

# Reporting on asylum seekers, refugees & migration in Northern Ireland

Guidelines for the Media



FUNDED BY

The *ele*  
Community  
Foundation  
Northern Ireland

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**Raised  
Voices**

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# Introduction

Responsible news coverage of immigration and the asylum system is undoubtedly in the public interest, ensuring a deeper understanding of people who are making Northern Ireland their home and challenging the systems and structures that govern the rights of migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The volume of misinformation and disinformation being spread on social media, plus increasingly polarised public discourse, undermines trust and evidence and poses a major challenge for journalism and civic society.

The racist violence of June 2026, along with that of summers 2024 and 2025, highlight the prejudicial attitudes that exist, and how situations can be exploited by those with a far right agenda.

Race-hate crimes are at a record level, according to statistics published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Between April 2025 and March 31 2026, there were 1,507 race-hate crimes and 2,367 race-hate incidents reported to police, an increase of 320 and 561 respectively on the previous year and the highest figures since records began in 2004.

The media plays a crucial role in countering misinformation and disinformation and the impact of it being unequipped to challenge misunderstandings and outright lies can be catastrophic, reinforcing stereotypes and deepening prejudice.

Funded by the [Community Foundation for Northern Ireland](#)'s Equity in Action Fund and compiled by [Raised Voices CIC](#), this document has been created with people who have lived experience - members of ethnic minority, asylum seeking and refugee communities across Northern Ireland - and in collaboration with the charities and organisations supporting them, in group sessions and one-on-one interviews.

Journalists were asked what they wanted this toolkit to contain. The request was for data, correct terminology, information on legislation and welfare assistance rights, where to source up-to-date statistics and how to keep interviewees safe.

This document will assist journalists, photographers, editors and producers who strive for consistently high standards of fair and accurate reporting.

Individual media organisations and supporting bodies, such as Ofcom, Ipso, Impress and the NUJ, may have pre-existing guidelines for reporting on these subjects. These guidelines are not intended to supersede that work but to enhance it, and to provide useful context for Northern Ireland.

Thank you to the organisations and individuals who have helped in the writing of this resource.

**Maeve Connolly and Laura Davis**

Raised Voices CIC · [raised-voices.co.uk](https://raised-voices.co.uk)



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# From the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency)

## The right to seek asylum

*"[Seeking asylum](#) is a human right and every person in the world has the right to apply for asylum if they are fleeing conflict or persecution. They must not be expelled or returned to situations where their lives or freedoms would be in danger. This is the principle of non-refoulement which is enshrined in the [1951 Refugee Convention](#). It is also part of human rights law and customary international law and must be guaranteed by all countries."*

- UNHCR

## Refugee

*"[Who is a refugee](#) is defined in international law. The [1951 Refugee Convention](#) defines a refugee as a person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country'."*

- 1951 Refugee Convention

A successful claim for asylum in Northern Ireland / the UK results in a person being granted non-definite Leave To Remain in the UK under one of three categories:

- **Refugee status - the most common**
- **Humanitarian protection**
- **Discretionary leave to remain**

The term 'refugee' or 'a person with refugee status' will be used throughout this document to refer to all three categories of persons who have been granted non-definite Leave To Remain.

# 10 things to remember

- 1 People who are likely to be asylum seekers or refugees should not be referred to as migrants as this can undermine the legal protections afforded under international law ([UNHCR](#))
- 2 Including ethnicity, nationality, immigration or asylum status in a headline can reinforce harmful stereotypes and dehumanise people. The guidance is to avoid it altogether
- 3 Provide holistic coverage of communities. Ensure the majority of your journalism is not only about hot-button issues and does not frame people as either 'victim' or 'threat'
- 4 The organisation [Reframing Race](#) analysed anti-immigration discourse and selected 'ordinary' as the Racist Word of the Year 2025. Words like 'local', 'ordinary' and 'from here' can seem innocuous but pause and ask yourself who is speaking and what is their intention. Also, do not use emotive, value-laden language that dehumanises people such as 'flood', 'swarm', 'exodus' and 'influx'
- 5 Check and challenge numbers quoted by politicians or others with an interest
- 6 Provide the source of statistics to enhance credibility - plus a hyperlink
- 7 Promote evidence-based public discourse by sharing resources that allow your audience to understand and further explore an issue, for example: Provide hyperlinks to external resources and add 'fact boxes' to written news reports and social media posts that offer information and explanation at a glance
- 8 If you are referring to a particular person or group, ask how they would prefer to be described eg: from [country] or [nationality] or do they simply want to be referred to by their name with no mention of nationality, ethnicity or citizenship
- 9 Have you thought about the comments section underneath articles, social media posts, podcasts and videos and how you handle racism, misinformation or disinformation posted there?
- 10 Report *with* communities not on them. Build trust and goodwill with marginalised groups by inviting representatives into your office, holding listening sessions and explaining the reporting process. The result is more nuanced reporting and, in the long-term, increased diversity in newsrooms

20 JUNE

is [World Refugee Day](#) while Refugee Week is the world's largest arts and cultural festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

For more information visit [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)

# At-a-glance information

## Rights in Northern Ireland

Group	Rights
<b>Asylum seekers</b>	<p>They <b>cannot</b> access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social security benefits or pensions</li><li>• Social housing</li><li>• Employment (only after 12 months and in certain limited circumstances)</li></ul> <p>They <b>can</b> access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Free NHS healthcare</li><li>• Free legal advice in relation to their asylum application</li><li>• Free interpretation help in relation to their asylum case</li><li>• A school place and free school meals for those aged 4-16</li><li>• Essential skills for adults such as English lessons</li></ul> <p>They receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Asylum support (financial assistance and accommodation) - if they meet the 'destitution test'. Asylum accommodation is <b>not</b> social housing.</li><li>• Financial asylum support is £49.18 a week or, for those living in a converted hotel (contingency accommodation) who receive meals, £9.95 a week</li><li>• Pregnant women and mothers of children aged three and under also receive between £5.25 and £9.50 a week</li></ul> <p>They must carry an identity card (Asylum Registration Card). An asylum seeker who is appealing a failed asylum application will receive the same level of asylum support during the appeal process.</p> <p><a href="#">Voting rights</a>: A person seeking asylum cannot vote</p>
<b>Refugees</b> - people whose claim for asylum was successful, meaning they have been granted non-definite Leave To Remain in the UK	<p>They <b>can</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access social security benefits and pensions</li><li>• Access social housing</li><li>• Work</li><li>• Open a bank account</li><li>• Get a driving licence</li><li>• Access free NHS healthcare</li><li>• Study</li></ul> <p>They must renew their Leave to Remain status every 30 months</p> <p>After five years they can apply for Indefinite Leave To Remain which affords them nearly the same rights as a UK-born person ie: they can work, study and live in the UK without a time limit and can travel outside the UK using a Home Office travel document</p> <p>One year after Indefinite Leave To Remain has been obtained, the person is eligible to apply for British citizenship (also known as naturalisation) or apply for a British passport</p>

# At-a-glance information (continued)

## Rights in Northern Ireland

Group	Rights
<b>Refugees</b>	<p>Voting rights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A refugee with Leave To Remain or Indefinite Leave to Remain status, and who is from a Commonwealth country, <b>can</b> vote in local council, Assembly and Westminster elections</li><li>● A refugee with Leave to Remain or Indefinite Leave to Remain who is <b>not</b> from a Commonwealth country <b>cannot</b> vote</li></ul>
<b>Settled or Pre-settled EU Nationals</b> <small>who were resident in Northern Ireland by December 31 2020</small>	<p>Their rights are very similar to UK nationals.</p> <p><u>They can:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Live permanently in the UK</li><li>● Work</li><li>● Access free NHS healthcare</li><li>● Study</li><li>● Access benefits and pensions</li><li>● Travel in and out of the UK</li></ul> <p>Voting rights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Can vote in local council and Assembly elections</li><li>● Cannot vote in Westminster elections unless they are from a Commonwealth country</li><li>● People from Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain who have Leave To Remain can vote in local council and Assembly elections but <b>not</b> in Westminster elections</li><li>● Migrants with Irish citizenship can vote in local council, Assembly and Westminster elections. So too can citizens of Malta and Cyprus</li></ul> <p>Note, the rights of EU nationals who do not qualify for the EU Settlement Scheme and are living in Northern Ireland, like all other nationalities, are dictated by the conditions of their specific visa.</p>
<b>Unauthorised migrants</b>	<p>They are without legal status and as such have very few rights and limited access to benefits.</p> <p>They <b>cannot</b> access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Jobs</li><li>● Housing</li><li>● Social security benefits</li><li>● A bank account</li><li>● Free NHS healthcare, except for emergency treatment and certain services, such as maternity care</li><li>● A driving licence</li></ul>

66%

of refugees are hosted by neighbouring countries.

Most people fleeing conflict and persecution remain near their country of origin. [UNHCR](#)

01

# Facts & Statistics

Asylum seekers and refugees

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## 1. Who is an asylum seeker?

[Asylum](#) is international protection given by a country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country.

An [asylum seeker](#) is someone who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status. To apply for asylum in the UK you must physically be in the UK.

According to the UK government, [the persecution must be because of:](#)

- Race
- Nationality
- Religion
- Political opinion
- Anything else that puts the person at risk because of the social, cultural, religious or political situation in their country, for example, their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. And the person must have failed to get protection from authorities in their own country.

## 2. Who is a refugee?

“ *Not all asylum seekers will be found to be refugees, but all refugees were once asylum seekers* ”

- UNHCR

Refugee is a legal term. A refugee is someone whose asylum application was successful, meaning they have the legal status of having been granted non-definite Leave To Remain in the UK.

Three types of non-definite Leave To Remain status are granted following an asylum application:

- **Refugee status** - most common
- **Humanitarian protection**
- **Discretionary leave to remain**

\*The term ‘refugee’ or ‘a person with refugee status’ will be used throughout this document to refer to all three categories of persons who have been granted Leave To Remain in Northern Ireland/the UK.

