

# ALL CHANGE: THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON MIGRATION COMPOSITION AND SOCIAL COHESION

BY HELENA IVANOV



**CENTRE ON  
SOCIAL &  
POLITICAL RISK**

Published in 2022 by The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society  
Millbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank  
London SW1P 4QP

Registered charity no. 1140489  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7340 4520

**[www.henryjacksonsociety.org](http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org)**

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TITLE: "ALL CHANGE: THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY  
ON MIGRATION COMPOSITION AND SOCIAL COHESION"  
By Helena Ivanov

ISBN: 978-1-909035-74-4

£9.95 where sold

Cover image: Air travelers queue at border control at Heathrow Airport, 14th March 2017  
by 1000 Words at shutterstock.com (<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/london-uk-march-14-2017-air-609397571>).

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## About the Author

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Helena Ivanov is an Associate Fellow at The Henry Jackson Society and a PhD candidate in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences. In her PhD thesis, she examines the role propaganda plays in violence against civilians with a specific focus on the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the role the media played in the dissolution of this country. Prior to her PhD, Helena completed an MPhil in Politics: Political Theory at the University of Oxford and a BA in Politics at the University of Belgrade.

## Acknowledgements

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I am grateful for the research assistance provided by Henry Jackson Society interns Thomas James Werner and Aaron Kwadwo Kyereh-Mireku. I also thank everyone at HJS who discussed this topic with me throughout, and a number of reviewers for their helpful comments and feedback.

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## About Us

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### About The Henry Jackson Society

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**The Henry Jackson Society** is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

## CENTRE ON SOCIAL & POLITICAL RISK

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### About The Centre on Social & Political Risk

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**The Centre on Social & Political Risk (CSPR)** is a citizen-focused, international research centre, which seeks to identify, diagnose and propose solutions to threats to governance in liberal Western democracies. Its fundamental purpose is to underscore the potential harm that various forms of social, cultural and political insecurity, conflict and disengagement can pose to the long-term sustainability of our democracies.

## Executive summary

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This paper is based on an in-depth examination of the changing migration patterns the UK has seen since it regained significant policymaking powers over immigration and borders. As shown in this report, while net migration figures have broadly remained the same (excluding 2020, where data was likely skewed in light of the travel restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the level of EU migration has seen a substantial decrease while non-EU migrants have dominated the net migration levels. The report goes on to analyse the impact of immigration on social cohesion in light of this changing data.

The paper's conclusions are cautiously optimistic – at the moment, there are no strong reasons to think that community cohesion will be undermined in light of changing migration trends. Nevertheless, the paper suggests several important potential phenomena which could, down the line, harm social cohesion in British communities. Finally, in light of these findings, the paper suggests the following set of policies for the UK Government to consider implementing:

1. Continuously monitor whether there are any further changes to the groups who are arriving and respond promptly to changes which have potential impacts on cohesion.
2. Monitor levels of ethnic segregation and concentration and their possible impact on social cohesion.
3. Introduce a fairer and more balanced system of asylum seekers' relocation.
4. Continue implementing all aspects of the Integrating Communities Action Plan and other projects aimed at fostering integration and social cohesion.
5. Monitor cohesiveness in neighbourhoods which contain a relatively high concentration of EU migrants.

## Introduction

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With the UK's departure from the EU, the UK Government has regained significant policymaking powers over immigration and borders. Five years on from the June 2016 referendum on EU membership, and a year after the end of the transition period, we can now see the first signs of a post-Brexit border regime for Britain. The policy decisions made by the UK Government indicate that we can expect to see substantial changes in the composition of migration to the UK.

While recent data is clearly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, net migration from non-EU countries reached its highest level on record in 2019 while net migration from EU countries fell three quarters from its 2016 peak. In 2020, net migration from the EU was negative, as large numbers of EU citizens left Britain.<sup>1</sup>

If Government policy is likely to mean the composition of immigration to the UK shifts heavily from EU to non-EU migration, this could have notable social impacts. It is often argued that non-EU migrants are drawn from very different cultural backgrounds, are more likely to live in social housing than their EU counterparts,<sup>2</sup> and contribute less fiscally than their native or EU counterparts.<sup>3</sup> While the picture on crime is generally positive, areas where multiple groups mix together can see increased criminal activity.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the composition of migration to the UK is therefore critical to understanding its effect on social cohesion, and accordingly the degree of net inflow that the UK should be looking to achieve. Most leading scholars and experts agree that immigration has an impact on social cohesion, with some arguing that this impact is often negative with greater diversity in cultural values and ideals giving rise to greater friction. In the UK, the tendency for immigrant groups to cluster together in concentrated areas must also be considered,<sup>5</sup> as large waves from single sources can give rise to segregated communities. Depending on the groups driving the rise of non-EU migration, there may be a need to carefully think about adequately integrating these groups into British society. Migration policy which sees a substantial increase in non-EU immigrants and a steady decrease of EU immigrants could result in a very different society if maintained for an extended period.

In this report, we seek to examine the changing migration trends and analyse the likely impact that these patterns of migration may have on social cohesion. The report concludes with a set of policy recommendations for the UK Government to consider implementing. Overall, the paper's conclusions are cautiously optimistic as it seems that, should the current trends continue, the UK is unlikely to see severe disruption of the cohesiveness of its communities.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to be cautious. For example, it is possible that the current trends may change as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted globally and a high number of refugees

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<sup>1</sup> "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2020", Office for National Statistics, 25 November 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2020>.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Dustman and Tommaso Frattini, "The fiscal effects of immigration to the UK", *The Economic Journal*, 2014, <https://www.cream-migration.org/files/FiscalEJ.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., and Dr Carlos Vargas-Silva, Madeleine Sumption and Peter William Walsh, "The Fiscal Impact of Immigration in the UK", *The Migration Observatory*, 20 March 2022, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-fiscal-impact-of-immigration-in-the-uk/>.

<sup>4</sup> Dr Dainis Ignatans, Kajetan Zielinski and Greg Los, "The 'before, after and in between' of immigration. Criminal Interactions of foreign-born people in England and Wales", *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal*, 19, no.2 (2017), <https://dam.ukdataservice.ac.uk/media/604220/ignatans.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Brendan Cox, David Goodhart, Eric Kaufmann and Richard Webber, "Whatever happened to integration?", *Policy Exchange*, 2022, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Whatever-happened-to-integration.pdf>.

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and asylum seekers arrive in the UK. Furthermore, it is also possible that social cohesion could be disrupted as the number of EU immigrants in the country continues to decrease and some EU citizens continue to be frustrated with the Home Office's delay in processing their settlement status applications. Finally, if the immigrants who are currently arriving tend to segregate along ethnic lines, we could see disruptions to social cohesion as well. The report provides recommendations on how to address some of these problems.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first section provides an overview of the new immigration rules in the UK. From there, it seeks to evaluate the effects of post-2016 policy changes on current migration patterns in the UK, arguing that the trends we are seeing now are probably here to stay (at least partially) even as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

The third section evaluates the existing research on the relationship between migration tendencies and social cohesion in the UK. Section four delves deeper into disaggregating non-EU migration trends, analysing which non-EU immigrants are driving the rise of non-EU net migration. From there, the paper examines what kind of impact we can expect these changed migration tendencies to have on social cohesion.

The final section provides a set of policy recommendations aimed at preventing the possible negative impact that changed migration tendencies could have on social cohesion.

## Current immigration rules

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Once the Brexit transition period ended at the start of 2021, the rules of immigration to the UK changed. With the exception of EU citizens who already lived in the UK and had applied for the EU Settlement Scheme, everyone needed a visa to come for work or study purposes. EU citizens, who had a privileged status before, are now subject to the same rules as the rest of the world and have to apply for a UK visa through the points-based system. As the BBC reports: “To qualify for a visa, migrant workers who want to move to the UK will have to qualify for 70 points. Having a job offer from an approved employer for a skilled job and being able to speak English will give 50 points. The applicant can achieve the remaining 20 points if they are due to be paid at least £25,600 a year.”<sup>6</sup> There are other ways of obtaining additional points, such as holding a PhD. Additionally, if the applicant works in certain specified industries (such as education and health), they can earn less (£20,480) and still obtain the necessary 20 points. Moreover, applicants working in these industries are eligible for a fast-track visa scheme and will pay reduced visa fees.

There are no limits on the number of international students who can come to study in Britain, and those who successfully complete their studies will be eligible for a graduate visa – this will allow students to stay in the UK and seek employment for two years (or three if they hold a PhD from a UK-based university).

