	6,134	81,775	12,000	-
2022 (as of late April)	27,100	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	27,100
Totals	214,222	31,101	62,246	81,775	12,000	27,100

9. The government has also confirmed that there was a major increase in illegal immigration in 2021, with 36,800 people arriving without prior permission by air, lorry and boat (about three times the total in 2018). This will have fed into the fact that there were a historically high number (56,000) of asylum applications by main applicants and dependants in 2021 - the most since 2003 when the number hit 60,000. See Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Asylum claims relating to main applicants and dependants, 2005-21.



Conclusion

10. Global entry clearance permissions for longer-term residence in the UK have reached record levels – with more than 800,000 people being allowed to come in 2021 (more people than live in the city of Leeds). This has partly been driven by a huge spike in study visa grants and a significantly larger amount of direct refugee resettlement (with around 80,000 Hong Kongers arriving in one year). Mounting illegal arrivals during 2021 (including by boat) have also fed into the highest number of asylum claims since 2003 (over 50,000 by main applicants and dependants). The government has failed to deliver on its pledges to restore border control in the wake of Brexit, and to reduce immigration.⁵

17 May 2022

Annex A

Delays and gaps in immigration statistics

Although until mid-2020 there was a time lag of only six months on immigration data, the government has repeatedly delayed the release of statistics that would provide a clearer picture of net immigration for 2021. ***Such information is vital for the public to be able to hold the government to account on an important national issue, for the purposes of transparency and democracy.*** But we have now had a delay of nearly a year in the release of figures for the year to mid-2021. There have been three recent cases of delays:

- Net migration estimates for the year to June 2021 were supposed to be released on 30 March but the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have now postponed release until late May 2022.⁶
- National Insurance Number registration data for adult overseas nationals for the period after June 2021 was meant to be released by the DWP earlier this year but that was postponed.⁷
- Exit Checks analysis for 2020/21 was due to be released in August 2021 but has not been released with no sign of whether or when it will be.⁸

Because of this, members of the public who are keen to know the truth about what has happened to immigration in the first full year since major policy are forced to rely only on figures produced by the Home Office (visa grants, asylum claims and resettlements).

Notes

1. Home Office immigration statistics, released 24 February 2022. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fifth-report-on-statistics-relating-to-exit-checks/fifth-report-on-statistics-relating-to-exit-checks-2019-to-2020>
2. The totals for 2005 to 2021 do not include short-term students. There was a very significant drop in the number of short-term students between 2019 and 2021, falling from 120,000 to 21,502 – a near 100,000 fall.
3. The 2021 total is 840,000 if those given permission to enter on temporary work visas are excluded from the total. However, temporary workers are included here (making the headline figure 890,000) for reasons of comparability: the headline totals for 2005-2020 including 'temporary workers' who came under Tier 5, including some given permission to come to the UK for up to two years.
4. The 2001 to 2004 totals include both entry clearance grants as well as data relating to applications made within the UK for 'leave to remain'. Data for 2005 to 2021 includes only entry clearance visa grants from outside the UK.
5. Home Office figures on irregular migration, released 24 February 2022.
6. The ONS statistics release calendar states that the statistics were originally scheduled to be published on 30 March 2022. However, this was postponed to 19 April 'to allow publication to go out alongside other related releases on the same day, in line with our revisions policy, and for further quality assurance of data'. Then this was postponed again to 24 May 'to allow for further quality assurance against other available data sources, including provisional Census 2021 data, to have the highest confidence in the figures we publish.' URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/longterminternationalmigrationprovisionalyearendingjune2021>
7. See Parliamentary answer, 11 February 2022, URL: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2022-01-28.HL5761.h&s=speaker%3A25254#gHL5761.q0>
8. Exit Checks data provides results on the proportion of non-EEA nationals who departed before their visa expired, as well as updated data quality metrics for data collected under the Initial Status Analysis (ISA) system, which combines data from different administrative sources to link an individual's travel in or out of the UK with their immigration history. The most recent Exit Checks analysis report was released in August 2020, covering the year 2019/20. URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/912886/fifth-report-on-statistics-relating-to-exit-checks-201920.pdf