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### 3. Who claims asylum in Northern Ireland and how does this compare to the overall UK figures?

#### (i) How does someone in Northern Ireland claim asylum?

To apply for asylum in Northern Ireland a person has to be physically in Northern Ireland. People who have social or familial connections in Northern Ireland may choose to seek asylum here.

There are no official safe routes to seek asylum in the UK and asylum seekers often arrive through irregular means having paid a people smuggler.

A person who is already in the UK on a visa, perhaps as a student or skilled worker, can apply for asylum if the situation in their home country changes.

A person [claims asylum](#) at their point of entry to Northern Ireland or at the Home Office's Drumkeen House in Belfast between 9am and 4pm on weekdays. Outside those hours they must go to Musgrave PSNI Station in Belfast.

The person seeking asylum is issued with, and must carry, an [ARC \(Asylum Registration Card\)](#). The Home Office assesses their claim and approval means the person becomes a refugee, while refusal means they are a refused asylum seeker and have [two opportunities to appeal](#).

[Refused asylum seekers](#) may decide to leave the UK under the government's [voluntary return service](#) while others are removed and taken back to their country of origin. If a refused asylum seeker stays in the UK they become an unauthorised migrant and have few legal rights.

There is no such thing as an 'illegal asylum seeker' as everyone has the fundamental human right in international law to request asylum.

[The Migration Observatory](#) at Oxford University provides statistics and information on voluntary return, removals and deportations, plus embed codes for its graphics.

#### (ii) The number of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland

The Home Office does not publish data on the number of claims for asylum lodged in Northern Ireland, only overall figures for the UK. However, it does provide data on the number of people receiving asylum support. While this is a good indicator of the number of people in the asylum system, according to the [Law Centre NI's Migration Justice Project](#) the actual number of asylum seekers is likely to be slightly higher as a small number are not eligible for support eg: they have their own financial means or have reached the end of the asylum legal process.

In December 2025, Home Office figures show there were [2,608 people](#) in receipt of asylum support in Northern Ireland and they were drawn from more than 75 countries.

The Home Office releases immigration statistics quarterly, eg: the December 2025 statistics were released on February 26 2026. See the relevant spreadsheets [here](#). The Law Centre NI's [Migration Justice Project](#) uses this source to produce Northern Ireland statistics in its [Refugee Facts and Statistics: Northern Ireland Briefing Resource](#).



**2,608**

people receiving **asylum support in NI**  
December 2025

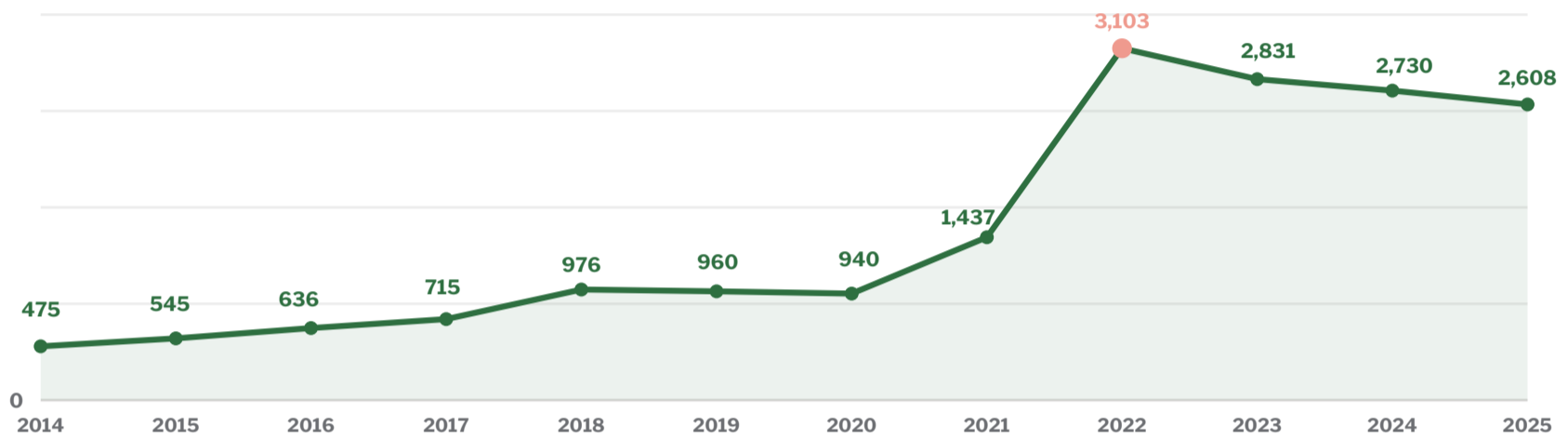
**75+**

**countries of origin**  
represented

**2.44%**

of all people on **asylum support in the UK** live in NI

### People receiving asylum support in Northern Ireland, 2014–2025



Source: Home Office's [Immigration system statistics data tables](#): Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support detailed datasets, year ending December 2025. Tab: Asy\_D09. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 3.62 MB)

Of all the people receiving asylum support in the UK in December 2025, [2.44% were living in Northern Ireland](#).

(Source: Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support detailed datasets, year ending December 2025. Tab: Data\_Asy\_D09. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 1.23 MB)

“ If the far right and racists are using a word pejoratively then the media should stop using that word. The far right are very smart, they are so happy that journalists are using these terms too. ”

- Participant

(iii) The number of asylum seekers in each council area

Individuals in receipt of asylum support by council area from December 2016 to December 2025

Council area	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Antrim & Newtownabbey	–	–	–	–	6	168	153	153	196	202
Ards & North Down	–	–	–	–	1	15	97	59	35	51
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	39	72	99
Belfast	636	715	976	960	931	1,044	2,550	2,043	1,940	1,749
Causeway Coast & Glens	–	–	–	–	–	–	44	158	167	199
Derry City & Strabane	–	–	–	–	–	–	98	194	245	254
Fermanagh & Omagh	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
Lisburn & Castlereagh	–	–	–	–	1	1	12	32	37	18
Mid & East Antrim	–	–	–	–	–	206	147	58	–	–
Mid Ulster	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Newry, Mourne & Down	–	–	–	–	1	3	2	95	38	34
<b>Annual total</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>1,437</b>	<b>3,103</b>	<b>2,831</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>2,608</b>

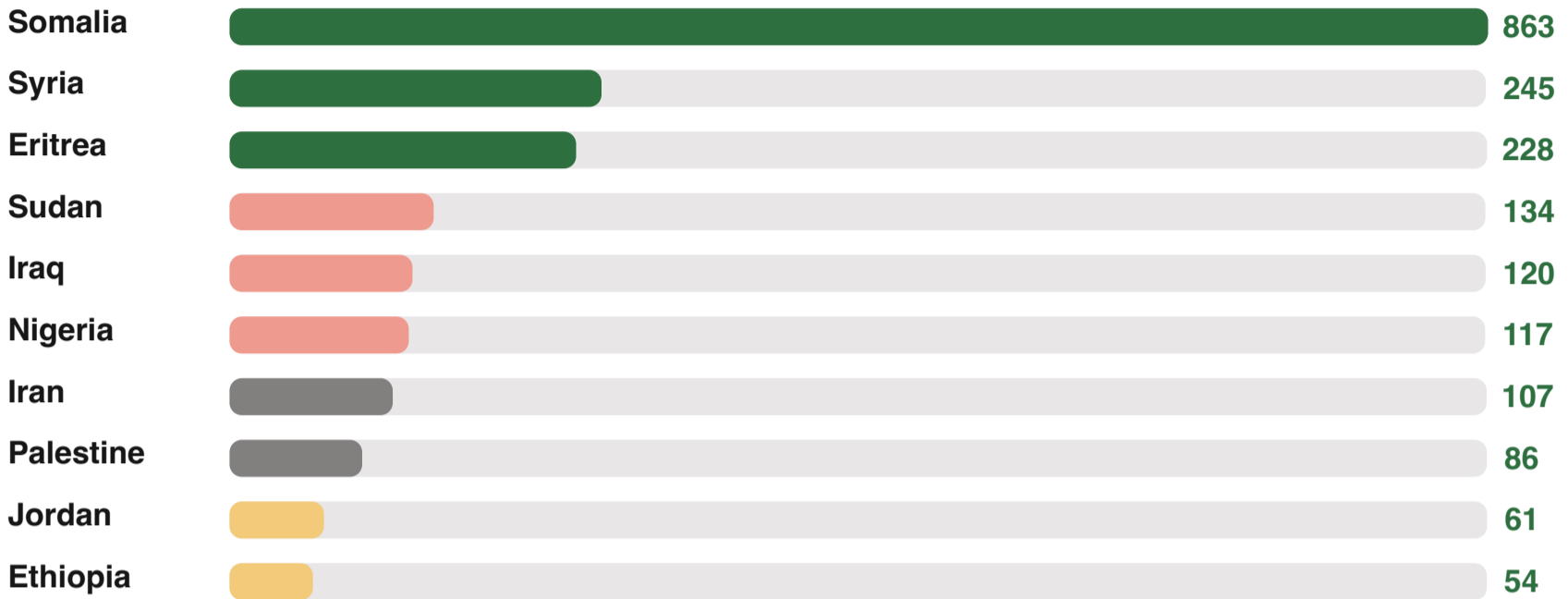
\*Where a field is blank it indicates there was no one in receipt of asylum support living in the council area at the end of that year

Source: Home Office's Immigration system statistics data tables - [Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support by local authority detailed datasets, year ending December 2025](#). Tab: Asy\_D11. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 1.23 MB)



#### (iv) The nationality of those seeking asylum in NI

The [10 most common nationalities of people receiving asylum support and living in Northern Ireland](#) in December 2025 were:

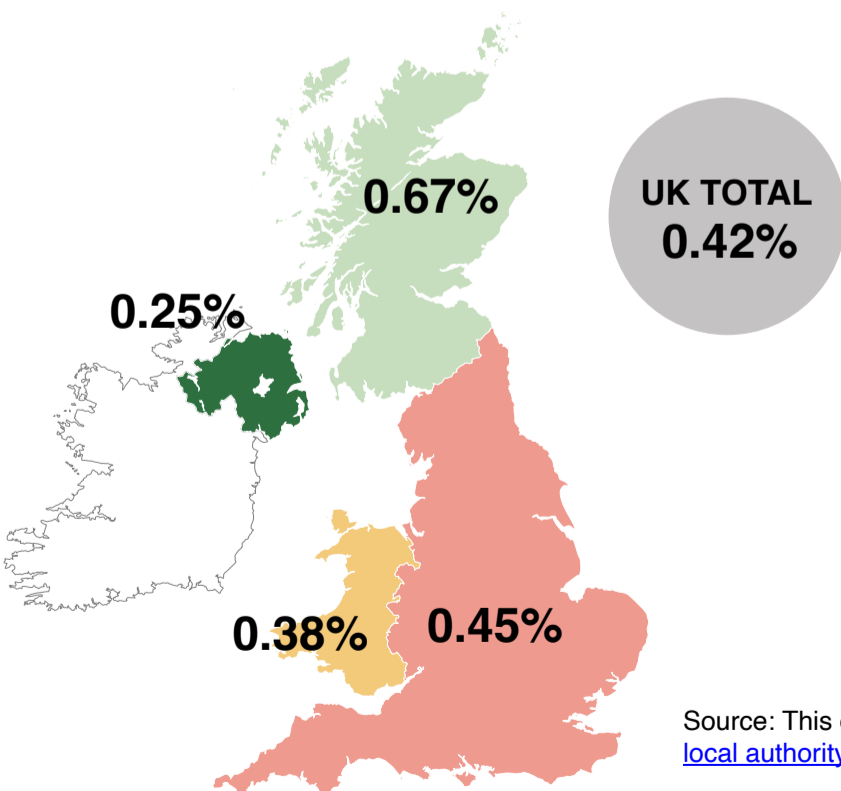


Source: Home Office's [Immigration system statistics data tables](#): Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support detailed datasets, year ending December 2025. Tab: Data\_Asy\_D09. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 1.23 MB)

The main countries of origin of asylum seekers are not the poorest countries in the world, they are the countries dominated by conflicts and human rights abuses. [Most people forced to leave their homes seek protection within neighbouring countries](#). For example, in 2023, [80% of the almost 900,000 Somali asylum seekers and refugees were living in neighboring countries](#) including Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Yemen, and there were an additional [3.8 million people displaced in Somalia](#) itself.

#### Northern Ireland has the lowest proportion of asylum seekers in the UK

Asylum seekers as a percentage of the population · by nation



Source: This data is from the [Home Office: Regional and local authority dataset](#). Tab: Reg\_01

## (v) Overall UK asylum figures

“ In 2024, around 108,000 people claimed asylum in the UK, the highest since records began in 1979. This surpassed the previous record of around 103,000 people in 2002, driven by wars in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

“Changes over time in the number of people claiming asylum in the UK are driven in a large part by geopolitical events, since asylum seekers come mainly from countries with political and military conflicts. For example, the spike in people who came to the UK to seek asylum from 1998 to 2002 were mainly nationals of Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia, which were then sites of war. ”

[The Migration Observatory](#) 2025

[In the UK overall](#), the top 10 nationalities of people claiming asylum in 2025 were:

- Pakistani
- Eritrean
- Iranian
- Afghan
- Bangladeshi
- Sudanese
- Indian
- Somali
- Nigerian
- Vietnamese

### The number of people claiming asylum in the UK since 2001

Year	No. of claims	Year	No. of claims	Year	No. of claims
2001	71,027	2010	22,644	2019	45,537
2002	103,081	2011	25,898	2020	37,603
2003	60,047	2012	27,978	2021	57,942
2004	40,623	2013	29,875	2022	95,007
2005	30,841	2014	32,344	2023	87,427
2006	28,328	2015	39,968	2024	104,764
2007	28,300	2016	39,357	2025	100,625
2008	31,314	2017	34,435		
2009	30,673	2018	34,483		

Source: [Asylum claims and decisions - Asylum claims and initial decisions detailed datasets, year ending December 2025](#) Tab: Asy\_D01. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 10.8 MB)

**100,625**  
[people claimed asylum](#)  
 (4% less than in 2024)  
 in the UK in 2025



## How do asylum seekers travel to the UK?

Not everyone who claims asylum arrives on a small boat - but nearly everyone who arrives on a small boat claims asylum.

### Means of entry for those who claimed asylum, 2025



- 41%** Small boats  
41,262
- 39%** On a visa  
39,095
- 11%** Other 'unauthorised' entry routes\*  
11,190
- 9%** Other routes

\* in lorries, shipping containers, or without relevant documentation  
Source: [Home Office: How Many People Claim Asylum In the UK](#)

### Number of people claiming asylum in the UK, by route of entry to the UK, YE December 2018 to YE December 2025



Source: [Home Office Asylum claims and initial decisions - Asy\\_D01a](#)

The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford published the [People Crossing the English Channel in Small Boats](#) briefing in March 2026

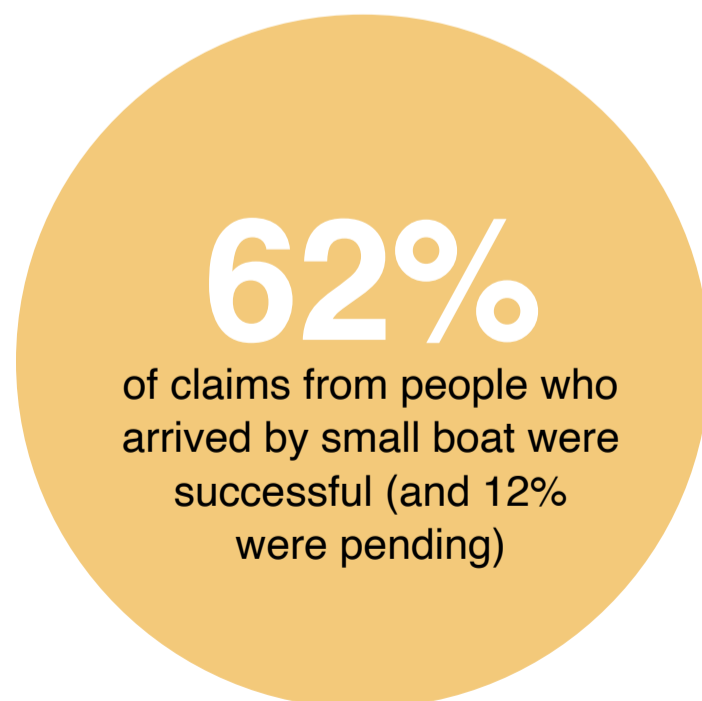
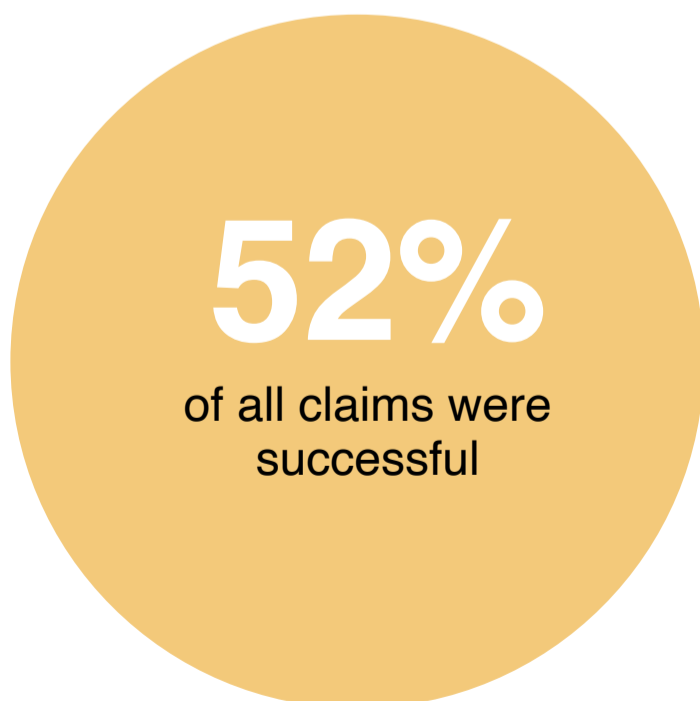
### Number of people who arrived in the UK in small boats

Year	No. of claims
2018	299
2019	1,843
2020	8,466
2021	28,526
2022	45,774
2023	29,437
2024	36,816
2025	41,472

Source: Home Office's [Illegal Entry Routes to the UK Summary table, year ending December 2025](#). Tab: IER\_02a

Of those who arrived on a small boat in 2025, [99% either applied for asylum](#) or were named as a dependent on an asylum claim ie: they were a partner or child.

### Asylum claims in the UK between 2018 and 2025



Source: [Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford](#) : People Crossing The English Channel in Small Boats



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## Safe and legal routes to the UK

In partnership with the UK government, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) operates [three resettlement schemes](#) and [identifies those who are eligible](#) - an individual cannot apply:

- [UK resettlement scheme \(or UKRS\)](#)
- [Community sponsorship scheme](#)
- [Mandate resettlement scheme](#)

There have also been several country-specific refugee resettlement schemes in recent years, for people from [Afghanistan](#), [Syria](#) (now closed), [Ukraine](#) (now closed) and [Hong Kong](#). There is also a scheme for [Afghans who worked with the UK government](#) in Afghanistan and one for people to [sponsor Ukrainians fleeing the war](#).

[Refugee advocacy groups](#) are critical of the limited nature of these schemes.

**Closure of Refugee Family Reunion scheme:** The UK Government [stopped accepting applications for Refugee Family Reunion](#) in September 2025. The scheme was regarded as one of the few safe routes available for people to reach the UK and predominantly used by women and children.

A refugee now has two options if they wish family members to join them.