Finally, some people considered exceptional may be eligible for Global Talent, Innovator or Start-Up visas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Brexit: How does the new UK points-based immigration system work?”, *BBC News*, 24 September 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48785695>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

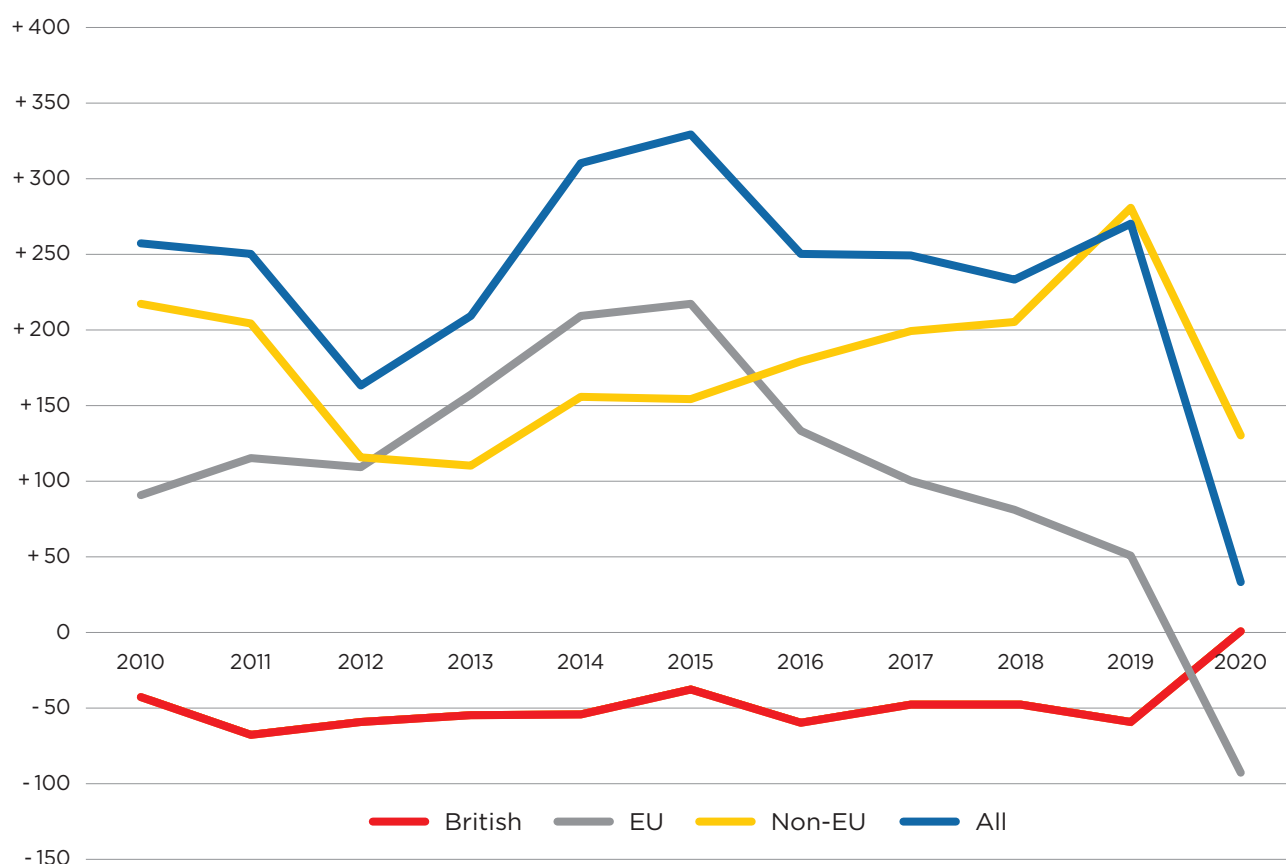
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## The evolving migration picture of the UK

Immigration to the UK has changed significantly in the last five years. In the year ending December 2019, overall net migration to the UK was estimated to be as high as 270,000.<sup>8</sup> While this figure was broadly compatible with the data from 2016 onwards,<sup>9</sup> significant changes occurred over this period in the composition of migration.

While net migration from the EU has fallen from a peak of more than 200,000 in 2015 and early 2016 to 49,000 in 2019,<sup>10</sup> non-EU net migration has gradually risen from 2013 to the highest level recorded by the Office for National Statistics.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1:** Long-term migration to the UK<sup>12</sup>



While the emergence of COVID-19 has complicated further analysis of these trends, with an overall reduction in the level of migration, it is notable that 2020 saw the first level of negative net migration from the EU in 30 years.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: May 2020 – EU and non-EU migration over time", Office for National Statistics, 21 May 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/may2020#eu-and-non-eu-migration-over-time>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

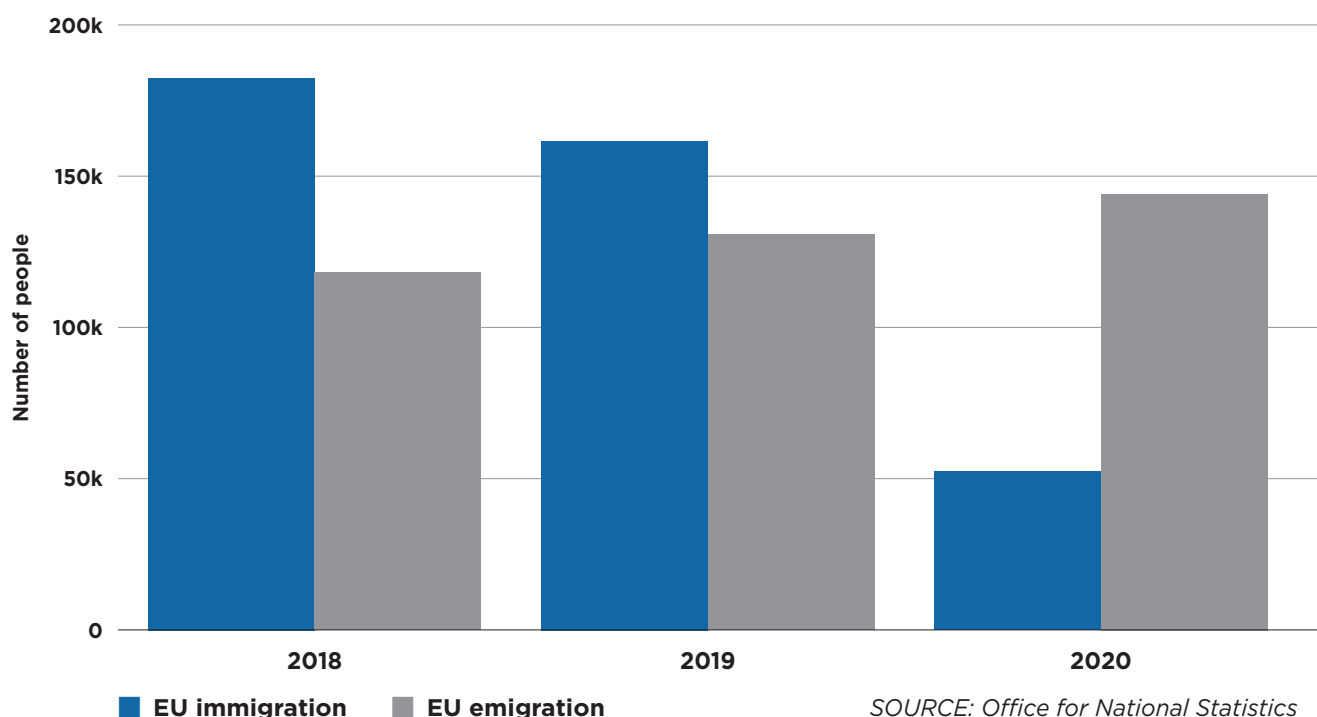
<sup>10</sup> "UK migration: Net migration from outside EU hits 'highest level'", BBC News, 21 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52752656>.

<sup>11</sup> "Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: May 2020."

<sup>12</sup> Long-term international migration, provisional – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk). And Long-term international migration 2.01a, citizenship, UK and England and Wales – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).

<sup>13</sup> "Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2020", Office for National Statistics, 25 November 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2020>.

**Figure 2:** Staying Away – The UK lost almost 100,000 EU nationals during the pandemic



To some degree, the changes observed since 2019 could be temporary adjustments due to COVID-19. It is also unclear how representative the migration picture of 2019 will be going forward. Creating a definitive account of future migration scenarios is outside the scope of this paper, and perhaps even impossible to do with any great degree of accuracy due to the difficulties involved in disentangling the impact of COVID and immigration policy changes.

It is possible, however, to develop probable scenarios based on current data and other available estimates. From these, we can start to assemble an understanding of the likely effects on social cohesion and to consider policies to reinforce positive or combat negative effects. If the decline in EU migration is a long-term trend, Britain could become a very different society, depending on the groups driving the increase of non-EU migration to the UK. If Britain is indeed likely to become a very different society racially, religiously, culturally or politically, effective policies will be required to maintain cohesion.

## The current state of migration

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Commenting on the overall decrease in net migration in 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports: “It’s too early to say whether these are temporary departures due to the pandemic and Brexit or the continuation of a trend which may have been emerging anyway.”<sup>14</sup> It continues to suggest that additional data is needed for more reliable conclusions.<sup>15</sup> The ONS report also recognises that “the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the entire world. Restrictions to travel, alongside various social and economic factors, have influenced people’s plans and decisions to travel or migrate to and from the UK.”<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, it seems reasonable to argue that, as COVID-19 becomes endemic and restrictions are lifted globally, Britain will see an overall increase in net migration. However, this increase in net migration may not be a return to previous levels. For instance, it is possible that some people, who perhaps temporarily left in March 2020, may decide to make their new destination a permanent home. As we show below, there are indications that some of the changes we are currently seeing are likely here to stay.

For instance, as *The Economist* reports: “In 2020, Europe saw a great reverse migration, as those who had sought work abroad returned home. Exact numbers are hard to come by. An estimated 1.3m Romanians went back to Romania – equivalent to three times the population of its second-biggest city. Perhaps 500,000 Bulgarians returned to Bulgaria – a huge number for a country of 7m. Lithuania has seen more citizens arriving than leaving for the first time in years.”<sup>17</sup>

The data seems consistent with what the UK reports are showing. For instance, the Migration Observatory reports that: “Net migration from ‘EU-8’ Eastern European countries such as Poland fell by an estimated 126% in the 2016 to 2020 fiscal years ... By contrast, net migration from ‘EU-14’ countries such [as] France, Germany, Italy and Spain fell by 42% during the same period.”<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, evidence from a range of sectors indicates a reduction in the willingness of EU citizens to move to Britain. Last year, the British Government was forced to introduce temporary visas for 5,000 lorry drivers in an effort to address a serious shortage of HGV drivers. While this shortage was caused in part by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions,<sup>19</sup> other changes predated COVID-19. A Road Haulage Association survey had already identified a significant shortage of qualified drivers caused partly by the emigration of EU member state workers,<sup>20</sup> while the ONS found that there were 16,000 fewer EU nationals working as HGV drivers in the year ending March 2021 than in the previous year.<sup>21</sup>

While it remains difficult to predict the exact trajectory of migration trends, there are strong reasons to think that the balance between EU and non-EU immigrants in the UK will continue to change, with contributing factors ranging from higher bars to entry and procedural delays

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<sup>14</sup> “Measuring migration: the story behind the headlines”, Office for National Statistics, 17 September 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/measuringmigrationthetorybehindtheheadlines/2021-09-17>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “How the pandemic reversed old migration patterns in Europe”, *The Economist*, 30 January 2021, [https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/01/28/how-the-pandemic-reversed-old-migration-patterns-in-europe?utm\\_campaign=editorial-social&utm\\_medium=social-organic&utm\\_source=facebook&fbclid=IwAR1kKaWwCDUOtX2-eVCqNANG\\_2Y\\_vJ2iYHmuYrY6ITsxNQLR6UI3cGyl2uQ](https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/01/28/how-the-pandemic-reversed-old-migration-patterns-in-europe?utm_campaign=editorial-social&utm_medium=social-organic&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=IwAR1kKaWwCDUOtX2-eVCqNANG_2Y_vJ2iYHmuYrY6ITsxNQLR6UI3cGyl2uQ) <https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/01/28/how-the-pandemic-reversed-old-migration-patterns-in-europe>.

<sup>18</sup> Madeleine Sumption and Peter William Walsh, “EU Migration to and from the UK”, *The Migration Observatory*, 15 February 2022, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk/>.

<sup>19</sup> “How serious is the shortage of lorry drivers?”, *BBC News*, 15 October 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/57810729>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

to grievances over the tactics deployed by the pro-Brexit campaign during the referendum on EU membership.

For instance, delays and procedural mishandlings are likely to deter EU citizens from coming to or staying in the UK with many EU citizens accusing the UK Government of breaching the Brexit divorce deal and failing to provide the necessary documentation to EU citizens who wish to settle in the UK.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, these procedural failings prompted a lawsuit against The Home Office. In December 2021, *The Guardian* reported that: “The statutory body set up to protect the post-Brexit rights of EU citizens settled in the UK has taken the dramatic step of launching legal action against the Home Office, accusing it of breaching their basic rights. The Independent Monitoring Authority has launched judicial review proceedings on the grounds that 2.5 million EU citizens who have been granted pre-settled status have been put at automatic risk of losing rights to live, work or rent, or being deported by the Home Office.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, it seems sensible to assume that, as procedural delays continue, and depending on the outcome of the lawsuit, many EU citizens may be deterred from staying in the UK.

Second, it seems that these procedural delays, coupled with anti-EU sentiment expressed during the Leave campaign, have had an impact on people’s willingness to come or to stay in the UK. The International Monitoring Authority for Citizens’ Rights Agreements (IMA) conducted a survey and concluded that as many as “One in 10 EU nationals in the UK are considering leaving after 30 June [2021], the deadline for applications to remain lawfully in the country post-Brexit”.<sup>24</sup> Most respondents suggested that they did not trust the Government and felt that “the UK is a less welcoming place as a result of Brexit ...”<sup>25</sup> Similar data is found on In Limbo, “a not for profit project based on the original ideal by Elena Remigi [Italian interpreter and resident in Britain]. It was launched in the aftermath of the 2016 UK referendum to give voice to 3.6m EU citizens living in the UK and 2.2m UK citizens living in the rest of the EU.”<sup>26</sup> It has been suggested that the post-Brexit environment had an impact on EU citizens’ willingness to stay in the UK. Namely: “But for all the confusion around the exact numbers, few experts doubt that the bitterness created by Brexit, combined with longer-term concerns about becoming second-class citizens, have prompted many [Europeans] to go. Early reports of unfair ‘hostile environment’ treatment of legally resident EU citizens have spurred the exodus: EU nationals arriving for job interviews have been locked up, and others legally resident in Britain have been detained.”<sup>27</sup>

Third, it is also plausible that, as the labour market starts treating all immigrants equally, fewer EU immigrants will apply for jobs in the UK and/or be successful in their applications. Preliminary data suggests that British businesses are already struggling to recruit the necessary workforce. According to the ONS: “Between 23 August and 5 September 2021, 30% of hospitality businesses said that vacancies were more difficult to fill than normal. This compares with 13% across all industries (up from 9% in early August).”<sup>28</sup> These struggles

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<sup>22</sup> Cristina Gallardo, “UK accused of leaving EU citizens in limbo over post-Brexit residence”, *Político*, 21 January 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-eu-citizens-limbo-post-brexit-residence/>.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa O’Carroll, “Home Office sued by watchdog set up to protect post-Brexit rights of EU citizens”, *The Guardian*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/dec/14/home-office-sued-by-watchdog-set-up-to-protect-post-brexit-rights-of-eu-citizens>.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa O’Carroll, “One in 10 EU nationals in UK may leave after June – survey”, *The Guardian*, 13 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/13/one-in-10-eu-nationals-in-uk-may-leave-after-june-survey>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “About In Limbo”, *In Limbo Project*, <https://www.inlimboproject.org/about/>.

<sup>27</sup> Jon Henley, “‘The day I left was the saddest of my life’: EU nationals on the pain of leaving UK”, *The Guardian*, 29 January 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/29/brexit-pubs-curry-pg-tips-but-not-weather-what-exiles-miss-about-uk>.

<sup>28</sup> “Hospitality businesses are most likely to be struggling to fill vacancies”, Office for National Statistics, 16 September 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/hospitalitybusinessesaremostlikelytobestrugglingtofillvacancies/2021-09-16>.

have been linked to a lack of EU applicants. As the ONS reports: “Of all businesses that were experiencing recruitment challenges, one in four (25%) said that a reduced number of EU applicants was a factor. This rises to almost one in two (46%) [for] transport and storage businesses, the highest of any sector.”<sup>29</sup>

It is also likely that the new tuition fee status will result in fewer EU students applying to study in the UK, particularly as they will continue to enjoy special status in other EU member states. Some preliminary data suggests that this is already happening, with the University of East Anglia reporting a 50% drop in EU student numbers in 2021 while non-EU student numbers returned to pre-COVID levels.<sup>30</sup> As study and work are the two primary motivations for those arriving in Britain, such a large shift in migration patterns in these fields is likely to impact the overall migration picture in the UK.

While there are some limitations to the arguments suggested above, and it remains plausible that the current trends can be reversed, this report argues that it is important to consider the universe in which these changes become permanent and consider the likely impact they will have on social cohesion in the UK.

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<sup>29</sup> “Hospitality businesses are most likely to be struggling to fill vacancies”, Office for National Statistics, 16 September 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/hospitalitybusinessesaremostlikelytobestrugglingtofillvacancies/2021-09-16>.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Dedman and Nic Rigby, “Universities see EU students halve post-Brexit as non-EU numbers rise”, *BBC News*, 9 October 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-norfolk-58846563>.

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## Defining social cohesion and its indicators

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Prior to examining the impact that immigration may have on social cohesion, it is important to establish a working definition of social cohesion and to identify the various indicators that could be used to measure the levels of social cohesion in a society. Due to the complexity of the concept, a universally accepted definition for social cohesion is yet to be established. Analysing the various academic disputes regarding the best definition of the concept is outside the scope of this report. This paper instead relies on the definition suggested by Guidance on Community Cohesion in 2002. This definition claims that a cohesive community is “one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, and
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.”<sup>31</sup>

Experts disagree on the indicators that measure the relative cohesiveness of a given society. Again, in-depth analysis of these disagreements falls outside the scope of this report. Thus, on the basis of a detailed literature review, the paper will rely on two crucial indicators seemingly deployed by most experts: “trust and shared social norms”.<sup>32</sup>

Having established the working definition and adequate indicators, the paper will now examine the relationship between immigration and social cohesion.