They can either apply for a family visa, however, the costs and [criteria](#) are prohibitive. For example, the minimum income requirement for sponsoring a partner is £29,000 and [the fees are around £2,000 per person](#). Home Office data shows that [the median salary for an 'asylum refugee'](#) eight years after they have been granted refugee status is £23,000.

Or, if the individual cannot meet the costs, they can apply for a spouse or partner visa/exceptional circumstances under [Appendix FM](#), which refugee support organisations say is a lengthy administrative process requiring significant legal assistance.

Right To Remain [has this explainer](#)

**“ The decision to suspend these applications is not only deeply unjust but it’s one of the most damaging in recent immigration policy. By shutting this door, governments know that children, women, and the most vulnerable will risk their lives on dangerous journeys to reunite with their families. This will inevitably lead to more human suffering, exploitation by traffickers, and preventable loss of life. ”**

- [Liz Griffith, Head of Migration Justice at the Law Centre NI](#)

## Age and gender of people seeking asylum

“ The majority of those arriving in small boats are men over the age of 18 – around 76% of 2025 arrivals for whom this information was recorded. A further 12% of arrivals that year were children under 18. These proportions have been relatively stable over time. One reason for the higher share of men is the danger associated with unauthorised migration. ”

- [The Migration Observatory](#) (2026)

### Number of people claiming asylum in the UK in the year ending December 2025, [by age and sex](#)

Age Group	Male	Female
Aged 17 and under	10,200 (10%)	6,510 (6%)
Aged 18 and over	62,259 (62%)	21,640 (22%)

Source: Home Office: [Asylum claims and initial decisions detailed datasets, year ending December 2025. Tab: Asy\\_D01](#)

**Context:** [The Home Office](#) says the proportion of men, women and children seeking asylum varies across nationalities and may be influenced by the route taken to reach the UK. “For example, more dangerous routes (such as crossing the Channel in a small boat) see fewer women and children than other routes (such as travelling to the UK on a visa before claiming asylum).”

In September 2025 the UK government closed the [Refugee Family Reunion scheme](#) which had allowed refugees to apply for family members to join them. It was regarded as one of the few safe routes available for people to reach the UK and predominantly used by women and children.

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Or, if the individual cannot meet the costs, they can apply for a spouse or partner visa/exceptional circumstances under [Appendix FM](#), which refugee support organisations say is a lengthy administrative process requiring significant legal assistance.

Right To Remain [has this explainer](#)



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## A safe third country

The UK government says an asylum claim [might not be considered](#) if the person:

- Is from an [EU country](#)
- travelled to the UK through a 'safe third country'
- has a connection to a safe third country where they could claim asylum

And states that, a safe third country is one that:

- the person is not a citizen of
- they would not be harmed in
- would not send the person on to another country where they would be harmed

## How does the UK compare to EU member states?

In 2025, [the UK had fewer asylum applications per head of population than EU member states](#)

**14** applications for every 10,000 people in the UK

**18** applications for every 10,000 people in the 27 EU member states

[Eurostat](#) publishes statistics on asylum seekers and refugees in European Union countries.



## 4. Can asylum seekers claim social security benefits?

**No.** Asylum seekers [cannot claim mainstream benefits](#), such as Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, while their asylum claims are being processed.

However, people seeking asylum who are homeless or unable to buy food and other essentials can apply for [asylum support](#) from the government, which consists of accommodation and a weekly cash allowance loaded onto a debit card. They must meet the criteria for asylum support, known as the 'destitution test'.

If an asylum seeker can stay with friends or relatives they will receive subsistence-only support *ie*: the financial, but not the accommodation, element.

As of December 2025, there were 12 people in Northern Ireland receiving subsistence-only asylum support.

Source: [Home Office: Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support detailed datasets, year ending December 2025. Tab: Asy\\_D09](#) (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 3.62 MB)

*“ War, persecution and human rights violations force people to flee their homes. To escape violence or threats to their lives or freedoms, many must leave with just a few moments' notice, carrying little more than the clothes on their backs. ”*

- UNHCR

### Asylum support

Asylum seekers [get £49.18 per week](#) for each person in their household, loaded onto a prepaid [Aspen debit card](#), which can be used to withdraw cash from an ATM and to pay in shops. The card [does not allow](#) for contactless, telephone or online payments and does not function abroad.

Those housed in accommodation where meals are provided, eg: hotels, receive less money - £9.95 per week for each person in their household.

Pregnant women or [mothers of a child](#) aged three or under receive additional financial support. If her baby is due in 11 weeks or less, or is under six months old, she can apply for a one-off maternity grant of £300.

Status	Extra payment per week
Pregnant woman	£5.25
Baby under one	£9.50
Child aged 1–3	£5.25

Asylum seekers are entitled to free legal advice and interpreters in relation to their asylum claim.

In Northern Ireland, the [median full-time earnings in April 2025 was £713 a week](#).



## 5. Can refugees claim social security benefits?

**Yes.** A refugee [is entitled to apply for social security and housing benefits](#), such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, Carer’s Allowance, Disability benefits and Pension Credit, and is subject to the same rules and processes as any other applicant.

## 6. Are asylum seekers placed in social housing?

**No.** The UK government is required by law to provide accommodation for people seeking asylum who have nowhere to live, and the asylum accommodation system is **separate** to the social housing system in Northern Ireland and across the UK.

Only people who claim asylum in Northern Ireland are placed in asylum accommodation here, which is managed by a company called Mears on behalf of the Home Office.

They are housed in initial accommodation until [dispersal \(longer term\) housing](#) is found. As with initial accommodation, [dispersal accommodation](#) consists of flats and houses.

Contingency accommodation is used when there is insufficient initial or dispersal accommodation and in Northern Ireland, as of April 2026, it included two hotels, where asylum seekers receive breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus toiletries, sanitary products and laundry facilities.

Accommodation is provided on a ‘no choice’ basis so the person cannot choose where in Northern Ireland they live.

### How asylum seekers in NI were accommodated · December 2025



■ 2,247 Dispersal accommodation   ■ 268 Contingency (hotels)   ■ 81 Initial accommodation

Source - Home Office’s [Immigration system statistics data tables: Asylum seekers in receipt of Home Office support detailed datasets, year ending December 2025](#). Tab: Asy\_D09. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 3.62 MB)

The NI Housing Executive has a [Migrant Housing Myths document](#)

### Protest vs Violence (June 2026)

“ *These aren't protests and these aren't protesters. We have been to different protests and believe very much in the right to protest but in a sensible way that does not put other people in danger.* ”

- Participant



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## 7. How many hotels are used to house people in the asylum system in Northern Ireland?

In April 2026, there were two hotels being used as contingency asylum accommodation in Northern Ireland. Hotels were not used before the Covid-19 pandemic. By early 2023, one third of the asylum seeking population in Northern Ireland was being accommodated in 18 hotels.

The UK government has said it will stop using hotels across the UK by 2029.

“ *The term ‘hotel’ denotes luxury, however this is far from the case. Buildings previously operating as hotels have been refitted and are essentially now blocks of accommodation with most amenities stripped out or cordoned off. Most adults are required to share rooms and face restrictions on their movement.* ”

- [Migration Justice Project](#), see Part A: Asylum, Asylum Support Accommodation

The Migration Observatory at Oxford University provides detailed information on [asylum accommodation](#) across the UK, plus embed codes for its graphics.

## 8. Where do refugees live?

Once an asylum seeker is awarded refugee status, they enter the 42-day ‘move-on period’ in which their asylum support is stopped and they must leave asylum accommodation. This had been a 28-day period but was extended in March 2026.

They are entitled to apply to the [Northern Ireland Housing Executive](#) for homelessness assistance, which is [temporary accommodation](#) anywhere in Northern Ireland. They can also apply for social housing, which is a more long-term and secure option.

Refugees are subject to the same rules and processes as any other applicant on the social housing waiting list.

The NI Housing Executive has a [Migrant Housing Myths document](#)



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## 9. Can asylum seekers apply for a job?

**No**, a person seeking asylum [cannot work](#) while their claim is being considered.

However, they can [apply for the right to work](#) if

- a decision on their claim has yet to be reached after 12 months (through no fault of their own)
- and they are over 18 years of age
- and the main applicant on their asylum claim

Dependent partners are not permitted to apply for work permission.

Income from employment may lead to the reduction, or cessation, of asylum support.

[From March 2026](#), anyone granted permission to work is restricted to jobs on the [Appendix Skilled Occupations list](#).

Human rights organisations want the government to [ease restrictions](#) on the right to work. The Home Office encourages those seeking asylum to [volunteer](#) while their claim is being processed.

## 10. Can a refugee have a job?

**Yes**. Once someone has been granted refugee status they have the legal right to work.

## 11. What healthcare is available to refugees and asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers and refugees have free access to NHS care. Any refugee or an asylum seeker with a live application, or who is appealing a decision, is entitled to use [primary care services](#) like GPs, and [secondary care services](#) such as hospitals, A&Es and maternity services.

In [Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales](#), asylum seekers whose applications have been turned down are entitled to secondary NHS care free of charge. However, this is not necessarily the case in England.

“ We would encourage humanising language as much as possible - ‘people seeking asylum’ rather than ‘asylum seekers’, ‘undocumented people’ and ‘people with irregular immigration status’ rather than ‘undocumented migrants’ or ‘irregular migrants’.”

- Participant

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## 12. How does a refugee acquire Indefinite Leave To Remain and become a UK citizen?

### ● First stage

After being granted non-definite Leave To Remain as either a refugee, or under humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain, they must renew that status every 30 months.

In March 2026, this was [reduced from five years to two and a half years \(or 30 months\)](#). It [remains at five years](#) for unaccompanied children.

If a refugee commits a serious crime, tighter conditions for remaining in the UK (known as [restricted leave](#)) may be imposed and their [status may be revoked](#).

### ● Second stage

After [five years](#), a person can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), also known as settlement, allowing them to remain in the UK permanently. This rises to 10 years for people granted discretionary leave to remain.