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<sup>31</sup> Sean Demack, Deborah Platts-Fowler, David Robinson, Anna Stevens and Ian Wilson, “Young People and Community Cohesion: Analysis from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)”, Sheffield Hallam University (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research and the Centre for Educational and Inclusion Research), September 2010, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Hesketh, Anastasia Lewis and Mark Kleinman, “Temporary migration routes, integration, and social cohesion: An assessment of the evidence”, King’s College London/The Policy Institute, October 2021, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/temporary-migration-routes-integration-and-social-cohesion.pdf>, p.8.

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## Social cohesion and immigration

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The majority of research suggests that immigration (which often leads immigration-induced diversity) has an impact on social cohesion. Broadly speaking, three crucial factors have been discussed by experts.

First, some argue that ethnic diversity is negatively correlated with social cohesion – i.e., any increase in ethnic diversity will have a negative impact on social cohesion. Second, others have suggested that not all diversity disrupts cohesiveness. Instead, they argue that positive contact tends to increase social cohesion, whereas segregation tends to harm it. Finally, research from Europe and the UK suggests that ethnic diversity has no impact on social cohesion once economic deprivation is accounted for. In the following paragraphs, we briefly outline these three approaches to the relationship between social cohesion and immigration. Once these are established, we seek to examine the likely impact changing migration patterns will have on social cohesion in the UK.

Many researchers suggest that there is a negative correlation between diversity and social cohesion. Notably, Putnam has analysed the impact of ethnic and racial neighbourhood diversity on social cohesion in the US and concluded that an increase in diversity had a negative impact on trust within communities.<sup>33</sup> Along the same lines, Alesina and La Ferrara argue that “trust in general and more specifically interpersonal trust is lower in more racially heterogeneous communities in the US.”<sup>34</sup>

Stoke, Soroka and Johnston expanded on this research by including Canadian neighbourhoods in the analysis and similarly conclude that: “neighbourhood-level diversity is associated with decreasing levels of interpersonal trust in both US as well as Canadian localities.”<sup>35</sup> These findings do not seem particularly surprising – it seems understandable that people tend to trust less those who appear different to them. Conversely, it seems plausible to argue that the more similar people are to us, the more likely we are to identify with them and, consequently, to trust them. And according to Stoke, Soroka and Johnston: “Research on racial attitudes echoes the idea that diversity can cause feelings of threat, and even increased negative orientations towards those who are different.”<sup>36</sup>

If these theories hold true, it is possible that as the number of non-EU immigrants arriving in the UK increases, we are going to see a decrease in the overall cohesiveness of British society. A 2020 meta-analysis of numerous studies of diversity and social trust shows that, at the local level, higher diversity is generally associated with lower interpersonal trust across a range of contexts.<sup>37</sup>

Kaufmann examined the accuracy of research claiming that people care more about “immigrants’ skill levels over ethno-cultural considerations.”<sup>38</sup> He analysed various surveys in

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Putnam (2007), ‘E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First century’. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30 (2): pp.137-174.

<sup>34</sup> Dr Neli Demireva, “Immigration, Diversity and Social Cohesion”, *The Migration Observatory*, 13 December 2019, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-diversity-and-social-cohesion/>.

<sup>35</sup> Dietlind Stolle, S Storoka, R Johnston (2008), “When Does Diversity Erode Trust? Neighbourhood Diversity, Interpersonal Trust and Mediating Effect of Social Interactions”, *Political Studies* 56: 57-75, p.58.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.59.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Thisted Diensan, M Schaeffer, K Mannemar Søndereskov (2020), “Ethnic Diversity and Social Trust: A Narrative and Meta-Analytical Review”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 441-465.”

<sup>38</sup> Eric Kaufmann, “Why culture is more important than skills: understanding British public opinion on immigration”, The London School of Economics, 30 January 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/why-culture-is-more-important-than-skills-understanding-british-public-opinion-on-immigration/>.

which respondents claimed they cared more about the economic consequences of immigration and immigrants' skills – thereby concluding that “people are most interested in the economic contributions migrants can bring.”<sup>39</sup> However, Kaufmann also conducted independent surveys which “ask about the properties of desirable *immigrants*, not those of *immigration*.”<sup>40</sup> In the end, he concludes that: “people are sensitive to the skill level of the immigrant intake, but this is trumped by their concern for the cultural impact of a larger inflow.”<sup>41</sup> To explain the discrepancy between his and others' findings, Kaufmann argues that: “The reasons people say they oppose immigration are those they are aware of, or feel to be socially acceptable. This is especially the case in focus groups, where peer pressure is strong.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, according to Kaufmann, an increase in diversity can disrupt social cohesion.

A *Policy Exchange* report seems to suggest that diversity has disrupted social cohesion in the UK. It states that many have experienced feelings of cultural anxiety and disconnection and, most notably: “According to a *YouGov* poll for *More in Common* in 2021 38% of British people agree (strongly or somewhat) with the proposition that: ‘Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country’.” Even more problematically, such feelings are associated with voting for extreme and populist parties – thus, alleviating those feelings must be a top priority for liberal democratic societies.<sup>43</sup>

Some politicians seemingly agree with this line of thought. Most notably, in 2011 at the Munich security conference, then-UK Prime Minister David Cameron stated that multiculturalism had failed and “criticised ‘state multiculturalism’ in his first speech as prime minister on radicalisation and the causes of terrorism.”<sup>44</sup> Along the same lines, in 2015 then-Home Secretary Theresa May “told her party’s conference that high levels of immigration make it impossible to have a cohesive society.”<sup>45</sup> Such statements from politicians carry weight – they are communicated by prominent figures speaking from a position of authority, and may persuade some people that immigration does indeed have a negative impact on social cohesion, which could be seen as a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, both Cameron and May were individuals with decision-making powers, and their views often informed policies – thus, their lack of confidence in multicultural societies may also have impacted how they formed their policies. This line of argumentation is based on a premise that “cultural difference can generate feelings of suspicion and threat – deriving from classical ‘group conflicts’ over competition for resources or based on fears of losing one’s own cultural identity.”<sup>46</sup>

However, some experts disagree with the view that ethnic diversity always disrupts cohesiveness. Proponents of ‘contact’ theory argue that “benefits of interethnic contact ... include reduced intergroup anxiety, with bonds of trust, respect, empathy and mutual understanding developed.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, an increase in positive contact between ethnically diverse groups can contribute to the social cohesiveness of a given community. And indeed, while it is possible that contact could confirm some stereotypes, it is equally reasonable to assume that,

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<sup>39</sup> Eric Kaufmann, “Why culture is more important than skills: understanding British public opinion on immigration”, The London School of Economics, 30 January 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/why-culture-is-more-important-than-skills-understanding-british-public-opinion-on-immigration/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Cox, Goodhart, Kaufmann and Webber, “Whatever happened to integration?”.

<sup>44</sup> “State multiculturalism has failed, says David Cameron”, *BBC News*, 5 February 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-12371994>.

<sup>45</sup> “Theresa May: Immigration ‘harms social cohesion’”, *BBC News*, 6 October 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-34459284>.

<sup>46</sup> Rakib Ehsan, (2018), “Discrimination, Social Relations and Trust: Civil Inclusion of British Ethnic Minorities”. PhD Thesis, p.37.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

as people interact and are exposed to those who are seemingly different from them, a vast number of stereotypes will be challenged. This is because through contact, people can come to see that their preconceptions are based on stereotypes – which are usually not true – and are not reflective of reality. Furthermore, through increased contact, people may become able to see the similarities that exist between themselves and those they initially thought to be different. If this holds true, exposure and contact might be crucial for increasing cohesiveness both within and between communities.

And indeed, vast amounts of research confirms that contact has a positive impact on reducing prejudices. For instance, Brown et al. argue that white athletes who play team sports with African American teammates are less prejudiced against African Americans than athletes who play individual sports.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, researchers have confirmed that contact alleviates stereotypes people hold against LGBTQI members. For instance, Herek and Capitanio concluded that the more homosexual people that non-homosexuals interacted with, the more likely it was that those people would stop holding negative views about gay people.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Savelkoul et al. examined the attitude towards Muslims in the Netherlands and found that in neighbourhoods where contact between Muslims and non-Muslims was high, the perceived threat some members of the community felt about Muslims substantially decreased over time.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, it could be that segregation along ethnic lines within or between neighbourhoods (which, in turn, decreases contact between people), rather than ethnic diversity per se, decreases trust and creates less cohesive communities.<sup>51</sup> In line with this argument, the 2015 Government-commissioned Casey Review suggested, among other things, that: “Ethnic concentration ... can also:

- limit labour market opportunities, notably for Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups – although it appears to improve employment opportunities for Indian ethnic groups;
- reduce opportunities for social ties between minority and White British communities; and
- lead to lower identification with Britain and lower levels of trust between ethnic groups, compared to minorities living in more diverse areas.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus, if newly arriving non-EU immigrants have a tendency to segregate and live in ethnically concentrated areas, it is possible that the changing patterns of migration will harm social cohesiveness in the UK.