ILR lets a person live, work and study without a time limit, and travel outside the UK using a Home Office travel document.

### ● Third stage

One year after ILR has been obtained, the person is eligible to apply for British citizenship (also known as naturalisation) or apply for a British passport.

From February 2025, anyone who “previously entered the UK illegally” will [“normally be refused”](#) citizenship. There are exceptions for children. Most people who enter the UK as asylum seekers are deemed to have entered the UK unlawfully, largely because there [are no safe and legal routes](#) for people to seek asylum in the UK. Advocacy groups say this change potentially affects the majority of refugees living in Northern Ireland.

## 13. Citizenship of children

If a child is born in the UK while its parent/s await a decision on their asylum claim, they will be added as a dependent and therefore included in financial asylum support, plus a birth certificate will be issued. The child does not have British citizenship but can be registered as a British citizen if/when its parent/s are granted Indefinite Leave To Remain (see question 12).

If a child was born in the UK to a parent with refugee status it does not have British citizenship. If a parent is later granted Indefinite Leave To Remain the child can then be registered as a British citizen.

If a mother has given birth after Indefinite Leave To Remain was granted, [her child will be a British citizen from birth](#).

These documents have more information - [Children and their Rights to British Citizenship](#) and [Migrant Help: Asylum Advice](#)



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## 14. Education rights for children and adults

Every child in Northern Ireland between the ages of four and 16 has a right to a school place. Children seeking asylum or who have refugee status [have the same right to schooling](#) and are entitled to [free school meals](#).

Adults seeking asylum are entitled to attend free English language lessons.

This Northern Ireland Assembly [briefing paper](#) contains information and statistics relating to newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland schools.

## 15. Correct terminology for an ‘illegal immigrant’ ie: an ‘irregular’ or ‘unauthorised’ migrant or immigrant

There is no agreed definition of the term ‘illegal immigrant’. The UK government refers to people who are living in the UK without the legal right to do so as ‘irregular migrants’. The term ‘unauthorised migrants’ is also in use.

‘Illegal migrants’ or ‘illegal immigrants’ have been used to describe people who have arrived using irregular methods which can include small boat crossings.

According to the [University of Oxford’s Migration Observatory](#) there are four categories of ‘unauthorised’ or ‘irregular’ migrants:

- People who have overstayed their visa
- Rejected asylum applicants who do not leave the UK
- People who enter the UK without authorisation or through deception
- Children of unauthorised migrants who are born in the UK

There is no such thing as an ‘illegal asylum seeker’ as everyone has the fundamental human right in international law to request asylum. The correct terminology for someone whose asylum claim was unsuccessful is a refused asylum seeker.

## 16. Can unauthorised migrants access jobs, housing and social security benefits in Northern Ireland?

**No.** Unauthorised migrants are without legal status in the UK and cannot access social security benefits. They cannot get a job, open a bank account or have a driving licence. Their access to free healthcare is limited to emergency treatment and certain services, such as maternity care.

## 17. The impact of Brexit on asylum

### From the Law Centre NI's Migration Justice Project's [Refugee Facts and Statistics resource](#):

"The Brexit 'Leave' campaign argued that leaving the European Union (EU) would allow for [tighter restrictions to migration to the UK](#). In practice, the UK's withdrawal from the EU has had the opposite effect as demonstrated by [higher rates of net migration](#).

"Further, the number of asylum applications has increased since, across the UK and in Northern Ireland. This is in no small part due to policy changes as a result of Brexit.

"While the UK was a member of the EU, it was part of the [Common European Asylum System](#) and the [Dublin III Regulation](#). In short, these systems are designed to prevent people seeking asylum from moving between EU countries. European countries have agreements that mean that people seeking protection must usually stay in the first European country they come to. Now that the UK is no longer part of the EU, these agreements no longer apply. Further, the UK no longer has access to the information-sharing [Eurodac database](#), which is the EU's fingerprinting database.

"A [European Parliament paper](#) explains:

For the British government, the Dublin system was beneficial in that it supported the transfer of asylum seekers back to other EU countries, as the majority of them had transited through the European continent on their way to the UK. This allowed for an overall reduction in the number of asylum applications made in the UK.

"While in theory, the UK can remove asylum seekers back to European countries, in practice, European countries have no obligation to admit asylum seekers into their countries from the UK. The UK government has agreed a 'one in, one out' arrangement with France, in which [377 people](#) have been returned to France to process their asylum claims.

"Certainly, the number of small boat journeys across the English Channel have increased exponentially following Brexit. In 2018, [299](#) crossings were reported, while figures show that in 2025, 41,472 people have travelled to the UK on a small boat. Sadly, in 2024, 73 people died crossing the English Channel, [more than the previous six years combined](#). In 2025, 24 people have died making journeys by boat."

# PSNI

does not have an immigration enforcement role - [Border Force](#) is the law enforcement command within the Home Office. In the Republic of Ireland, An Garda Síochána has [immigration enforcement responsibilities](#).



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## 18. Human trafficking versus people smuggling

[The United Nations](#) describes people smuggling and human trafficking as “two distinct but often interconnected crimes”.

### Human trafficking

Exploits a person, who may or may not be a migrant, and can take place within a victim’s home country or in another country. Human traffickers **deceive, coerce or force** their victims into an exploitative situation.

### People smuggling

**Always happens across country borders.** Some journeys might begin with a person being ‘smuggled’ into another country but once there they become victims of human trafficking, forced into working for little or no money.

“Criminals may both smuggle and traffic people, employing the same routes and methods of transporting them. Smuggled migrants have no guarantee that those who smuggle them are not in fact human traffickers.” [The United Nations](#)

02

# Facts & Statistics

Migration

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## 1. How many people migrate to Northern Ireland annually and why?

The [most recent figures](#) from Nisra are for 2023/24 and show the main reasons people migrated to Northern Ireland from outside the UK were family (35%), work (34%), education (14%) and asylum (10%). The remaining 7% was for other/unknown reasons.

### Migration in and out of Northern Ireland over 10 years

Flow	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
To NI from outside UK	13,093	12,998	11,310	13,100	14,191	11,181	13,296	16,922	18,797	16,851
To NI from inside UK	10,473	10,806	10,759	10,450	11,447	10,044	13,159	10,094	11,738	11,387
From NI to outside UK	9,782	11,115	10,469	9,078	10,392	13,003	11,308	11,902	11,235	10,880
From NI to inside UK	11,236	10,806	10,167	10,235	10,333	11,570	15,550	12,800	11,777	11,589
Net gain	+2,548	+1,883	+1,433	+4,237	+4,913	-3,348	-403	+2,314	+7,523	+5,769

Source: [Nisra: All Areas - Components of Population Change](#). Tab: Flat. (MS Excel Spreadsheet, 303KB). The figures are also available at council level in this database.

**FactCheckNI**

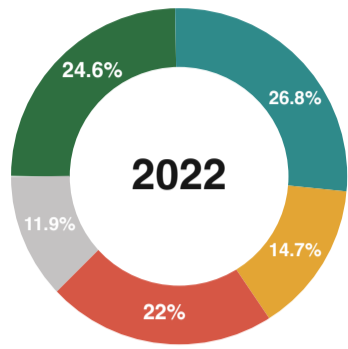
has compiled [data at the UK level](#) on migration.

**NISRA**

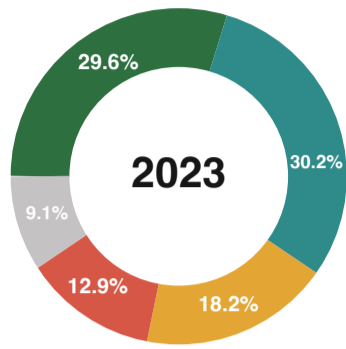
The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (Nisra) publishes migration data. Its Long-Term International Migration Statistics for Northern Ireland (2025) are due to be published in autumn/winter 2026.



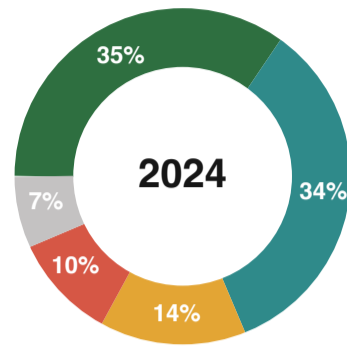
## Reasons for coming to Northern Ireland from outside the UK



Source: [Nisra, Northern Ireland Migration \(2022\)](#)



Source: [Nisra, Northern Ireland Migration \(2023\)](#)



Source: [Nisra, Northern Ireland Migration \(2024\)](#)

- Family
- Work
- Education
- Asylum
- Other

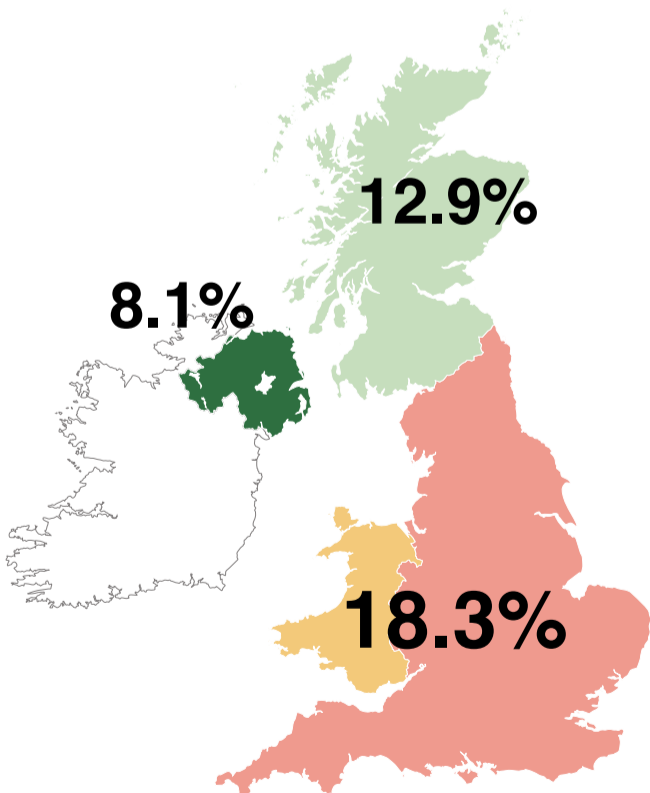
The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford has published a report [Who migrates to the UK and why?](#)

## 2. Ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland

“ According to Census 2021, the total number of people in Northern Ireland belonging to a minority ethnic group stood at 65,600 people (3.4% of the population). However, a re-analysis conducted by The Executive Office (2023), which included residents of a White ethnicity born in Eastern Europe, suggests the true figure may be as high as 153,000 (8.1%) ”

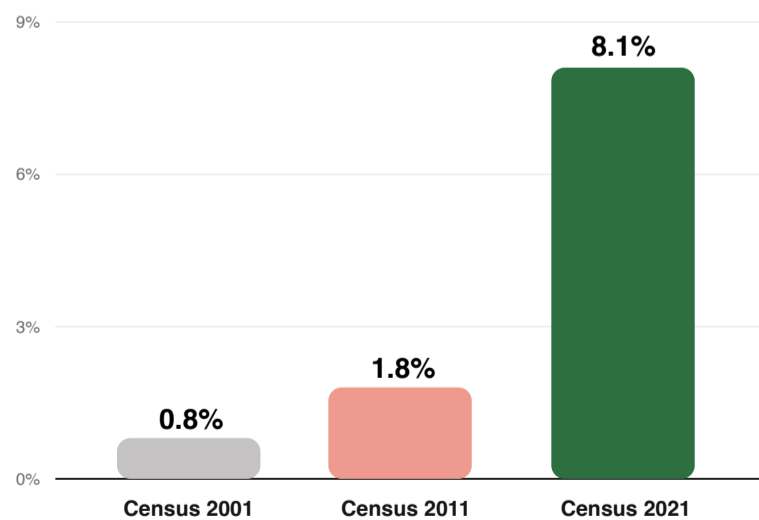
- Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service [Research Paper](#) May 2026

Percentage of the population belonging to an ethnic minority group:



Source: Scotland and England and Wales figures are from the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service [research paper](#) February 2025

Percentage of people belonging to an ethnic minority group



Source: 2001 and 2011 figures from [International Migration in Northern Ireland: An Update \(2025\)](#)

Note, these statistics do not reflect the re-analysis conducted by the Executive Office which suggested the total number of people in Northern Ireland belonging to a minority ethnic group might be 153,000 or 8.1% when residents of a White ethnicity born in Eastern Europe are included

### Ethnic group of usual residents, Census 2021

Ethnic group	Count	(%)
White	1,837,600	96.6%
<b>Minority Ethnic Group</b>	<b>65,600</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
Black	11,000	0.6%
Indian	9,900	0.5%
Chinese	9,500	0.5%
Filipino	4,500	0.2%
Irish Traveller	2,600	0.1%
Arab	1,800	0.1%
Pakistani	1,600	0.1%
Roma	1,500	0.1%
Mixed Ethnicities	14,400	0.8%
Other Asian	5,200	0.3%
Other Ethnicities	3,600	0.2%
<b>All usual residents</b>	<b>1,903,200</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Nisra - [Census 2021 Table MS-B01 Ethnic Group](#).

The Migration Observatory at Oxford University has published a report [EU ethnic minorities in the UK: An overview](#)

“I have been here 26 years and we’re always still being portrayed as migrants... Why do you perceive that group of people who came in to work as not part of the community?”

- Participant

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## Traveller community

Irish Travellers are a named ethnic minority group under Article 5 (2) of the [Race Relations \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1997](#) and can avail of the protections available against some forms of discrimination available under the Order. The Northern Ireland Executive Office established a [Travellers Thematic Group](#) as part of the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025.

An individual is referred to as a Traveller or a member of the Traveller community.

## Roma community

Roma are an ethnic minority group, protected in Northern Ireland under the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

The Roma are historically a nomadic people who speak Rromanëš, which has different dialects. Their origins are in northern India and during the ninth century they migrated to Europe and further afield. They are the largest ethnic minority in Europe and are now largely settled, rather than nomadic.

In 1971, representatives from different Roma communities came together and adopted a flag, anthem and international day (April 8).

Bulgarian Roma, Romanian Roma, Ukrainian Roma and Slovakian Roma live in Northern Ireland. Many Roma provide essential labour at businesses across Northern Ireland, including factories and in the agricultural sector.

The 2021 Census showed 1,500 Roma living in Northern Ireland, however, community organisations believe the figure is higher but was not captured in the Census due to access and literacy levels within the community.

An unknown number of Roma families and people from other ethnic minority groups fled Ballymena, in Co Antrim, after being subjected to racist violence in June 2025.

The Northern Ireland Executive Office established a [Roma Thematic Group](#) as part of the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025, to address the unique issues faced by the Roma community.

According to [Amnesty International](#), the Roma have been persecuted for centuries across Europe.

“In many regions, Roma were forced into slavery, a practice which continued into the 19th century in Romania and elsewhere. Roma were also sentenced to death throughout the medieval era in England, Switzerland and Denmark. This later grew into organised persecution. Many countries, including Germany, Poland and Italy, ordered the expulsion of all Roma. In the 1930s, [the Nazis in Germany saw Roma as ‘racially inferior’ and murdered hundreds of thousands of them during World War II](#). After the war, Roma continued to be discriminated against and oppressed, especially in the Soviet Union. Between the 1970s and 1990s, the Czech Republic and Slovakia sterilized around 90,000 Romani women against their will.”

Amnesty International says discrimination has pushed the Roma people to the edges of society and as a consequence they have “more health problems, worse housing and lower literacy levels than non-Roma people”.

### 3. Definitions - migrant v immigrant

There is no international legal definition of the term ‘migrant’. It is commonly understood to refer to someone who has chosen to leave their home country to either spend a period of time in another country, for example to work or study, or to start a new life. A migrant can voluntarily return home without risk to their life or freedom.

#### Migrant worker:

“A migrant worker is a person who travels from one area to another in search of [work](#). Migrant workers may travel from inside and outside the United Kingdom although the term is more commonly associated with workers coming from abroad.” - [UK government](#)

Note, the UK [has not signed](#) the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Migrant Workers have the right to redress against unlawful discrimination and harassment under the [existing equality legislation in Northern Ireland](#).

Although [Article 2 \(1\) of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) requires that “States Parties condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms...”, intersectional or combined discrimination is not yet prohibited in law in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions has produced the resource [Black and Ethnic Migrant Workers’ Rights](#)

#### Immigrant:

The common understanding is that immigration has more of a permanent aspect.

Both migrants and immigrants may require a visa and the type of visa will depend on their country of origin and their employment status in Northern Ireland/the UK.

### 4. Types of visa - [Source](#)

#### Students 14%

Students form a large percentage of the people who come from other countries to the UK and the duration of their visa depends on their level of study. In 2024, [14% of people](#) who migrated to Northern Ireland did so for education purposes.

#### Workers 34%

In 2024, [34% of people](#) who migrated to Northern Ireland did so for employment. Entry clearance visas allow an individual to enter and stay in the UK within the period for which the visa is valid.

#### Family 35%

Someone who wishes to live in the UK with family members “who are British citizens or non-British settled migrants in the UK” can apply for a [family-related visa](#). This also includes people wishing to join a relative with refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK.

In 2024, [35% of people](#) who migrated to Northern Ireland did so to join a family member.



## (i) Healthcare costs

Most people need to pay an [immigration health surcharge \(IHS\)](#) as part of their immigration application, in order to be able to use the NHS for free.

“ In 2024/25, IHS payments totalled over £2.4 billion. Note, however, that most migrants will also pay for the NHS in the same way as UK citizens: through their taxes. The IHS thus represents a form of double taxation – migrants who are net fiscal contributors to the UK’s public finances pay twice. ”

- [Migration Observatory](#)

Northern Ireland received £82m of the £2.4bn, in line with the Barnett formula. See Northern Ireland Assembly Question AQW 30818/22-27 via <https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=448835>

The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford published [an April 2026 Q&A on immigration fees](#).

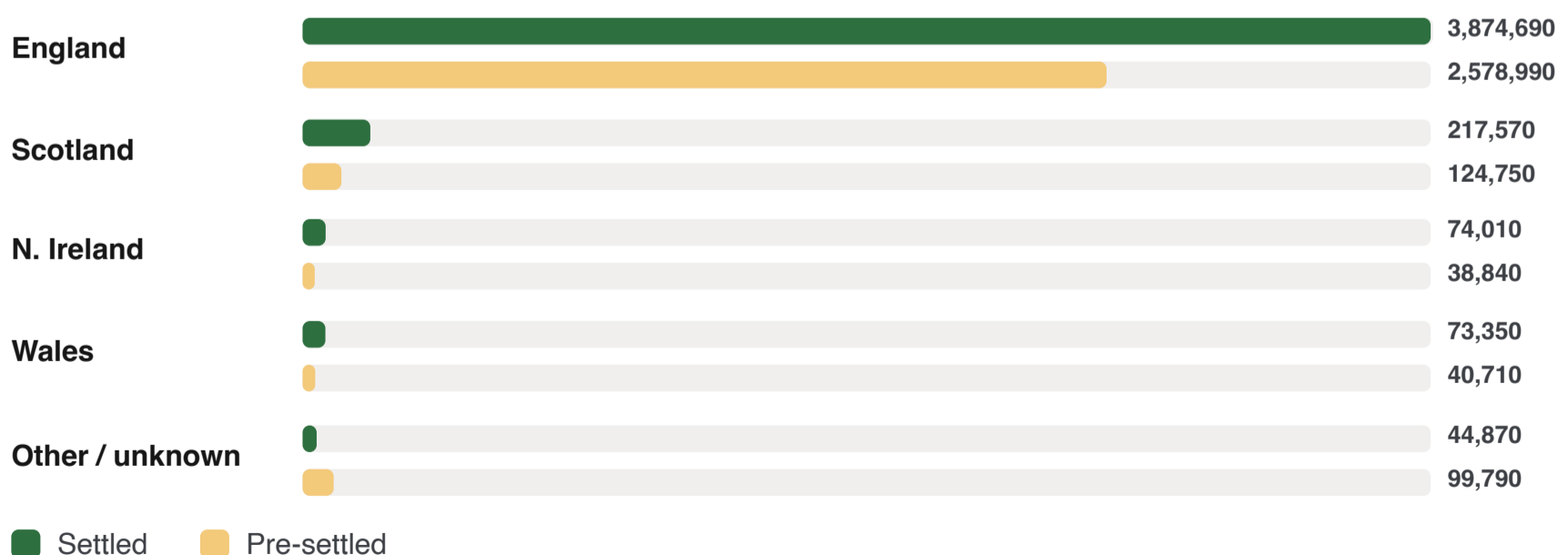
## 5. Post-Brexit EU Settlement Scheme

The UK left the European Union on January 31 2020 and from December 31 that year people from any EU country [no longer had freedom of movement in the UK](#), and vice versa.