Finally, a lot of research suggests that economic factors seem to play a more important role than ethnic diversity. Data from Europe, and the UK specifically, suggests that ethnic diversity in and of itself does not lead to less cohesive societies. Instead, researchers suggest that economic inequality and deprivation are damaging to the cohesiveness of a given society.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kendric Brown et al. (2006), “Teammates On and Off the Field? Contact With Black Teammates and the Racial Attitudes of White Student Athletes”, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33(7): 1379-1403.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory Herek, J Capitanio (1996), ““Some of My Best Friends’ Intergroup Contact, Concealable Stigma, and Heterosexuals’ Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians”, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 22(4): 412-424.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Savelkoul et al. (2011), “Anti-Muslim Attitudes in The Netherlands: Tests of Contradictory Hypotheses Dervied from Ethnic Competition Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory”, *European Sociological Review* 27(6): 741-758.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Uslaner (2012), “Segregation and Mistrust”, Cambridge University Press: New York.

<sup>52</sup> Dame Louise Casey, “The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration”, Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2016, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/575973/The\\_Casey\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Shamit Saggat, Will Somerville, Rob Ford and Maria Sobolewska, “The impacts of migration on social cohesion and integration”, Final report to the Migration Advisory Committee, January 2012, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/258355/social-cohesion-integration.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/258355/social-cohesion-integration.pdf); and Demireva, “Immigration, Diversity and Social Cohesion”.

Ehsan argues that “this ties in with the idea that economic deprivation can breed feelings of hostility and suspicion – and in diverse areas (which tend to be poorer in Britain’s case), the competition for scarce resources – jobs, social housing, welfare, public services – can lead to interracial material conflict and social identity threat.”<sup>54</sup> Along the same lines, Strurgis, Brunton-Smith, Kuha and Jackson suggest that “ethnic diversity in London [is] positively related to the perceived social cohesion of neighbourhood residents, once the level of economic deprivation is accounted for.”<sup>55</sup> According to this view, it is the economic status of the newly arriving non-EU immigrants and the neighbourhoods they live in that will be the key indicator to look out for when thinking about their impact on the social cohesiveness of British society.

Economic deprivation could also be seen as somewhat compatible with contact theory. For instance, it is highly unlikely that there will be positive contact between households in areas where there is a huge discrepancy between household incomes as those groups are likely to go to different supermarkets, bars and restaurants – which, in turn, decreases the opportunities for contact between these groups.

Similarly, it is also unlikely that we will see any interaction between neighbourhoods that have widely different levels of income as those living in poorer areas are unlikely to go to the richer areas and vice versa. Therefore, relatively equal income levels within and across neighbourhoods could increase contact and subsequently mitigate the possible negative impacts on social cohesion.

The following section explores where the non-EU immigrants to the UK are coming from and the likely impact they will have on social cohesion in the UK.

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<sup>54</sup> Rakib Ehsan (2018), “Discrimination, Social Relations and Trust: Civil Inclusion of British Ethnic Minorities”, PhD Thesis, p.38.

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Strurgis, I Brunton-Smith, J Kuha, J Jackson (2014), “Ethnic diversity, segregation and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods in London”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(8): 1286.

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## Who is coming?

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It seems that the current rise in non-EU migration is primarily led by Indian and Chinese immigrants who are applying to work or study in the UK. The data shows that in 2019, 65% of entry visas issued for work, family or study were allocated to citizens of Asian countries – with 30% going to those from East Asian countries, and specifically Chinese students.<sup>56</sup> In total, Chinese citizens received 21% of all visas, and 91% of those issued were granted for study.<sup>57</sup> As expected, 2020 saw a decrease in the number of Chinese students who applied for study visas in the UK.<sup>58</sup> However, in February 2022, statistics showed record numbers of Chinese students applying to study at British higher education institutions.<sup>59</sup>

In 2021, the number of skilled work permits issued jumped by 110% in comparison to 2020 and 25% in comparison to 2019.<sup>60</sup> The increase has primarily been driven by Indian immigrants who are the top nationality granted skilled work visas.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, there are indications that the size of the Indian community in the UK is likely to continue to grow. In January 2022, it was reported that: “Ministers are keen to ease immigration restrictions in a bid to make it easier for thousands of Indian citizens to live and work in the UK as part of forthcoming trade talks.”<sup>62</sup>

Another interesting point regarding skilled work permits is the decline in applicants coming from the United States – the data from 2021 shows a 25% decrease in applications coming from the USA compared to the number seen in 2019.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the UK has seen a huge increase in the number of work permits issued to Nigerians – a stunning 29% increase in 2021 when compared to 2020.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, there has been an increase in temporary work visas as well. Seasonal workers, who make up over half of all temporary work visas issued, have seen the greatest increase. More specifically, when it comes to the Seasonal Worker visa, there has been a “311% [increase] compared with 2020 and currently [seasonal worker visas] make up over half (55%) of all Temporary work grants.”<sup>65</sup> As for the composition of the immigrants arriving for seasonal work in the UK: “The highest number of grants [...] are for Ukrainian nationals, which are at 67% [...] of the total, although this proportion is down from 91% in 2019. The next highest grants were for Russian [... 8%], Bulgarian [... 4%], and Belarusian nationals [... 3%].”<sup>66</sup> The data remains similar for the HGV, Poultry and Butcher temporary visas which are also dominated by Eastern European applicants.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the Youth Mobility category of temporary visas was

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<sup>56</sup> Denis Kierans, “Who migrates to the UK and why?”, *The Migration Observatory*, 30 March 2020, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-migrates-to-the-uk-and-why/>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “National statistics: Summary of latest statistics”, Home Office, 3 March 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/summary-of-latest-statistics>.

<sup>59</sup> Elly Blake, “Record number of Chinese students apply to study at UK universities”, *Evening Standard*, 17 February 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/education/record-number-chinese-students-uk-universities-b983094.html>.

<sup>60</sup> “National statistics: Why do people come to the UK? To work”, Home Office, 3 March 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-to-work>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Jane Clinton, “UK ministers eager to ease immigration rules for Indian citizens”, *The Guardian*, 1 January 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/01/uk-ministers-eager-to-ease-immigration-rules-for-indian-citizens>.

<sup>63</sup> “National statistics: Why do people come to the UK? To work”, although it should be noted that the data for US applicants saw an increase of 48% in 2021 in comparison to 2020. Nevertheless, the 2020 data is generally skewed by COVID-19 and global travel restrictions.

<sup>64</sup> “National statistics: Why do people come to the UK? To work”.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

largely dominated by Australians, Canadians and Japanese nationals. The pandemic seems to have had an impact on the number of applicants interested in this immigration route, reflected in a 58% decrease since 2019.<sup>68</sup>

Overall, the increase in non-EU migration seems to be primarily driven by Indian, Chinese and Nigerian citizens coming to work or study in the UK. And should the UK ease the immigration rules currently in place for Indian citizens, we can expect net migration figures to continue to rise. Thus, in the following paragraphs, we will analyse the impact that the arrival of these groups is likely to have on social cohesion. While the increase is also driven by Eastern Europeans and others who apply for temporary work visas, it seems unlikely that these groups will have a huge impact on social cohesion, both because of the length of their stay in the UK and also because, comparatively, the sheer size of those communities is not as large.

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<sup>68</sup> “National statistics: Why do people come to the UK? To work”.

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## The New Britain – What to expect

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While it is impossible to know the full implications of the changing migration trends on social cohesion, from the currently available data we can reach some preliminary conclusions. As it stands, it seems unlikely that the current rise in non-EU migration will have a negative impact on the cohesiveness of British society.

First, with the current immigration policies, the UK Government is able to control for economic deprivation by setting an income threshold for those who arrive to work in the UK. Jonathan Portes examined the impact of the post-Brexit immigration system on the UK economy in a 2022 study which argues that the new points-based system is more selective than the previous system as it focuses on attracting high-skilled immigrants. Thus, Portes argues, non-EU immigrants who seek to enter the UK for work purposes will have to meet a high salary threshold and will work in occupations that are higher skilled than the UK average.<sup>69</sup>

Such immigrants are more likely to live in richer areas, which generally do not report low levels of neighbourhood trust or cohesiveness. Moreover, such immigrants are unlikely to be perceived as ‘stealing British jobs’ or unfairly using the state’s benefits as they are unlikely to be competing with relatively poor, lower-skilled native workers for resources perceived to be scarce.

Second, most immigrants currently arriving in the UK are likely to speak English – either because the points-based system requires them to do so, or because it is compulsory for those who wish to study at UK-based universities. Thus, their integration into British society is unlikely to be obstructed due to language barriers.