The UK government introduced an EU settlement scheme which allowed EU citizens who had been living and working in the UK before December 31 2020 to apply to stay in the UK.

In the year ending March 2025, there were [329,000 grants of settled status](#) in the UK under the EU Settlement Scheme.

**EU Settlement Scheme: concluded applications by outcome type and UK country, 28 August 2018 to 30 September 2025**



Source: [Nisra: Long-term international migration \(2024\) spreadsheet, table 2.25](#)

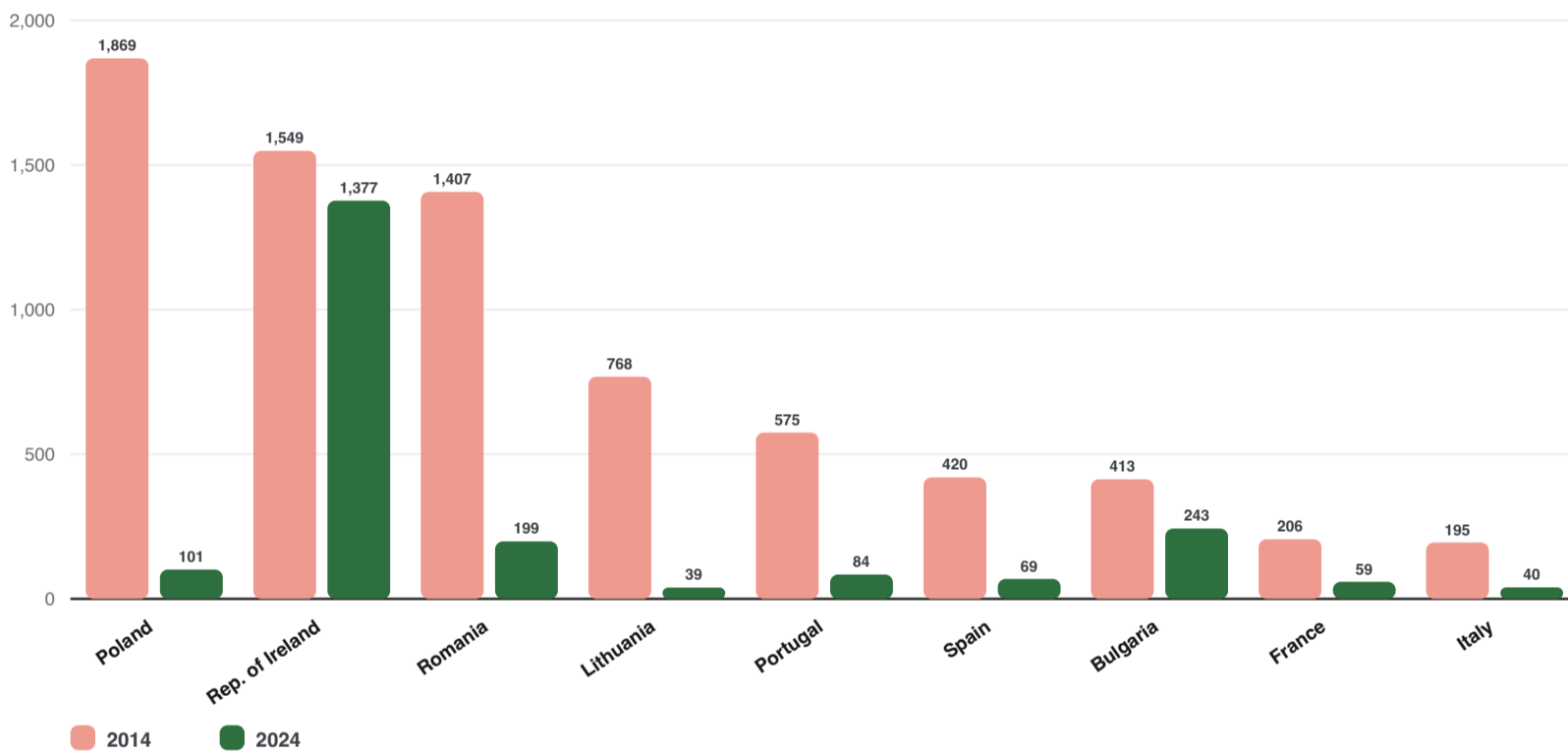


[The rights of settled EU nationals](#) are very similar to the rights of Northern Ireland/UK nationals. They can work, receive free NHS treatment, access education, social security benefits and pensions and travel in and out of the UK. They also have the right to live permanently in the UK.

Nisra's most recent statistics on EU Settlement scheme applications can be found in the Long-Term International Migration Statistics database, in the [Long-Term International Migration - Administrative Data Relating to Migration Into Northern Ireland \(inflows\) spreadsheet](#), Tables 2.21 to 2.25

### Migration from European countries to Northern Ireland over 10 years

The figures represent the number of new registrations for medical cards



Source: Business Service Organisation (BSO) Medical Card Registration. You can access the data in Nisra's Long-Term International Migration Statistics database, in the [Long-Term International Migration - Administrative Data Relating to Migration Into Northern Ireland \(inflows\) spreadsheet](#). Tab: Table 2.4

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# Discussion points & participants' words

## Discussion points

The following points were raised by members of ethnic minority communities, people seeking asylum and refugees who contributed to this document in group sessions and one-on-one interviews

- Treat people as **members of the community they live in**. Do not only seek to interview them about issues relating to their immigration status, ethnicity or nationality
- **Do not group multiple nationalities under one term** eg: 'Eastern Europeans' or 'foreign nationals'. If you can, specify the different nationalities
- Polish people said it is **geographically inaccurate** to describe them as 'Eastern European' as Poland is in the centre of Europe
- There was **no consensus** on the most acceptable collective noun between migrants, immigrants, foreign nationals or newcomers. Some participants felt 'migrant' and 'immigrant' had been weaponised
- In every conversation, participants asked that the media highlight the contribution they make to Northern Ireland

## Participants' words

The following quotes are from members of ethnic minority communities, asylum seekers and refugees, and the organisations who support and advocate for them, who contributed to this document

*"If the far right and racists are using a word pejoratively then the media should stop using that word. The far right are very smart, they are so happy that journalists are using these terms too."*

### Protest versus violence (June 2026)

*"These aren't protests and these aren't protesters. We have been to different protests and believe very much in the right to protest but in a sensible way that does not put other people in danger."*

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## Participants' words (continued)

*"I have been here 26 years and we're always still being portrayed as migrants... Sometimes you just get tired hearing 'migrants, migrants, migrants', all the time... Why do you perceive that group of people who came in to work as not part of the community? Generally our experience here in this country is good, really, really good but you wish for a little change when it comes to the general perception. I think we will benefit more if we will be counted as part of the entire community, not looking at our colour, our background, our history."*

*"People are often presented through narrow frames, such as immigration status, pressure on services, or moments of controversy, rather than as ordinary members of society. Their voices are less frequently heard directly, with coverage tending to prioritise political or institutional perspectives over lived experience."*

### **Including nationality in headlines:**

*"There will be automatic judgement. I don't know why the media and the reporters would love to mention nationalities. I presume because they will get more readers. But whenever a local man is on the news, they won't say he is Irish or British, they might mention that this man lives locally but that is it, but a migrant, your roots, your origin, will have to be mentioned, in capital letters."*

*"Why does the media focus so much on the refugee status and the costs? It's like chewing over and over the same piece of meat, it loses its taste eventually. I'd like to learn something new, the horrible conditions they are living in, how little money they are given and how they are managing to cope, what they are fleeing from and a little bit about their culture and how very many are highly educated. Tell us what they can bring. These people should be embraced rather than lowered to the level of 'eugh, refugee'."*

*"People treat refugees like they have a low level of education. I have a Masters. I was a teacher in Ukraine, I taught world literature. People always underestimate you. You are no one. The people who are choosing to go back to Ukraine, they are choosing to be a person, not a thing. I've now got GCSE English and Maths so that I could apply for a job and I am a classroom assistant. People presume refugees are poor. I didn't escape poverty, I escaped war. I had savings, which I thought I would use in retirement, and I feel ashamed wearing nice clothes to work. I go for a manicure, I go to the hairdresser, they are the things that keep me feeling like a woman, like a person. I am working, I rent a house, I have a social life, I don't want to be a victim."*

*"We would encourage humanising language as much as possible - 'people seeking asylum' rather than 'asylum seekers', 'undocumented people' and 'people with irregular immigration status' rather than 'undocumented migrants' or 'irregular migrants'."*



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# Media codes of conduct

Journalists should ensure they are following the code of conduct they and/or their organisation have signed up to, including but not restricted to clauses on accuracy, discrimination, intrusion into grief or shock, and differentiating between fact and opinion.

These include Ipsos's The Editor's Code of Practice, Impress' The Standards Code, the NUJ's Code of Conduct and The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, but some media organisations have their own in-house codes.