Furthermore, the data indicates that the impact on social cohesion could be positive. A 2020 study suggests that UK residents of Indian birth reported higher levels of social cohesion than the UK population as a whole – which appears to stand true across the country, and not just in limited areas. When it comes to this group specifically, it seems that cohesiveness is not harmed even for those living in low-income areas, and not just rich areas.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, “British Indians [already] represent one of the highest-performing ethnic groups in the UK ...”<sup>71</sup>

Similar arguments can be made with respect to Chinese students who also seem to be part of the increased non-EU migration to Britain. First, it remains unclear how strong their impact might even be given that many students may decide to leave once they complete their studies. Second, most international students are likely to come from privileged backgrounds – in part due to the visa requirements which also involve a certain level of income, but also because of the tuition fee costs associated with studying in the UK. Third, the Chinese community already seems well integrated in Britain and seems to be one of the highest performing communities in the UK.<sup>72</sup>

Third, all international students are required to pass an English proficiency test as part of their university application process. Thus, Chinese students are unlikely to struggle with language

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Portes, “Immigration and the UK economy after Brexit”, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 38, Issue 1 (Spring 2022): 82–96, <https://academic.oup.com/oxrep/article/38/1/82/6514758>.

<sup>70</sup> Mariña Fernández-Reino and Dr Cinzia Rienzo, “Migrants’ social relationships, identity and civic participation in the UK”, *The Migration Observatory*, 17 March 2020, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-social-relationships-identity-and-civic-participation-in-the-uk/>.

<sup>71</sup> Sarwar Alam, “Time to consider ground realities in racial debate”, *Eastern Eye*, 23 April 2021, <https://www.easterneye.biz/time-to-consider-ground-realities-in-racial-debate-2/>.

<sup>72</sup> Rakib Ehsan, “The extraordinary success of the British-Chinese community is a lesson to us all”, *CAPX*, 1 February 2022, <https://capx.co/the-extraordinary-success-of-the-british-chinese-community-is-a-lesson-to-us-all/>.

barriers. Subsequently, there are strong reasons to think that Chinese students will not have a negative impact on social cohesion.

Moreover, some research suggests that international students may have a positive impact on the perceived cohesiveness of communities across the UK. While research on the impact international students have on social cohesion is fairly meagre, the available studies are generally positive. Research conducted in 2007 shows that 92% of people believed that the presence of international students in their neighbourhood had a positive impact on their communities.<sup>73</sup> In some studies, that number was as high as 100%.<sup>74</sup> Thus, it seems unlikely that the arrival of Chinese students, or other non-EU students for that matter, will have a negative impact on social cohesion in the UK.

Finally, with the new immigration rules, the UK Government will have an insight into the kinds of communities newcomers are settling into. This provides the potential for the Government to minimise possible risks to social cohesion. Should there be a large influx of one ethnic group into a lower-income area, the Government will be able to respond by, for instance, increasing funding for pro-integration community events which would, in turn, increase the chances of positive intergroup contact.

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<sup>73</sup> Caro Hart, Jenny Sheehy-Skeffington and Ingrid Charles, "International students and local communities – a research project by HOST UK", *Worldviews*, Summer 2007, <http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/uploads/media/84/16024.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



## The New Britain – What to watch out for

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While we can be generally optimistic when it comes to the current data on non-EU migration and the impact it may have on social cohesion, there are several things to watch out for. First, there are some groups arriving in the UK who could disrupt the cohesiveness of the communities they come to. Notably, a large number of immigrants from underprivileged backgrounds moving to medium- to low-income areas could disrupt social cohesion in these communities. The Migration Observatory notes that often those who work and live in medium- or low-income areas are new immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africans more generally.<sup>75</sup> The data also suggests that the perceived social cohesion in communities that tend to have these attributes is often very low.<sup>76</sup> Thus, we can expect decreases in social cohesion in areas where such immigrants arrive – unless the UK Government takes the necessary steps to ensure integration.

Second, a recent *Policy Exchange* report<sup>77</sup> argues that: “There are caveats to this broadly positive story [on integration]. There are certain groups, like traditional Muslims, who remain in general very concentrated in certain places ... And an even bigger caveat is that while minorities, say British Pakistanis and British Indians, are mixing more among themselves in so-called super diverse neighbourhoods and schools, the level of mixing between ethnic minorities taken as a whole and the white British majority is barely increasing at all ...”<sup>78</sup> The authors of the report further argue that the UK, unlike Canada for instance, has devoted little attention to creating various programmes that would foster integration on a national level.

In the end, they suggest that: “A pessimistic scenario is all too plausible: a country that is increasingly diverse at the national level but less diverse at the local level ... The country could gradually diverge, like the US with its red states and blue states, both ideologically and demographically.”<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the report also offers reasons to be optimistic, with the authors arguing that “integration and segregation are increasingly seen as part of a *broader problem of generating social cohesion*” and that pandemic-produced solidarity created a good environment to deal with some of these issues.<sup>80</sup>

Third, the data shows that EU residents in the UK (and especially those coming from Eastern European countries) report the lowest levels of neighbourhood cohesion after Sub-Saharan Africans.<sup>81</sup> Given a substantial rise in non-EU Eastern Europeans arriving in the UK on seasonal work visas, it is possible that some communities will become more mixed and see lower levels of social cohesion as a result. Thus, going forward, the British Government must think about adequately integrating these groups into British society to overcome the negative impacts their arrival may have on social cohesion.

Fourth, while many EU citizens left the UK following the June 2016 referendum, many decided to stay. Given the procedural delays that EU citizens who stayed have experienced, there is a risk that the communities they live in may become less cohesive as EU citizens who stayed

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<sup>75</sup> Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, “Migrants’ social relationships”.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> The report is particularly useful since it disintegrates the data and analyses the behaviour of various immigrant communities – with a specific focus on those who tend to segregate. For further details, see: Cox, Goodhart, Kaufmann and Webber, “Whatever happened to integration?”.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

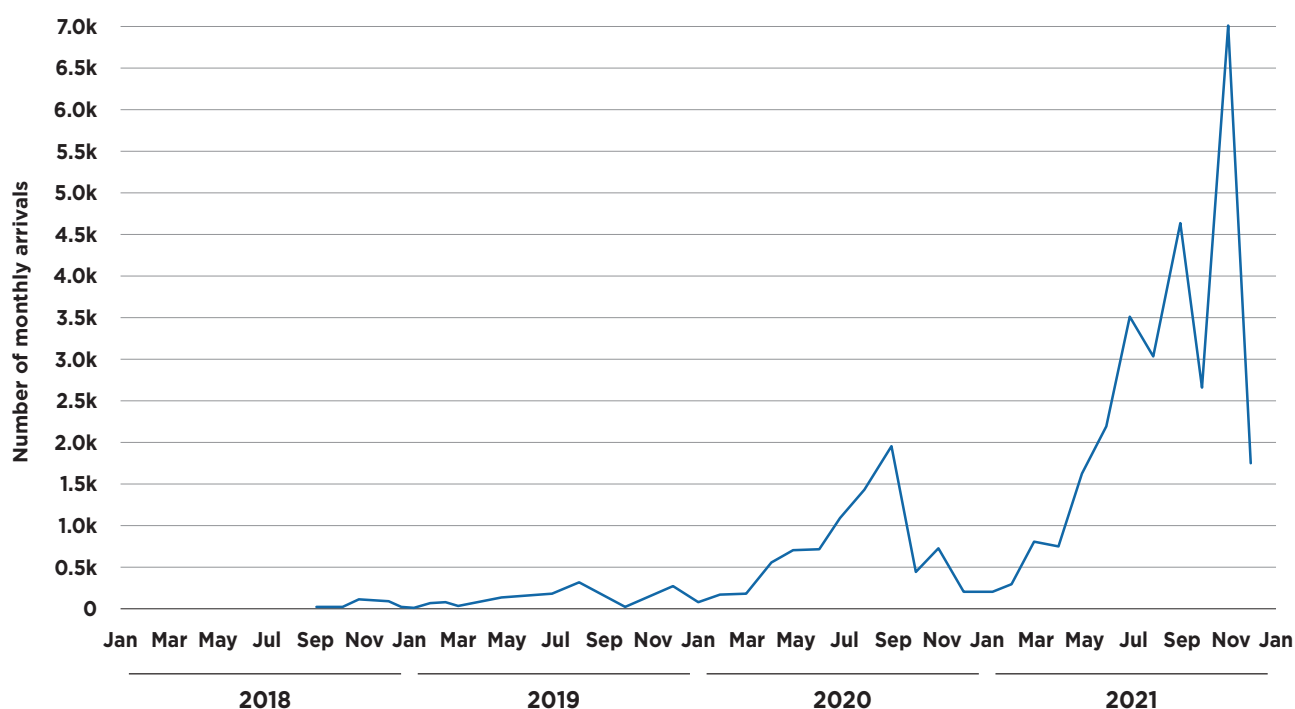
<sup>81</sup> Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, “Migrants’ social relationships”.

may feel unwelcome and somewhat resentful towards the British state. As shown above, many EU citizens have expressed dissatisfaction with the Home Office's handling of their settlement status, with a lot of immigrants also reporting that the way the broader pro-Leave movement was led made them feel unwanted in Britain. Thus, unless the UK Government engages with this problem, we may witness decreases in the cohesiveness in communities populated by EU immigrants (especially relatively deprived, Brexit-voting local authorities).

Fifth, the current immigration rules heavily prioritise attracting high-skilled workers. However, as indicated earlier, the new immigration rules have created a situation whereby Britain has struggled to attract low-skilled workers – and since many EU citizens left, job vacancies have been hard to fill. While perhaps part of the struggle to hire low-skilled workers can be attributed to COVID-19, it is also possible that Britain will continue to struggle to attract these workers, which could force it to relax some of its immigration rules for lower-paid roles in the UK labour market. If such a scenario happens, and depending on what kind of policies are adopted, and who they attract to come and work, social cohesion in some areas may worsen.

Finally, while it seems that Britain has taken control over its legal immigration routes, it has seemingly lost control of illegal immigration. The data shows that irregular migration has ballooned since 2018. In 2018, a mere 299 people illegally crossed the Channel. Just a year later, that figure was 1,843, only to reach 8,466 in 2020, and to peak at an astounding 28,526 in 2021.<sup>82</sup>

**Figure 3:** Number of people arriving in the UK by small boats

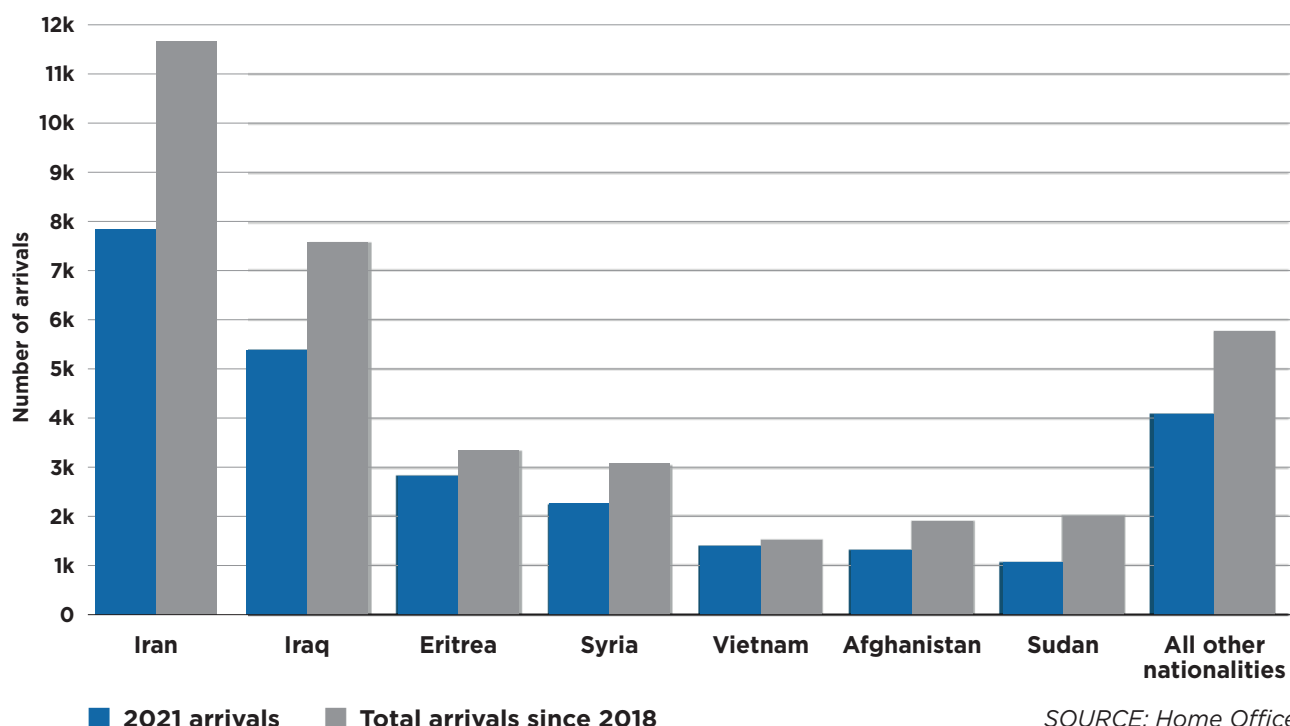


SOURCE: Home Office

Until 2019, Iranians made up the vast majority of small boat arrivals, whereas today those coming via small boats is more mixed. While Iranians still dominate, we are seeing an increase in arrivals of those coming originally from Iraq, Eritrea and Syria.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> "Official Statistics: Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2021," Home Office, 24 February 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2021/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2021>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 4:** Number of small boat arrivals by nationality 2021 (and total 2018-2021)

One may wonder whether illegal crossings ought to be included in this report since illegal immigration was an issue before and after the changes to the immigration policies. However, the report argues that the reason why illegal immigration has spiked is partly due to the changes to immigration law. Namely, prior to Brexit, Britain subscribed to “an EU-wide law called Dublin III, [which] allows asylum seekers to be sent back to the first member state they were proven to have entered. Between 1 January 2019 and 1 October 2020, 231 migrants who crossed the Channel were returned to mainland Europe using Dublin III ... [By contrast], Immigration Minister Tom Pursglove told MPs on 17 November [2021] that only five people had been returned to mainland Europe so far in 2021.”<sup>84</sup>

Thus, by leaving the European Union, the UK lost the ability to return some of the asylum seekers who reach its borders, and to date has not found an adequate scheme to replace Dublin III. To deal with the problem, the Home Secretary Priti Patel “has authorised Border Force officials to turn back boats carrying migrants to the UK in limited circumstances ... [which] is a tactic that is used in Australia. However, France has not co-operated with the UK’s approach.”<sup>85</sup> France is within its own right to refuse to re-take the refugees once their boat has left French waters – leaving the UK in a difficult position.

One attempt to resolve the issue is the currently debated Nationality and Borders Bill. Clause 11 of the Bill creates two different categories of refugees depending on whether they arrived through legitimate or irregular routes to the UK. One of the purposes of the Bill is to give Britain a legal power to turn down those who arrive illegally thereby reducing the inflow of asylum seekers and gaining control over who can settle in the UK.

However, “Boris Johnson’s nationality and borders bill has suffered four defeats in the House of Lords, including the removal of a crucial plank of the government’s immigration strategy

<sup>84</sup> Dominic Casciani, “Channel migrants: What happens to people crossing to the UK?”, *BBC News*, 26 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53734793>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

[...].”<sup>86</sup> Clause 11 of the Bill which would have “limited the rights of refugees who arrive by an irregular route [...]” was defeated by a majority of 78.<sup>87</sup> Thus, it remains to be seen whether the Bill will actually pass, and in what form. Depending on the outcome, we may see further harm to social cohesion – especially if British citizens start feeling as if their own government has lost control over its borders.

While theoretically these illegal immigrants pose a potential risk to social cohesion, depending on their socio-economic status and cultural similarity, the numbers do not appear to be substantial enough to have a significant impact on cohesion. However, this remains an area that warrants serious monitoring in case the number of asylum seekers significantly increases, which may happen as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

To overcome some of these problems, this report proceeds to suggest several policies aimed at tackling any negative impacts that the current migration trends may have on social cohesion.

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<sup>86</sup> Rajeev Syal, “Lords reject clause in bill limiting rights of refugees who arrive by irregular route”, *The Guardian*, 28 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/lords-reject-clause-in-bill-criminalising-refugees-who-arrive-by-irregular-route>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

## Policy recommendations

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The UK Government has already implemented several different projects to improve social cohesion. For example, the Integrated Communities Action Plan “funded five English local authority areas (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Walsall, Waltham Forest and Peterborough) to serve as a test case that would develop local place-based integration plans and programmes over a 2-year period.”<sup>88</sup> For each of the areas, a local plan and strategy was put into place based on the challenges these communities were faced with. Overall, “these programmes encompassed strengthening community leadership, supporting new migrants and local residents, education and young people, boosting non-native speakers’ proficiency in English language, focusing directly on place and communities, increasing economic opportunity and protecting rights and freedoms.”<sup>89</sup>

These programmes are vital as they tend to improve social cohesion. As one of the Government’s reports on the Plan says: “The responses to the consultation highlighted the need for both national and local integration plans to be delivered in a way which inspires, engages and involves local communities. As has been made clear in this response, community voices must be heard, valued and produce change so that no community is left behind.”<sup>90</sup>

However, in light of the changing migration patterns, and the data provided in this report, it is important to think about how to best integrate the newly arriving non-EU immigrants into British society. On the basis of the aforementioned data, we propose the following:

### **1. Continuously monitor whether there are any further changes to the groups who are arriving and respond promptly to changes which have potential impacts on cohesion**

At the moment there are reasons to be optimistic that changing migration patterns will not have a negative effect on social cohesion. However, the data gathered thus far only allow us to make preliminary observations, and there is no guarantee that things will not change in the foreseeable future. With COVID-19 restrictions being lifted globally, and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is plausible that the UK will see unexpected changes to its migration composition. It is also plausible that the groups arriving in the future may disrupt cohesiveness in the UK. For instance, a substantial rise in Ukrainian refugees could disrupt social cohesion, and the UK Government may face challenges when it comes to integrating Ukrainian refugees. First, as discussed, Eastern Europeans tend to report lower levels of social cohesion in comparison to other ethnic groups.<sup>91</sup> Second, Ukraine is a very homogenous society and it may be difficult to integrate Ukrainian refugees into a racially and ethnically diverse country like the UK.<sup>92</sup> Thus, monitoring the number of refugees arriving in the UK and adequately assisting them as they aim to integrate into British society is crucial. At a minimum, the Government needs to continuously monitor developments, track where in the UK immigrants are going, and update its assessments on the risks to social cohesion at both the national and local level.

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<sup>88</sup> Fanny Lalot, Dominic Abrams, Jo Broadwood, Kaya Davies Hayon and Isobel Platts-Dunn, “The social cohesion investment: Communities that invested in integration programmes are showing greater social cohesion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic”, *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, March 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/casp.2522>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> “Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper: Summary of consultation responses and Government response”, HM Government, February 2019, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777160/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy\\_Government\\_Response.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, “Migrants’ social relationships”.

<sup>92</sup> Dr Rakib Ehsan (@rakibehsan), *Twitter*, 12 March 2022, 9.09am, <https://twitter.com/rakibehsan/status/1502572381587615748?s=20&t=2gbMOQUtIMQYmpQ13w4Vjg>.

## **2. Monitor levels of ethnic segregation and concentration and their possible impact on social cohesion**

As research indicates, segregated communities tend to report lower levels of social cohesion, and integration of immigrants into communities is improved through contact. With the new immigration rules introduced by Britain, the Government is better able to monitor who is arriving, at what rates, and where they tend to settle. Such monitoring, in turn, puts the Government in a better position to respond to any potential disruptions to social cohesion. For instance, should the Government notice a large influx of a single group of people into a (perhaps already somewhat segregated) neighbourhood, it could introduce various projects that increase contact between individuals in a neighbourhood or between neighbourhoods.<sup>93</sup>

## **3. Introduce a fairer and more balanced system of asylum seekers' relocation**

The UK has moral and legal duties to continue to take in refugees from across the world. However, an increase in refugee numbers could create risks to social cohesion – which may need to be addressed. In the short term, the UK can expect a rise in the number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Britain. Furthermore, an increase in illegal channel crossings, and the lack of an effective policy to return those who reach the British shores, could also pose a threat to social cohesion.

Without a significant change in Government policy, the total number of asylum seekers is likely to remain relatively low, but an influx could potentially damage social cohesion if immigrants congregate in a small number of locations. Thus, there is a need to carefully think about how to integrate asylum seekers into British society. As Ehsan tells us: “What is often overlooked in the debate over numbers is just where in the UK refugees end up being rehomed. Indeed, it’s the poorest areas of this country that have taken in a disproportionate number of newcomers, while wealthier areas have by and large failed to take in their fair share.”<sup>94</sup> The data is staggering: “northern England – including the north-west, north-east and Yorkshire and Humber – had taken more than one in four asylum seekers in the UK (42%). To put this in perspective, only 6.5% have been placed in southern England (excluding London).”<sup>95</sup>

As the research tells us, economically deprived and poorer communities generally report lower levels of social cohesion – and housing asylum seekers at such a high rate in these areas is likely to further damage cohesiveness in these communities.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether these poor communities have the necessary resources for projects that generally help people integrate into neighbourhoods. Thus, going forward, the Government will need to balance the burden and relocate asylum seekers into wealthier areas as much as (if not more than) poorer areas.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, Government funding for cohesion programmes should focus on integration in poorer areas.

## **4. Continue implementing all aspects of the Integrating Communities Action Plan and other projects aimed at fostering integration and social cohesion**

The arrival of new immigrants is not the only factor that is likely to impact the cohesiveness of various communities. Indeed, there are communities that have struggled with cohesiveness in the past (some of which continue to do so). One such example is the Derbyshire town of

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<sup>93</sup> There are already available reports regarding the communities that tend to segregate. For further details, see: Cox, Goodhart, Kaufmann and Webber, “Whatever happened to integration?”.

<sup>94</sup> Rakib Ehsan, “We should welcome Ukrainian refugees – but wealthier areas need to take in their fair share”, CAPX, 10 March 2022, <https://capx.co/we-should-welcome-ukrainian-refugees-but-wealthier-areas-need-to-take-in-their-fair-share/>.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Shirebrook in Bolsover District Council. “Bolsover has a history of Polish immigration when Polish pilots stayed on after World War II and brought up families who are now fully integrated. But the lower wages that new immigrants were prepared to accept, and the number of immigrants arriving, put increasing pressure on services like housing, health and education as well as public order.”<sup>97</sup>

In the end, the district suffered serious economic problems as well as cultural clashes – and ended up all over the news. The Council quickly realised that action was needed and gathered experts from different areas to address the issues. Among other things, “Language classes have been set up. Cross cultural arts and sports events have taken place. Relationships have improved with Sports Direct who helped with information and facilities and are now running their own language classes.”<sup>98</sup> In the end, it was concluded that: “The council feels that it has established a successful method of addressing the issues its communities face, and will continue to work with its key partners and the local community to promote cohesion and integration.”<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, the data for the Integrating Communities Action Plan seems promising as it covers various areas of life and relevant indicators of social cohesion. This report recommends continuing with such a Plan.

Thus, to continue to improve cohesiveness within communities across counties, this report suggests that the Government continues with its current policies which aim to foster integration and social cohesion.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the report recommends continuously monitoring whether any other areas of life ought to be included in the Plan depending on the specific groups that are driving the rise of non-EU migration.

## **5. Monitor cohesiveness in neighbourhoods which contain a relatively high concentration of EU immigrants**

Given the data on the number of EU citizens arriving, as well as the number of complaints that EU citizens in the UK have raised regarding the way the Home Office has dealt with their settlement status applications, it is crucial for the Government to continuously monitor whether and to what extent neighbourhoods inhabited by EU citizens remain cohesive. In particular, since some EU citizens have expressed concern about not feeling welcome in the UK post-Brexit due to discourses deployed in the Leave campaign, it is possible that some of these individuals will be increasingly segregated or isolated. Thus, it is crucial for the Government to continuously monitor these neighbourhoods and take adequate actions should it notice a decrease in social cohesiveness. While the risk of this happening is generally low, this report nevertheless recommends continuous monitoring by conducting regular surveys and focus groups in areas predominately inhabited by EU citizens.

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<sup>97</sup> “Building cohesive communities: An LGA guide”, Local Government Association, March 2019, [https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.31%20Community%20cohesion%20guidance\\_04.2.pdf](https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.31%20Community%20cohesion%20guidance_04.2.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Of course, it is important for Government to make sure that its events are appropriate for the group it is trying to integrate – to illustrate, events surrounding alcohol consumption may not necessarily facilitate the integration of Muslim refugees, and as such should be avoided in predominately Muslim inhabited areas.

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## Conclusion

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This paper has examined UK migration tendencies in light of the changing migration rules and the COVID-19 pandemic. First, it established that in the last few years, the UK has seen a substantial decrease in EU migration and, indeed, has recorded negative EU migration for the first time in years. Conversely, the UK has seen the biggest increase in non-EU migration. From there, the paper examined whether these trends are here to stay, or whether previous trends are likely to return as COVID-19 becomes endemic and travel restrictions are lifted globally, and definitive post-Brexit immigration rules are instituted. Disentangling the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit is required to come up with any definitive conclusions regarding the long-term migration composition of the UK. Nevertheless, there is enough data for the report to make an argument as to why this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

From there, the paper examined the likely impact that the changing migration trends will have on social cohesion in light of relevant literature that suggests that immigration can disrupt community cohesion. Despite a somewhat pessimistic view from the relevant experts regarding the overall relationship between immigration and social cohesion, the data seen in the UK provides reasons for optimism. Given the background of the individuals currently coming to the UK in large numbers, it is unlikely that the UK will see serious disruptions to the cohesiveness of its communities.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for caution. First, current trends could still evolve and the UK may see further changes to the composition of the immigrants who are arriving. Second, there is a concern about adequately integrating refugees and asylum seekers who reach British shores. Finally, there is a concern that some EU citizens may become alienated in light of procedural delays regarding their settlement and the tone of the Leave campaign.

To deal with the problems, the paper set out five clear policy recommendations that the UK Government should implement. These policy proposals aim to both prevent disruptions to the social cohesion of British communities, and also to mitigate the possible negative consequences we may see when it comes to the cohesiveness of British neighbourhoods.





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By Helena Ivanov

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The Henry Jackson Society  
Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank  
London SW1P 4QP, UK

[www.henryjacksonsociety.org](http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org)



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