Most codes state that the media must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's protected characteristics including race, colour or religion, and that details of these must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

Some also include a clause stating that when stories involve personal grief or shock, approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion, and the publication of these stories must be handled sensitively.



# Headlines

Examples from Northern Ireland media:

**Asylum seeker studying at Belfast college slashed flatmate with knife, court told**

**Lithuanian man (34) in court over murder of man in north Belfast**

**Polish man who punched PSNI officer and subjected nurse to sexual slurs in native language sentenced**

**Asylum seeker who made stabbing gestures in Belfast street jailed for three months**

## Actions

- Including ethnicity, nationality, immigration or asylum status in a headline can reinforce harmful stereotypes. The guidance is to avoid it altogether.
- Do not use emotive, value-laden language that dehumanises people such as ‘flood’, ‘swarm’, ‘wave’, ‘influx’ and ‘exodus’

The inclusion of nationality, ethnicity or asylum status in headlines is contentious. In an online-led news environment, where websites have registration and paywalls and where 46% of people aged 16 and over in Northern Ireland use social media as a news source ([Ofcom, 2025](#)), many people only see and read headlines. There is concern that linking ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees to negative news stories eg: crime, can increase prejudice and perpetuate stereotypes that a particular nationality or group is ‘dangerous’.

### Alternative headlines:

- Belfast student slashed flatmate with knife, court told
- Man (34) in court over murder of man in north Belfast
- Man who punched PSNI officer and subjected nurse to sexual slurs sentenced
- Man who made stabbing gestures in Belfast street jailed for three months

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## 'Positive' stories can also be sensitive

One example from a group discussion on headlines highlighted how sensitive the media must be to potential concerns, even with what might be regarded as a positive story. The headline related to an event in England: 'Thousands celebrate Polish heritage in Gloucestershire'.

A number of participants said using 'thousands' could feed into the rhetoric used to heighten tension and fear. One, non-Polish, participant said it could be interpreted as "these people come here, they are celebrating their own occasions, they're like invaders, they are changing the principle of our community".

## Police position on releasing ethnicity & nationality

In August 2025 the [National College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\) released interim guidance](#) encouraging police forces to disclose the ethnicity and nationality of suspects when they are charged in high-profile or sensitive cases. Some police forces have released race and nationality details on arrest.

The guidance is described as an effort to reduce the risk to public safety posed by misinformation and disinformation about an incident, and states that verifying a suspect's immigration status is the role of the Home Office and not of the police.

The PSNI says it is taking time to consider the interim guidance.

"There is no PSNI policy to generally omit information about ethnicity/national origin when issuing a description of suspects. On occasions the Police Service of Northern Ireland may release the ethnicity of a suspect if it is known and there is a policing purpose to do so.

"The Police Service of Northern Ireland has received the joint interim guidance from the College of Policing/National Police Chiefs' Council relating to publicising the ethnicity/nationality of suspects or defendants at the point of charge for high harm offences or where there is a related risk or impact to public safety and we will now take time to consider this guidance."

- Police Service of Northern Ireland



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# Images

While images are an important part of telling a story, there are some questions to ask before deciding which photographs or footage to publish:

## Could they be inaccurate, misleading or distorted?

Ipsos guidance states that journalists must particularly ‘consider whether an image may misrepresent or create a distorted impression of the issue being reported on’. Double check that captions are accurate.

## Do they identify individuals?

Ensure you have obtained the permission of the people portrayed. Identifying people could place them or their families back home at risk of retribution, but all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have the right to privacy. Take special care when identifying children. Note that [in the Republic of Ireland it is a criminal offence to identify an asylum seeker, or a former asylum seeker](#) ie: a refugee or naturalised citizen, in an image or news report, without their consent.

## Is their use likely to lead to discrimination or hostility?

Ensure image placement and context do not inadvertently promote anti-migration sentiment. When publishing or broadcasting images of asylum accommodation, consider the balance between reporting that is in the public interest, such as on poor housing conditions, and the right to privacy and safety. Be aware that revealing the location of asylum accommodation could lead to local hostility.

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# Responsible interview practices

Not every interview with someone seeking asylum, a refugee or member of an ethnic minority community need be about a trauma. Participants in the creation of this document spoke about wanting to be treated as members of the community rather than ‘other’ and the risks of framing people as either ‘victim’ or ‘threat’.

However, understanding trauma and its effect on the way people think and react is important and, where appropriate, will help you to carry out a better interview and create a safer space for those with lived experience to share their stories. These interviews should be dealt with in a different way to day-to-day reporting and you must consider the impact on them before, during and after.

Asylum seekers and refugees may be afraid of reprisals from the places they have left or a hostile reception in Northern Ireland. They may fear being stereotyped or that coverage will be negative. They may come from a country without an independent media, leading to mistrust.

Also, someone’s story didn’t begin when they left their home country, they will have had a full life before then and may be happy to speak about it, bringing nuance and rich detail which will humanise the interviewee and provide context.

## Before the interview

**Get informed consent:** Be clear about the purpose of the interview. Provide detail on the angle of your story, where and when it will be published and how/if they will be identified. Note that in the Republic of Ireland it is a criminal offence to identify an asylum seeker, or a former asylum seeker ie: a refugee or naturalised citizen, in an image or news report, without their consent.

**Their safety is your priority:** Arrange to meet at a location where they feel safe. Address concerns, including whether they want to be identified. Do not assume the person understands terms such as ‘off the record’.

### Consider reimbursing the interviewee’s travel expenses

**Understand how trauma impacts the brain:** Stress and trauma affect both what and how events are remembered. While people are typically able to reliably recall their experiences, their memories may be distorted or disorganised.

**Inform yourself:** Research their country/countries of origin, their culture and anything else you might need to know about their experiences.

**Prepare questions that give control to the interviewee:** Open questions will allow them to steer the conversation away from specific events they do not want to relive. Unlike most interviews, be prepared to show them the questions in advance.

**Ask yourself if you are the right person to conduct the interview:** Sometimes a woman would be less comfortable being interviewed by a man and vice versa.

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## During the interview

### Start with simple, open questions which won't overwhelm the interviewee

**Self-description:** Ask how they would like to be referred to in terms of ethnicity, nationality and asylum status. If relevant, ask whether they prefer to be described as a 'victim' or as a 'survivor'.

**Don't ask 'How did that make you feel?':** It can be overwhelming, so try instead 'How are you now?' or 'What do you think about ...?'

**Don't imply you understand their experience:** Saying 'I know how you feel' or 'I understand' can minimise lived experience. Instead, say 'I appreciate that this must be difficult for you'. Expressions of grief, either spoken or facial, can also make the interviewee feel worse.

**Give them some control:** Ask if they need to take a break. Let them choose not to answer questions they find upsetting or uncomfortable. Many people will not want to disclose their route into the country where they are seeking asylum.

### Don't question an emotional reaction, respect it

**Conclude by grounding them in the present moment:** Don't make your final question about a traumatic experience. Try instead 'What's the best part of your life right now?' or 'Do you have any plans for after this interview?'

## After the interview

**Explain what will happen next:** Explain when the story will be published or broadcast and the format, including: any other interviewees and whether they will be directly quoted or paraphrased.

**Look after yourself:** Listening to accounts of lived experience can affect journalists' mental health. Signs include a lack of concentration, numbness, sleeplessness and anger. To prevent this, recognise your own limits and speak to colleagues about the experience. Seek counselling if you are overwhelmed.

## Resources

[The Dart Center Style Guide for Trauma-Informed Journalism](#)

[Trauma-informed journalism: What it is, why it's important and tips for practicing it](#)

[Reporting on refugees - NUJ Ireland and UNHCR guidance \(automatic download\)](#)

[Best practices for trauma-informed journalism](#)

[Guide for Journalists, Researchers, Artists and those people seeking information and stories from Asylum Seekers and Refugees](#)

[Self-care tips for journalists](#)



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# Useful resources

## Where to find the latest statistics & information

- **We R.I.S.E. Together**  
maps racist crimes across Northern Ireland - [werisetgether.ie](http://werisetgether.ie)

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- **[Law Centre NI's Migration Justice Project](#)**  
has many useful resources, including two relating to refugees which are regularly updated  
1 Refugee facts and statistics - [www.lawcentreni.org/news/refugee-facts-and-statistics/](http://www.lawcentreni.org/news/refugee-facts-and-statistics/)  
2 Refugee move-on guide - [www.lawcentreni.org/new-refugee-move-on-guide/](http://www.lawcentreni.org/new-refugee-move-on-guide/)

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- **[The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford](#)**  
provides evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, plus embed codes for its interactive data visualisations

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- **NI Housing Executive**  
has produced a [Migrant Housing Myths](#) document

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- **UK government**  
provides quarterly immigration statistics, which include Northern Ireland figures for the number of people in receipt of asylum support in Northern Ireland, broken down by council area. You can access the statistics [here \(www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables)

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- **Nisra**  
the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency provides statistics on long-term international migration from 2014 [here](#)  
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population/long-term-international-migration-statistics>

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- **NI Direct's central information hub**  
for asylum seekers and refugees can be found [here](#)

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- **The European Union**  
provides information and statistics on asylum seekers and refugees on its [Eurostat](#) service

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- **PSNI's**  
[hate motivation statistics](#) (released quarterly)

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- **The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)**  
published two reports following the racist violence in Belfast in summer 2024 and in Ballymena in June 2025. They are [Inciting a Pogrom? Social media and the racist disorder in Ballymena and beyond during summer 2025](#) and [Mapping Far Right Activity Online in Northern Ireland Project Report](#).

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- **United Nations**  
[Migrant Smuggling FAQs](#)

## Fact checking organisations

**FactCheckNI** - <https://factcheckni.org/>  
**FullFact** - <https://fullfact.org/>



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## Organisations

### **Building Communities Resource Centre**

Ballymoney 028 2766 5068

[theresourcecentre.org](http://theresourcecentre.org)

### **Inter Ethnic Forum**

Ballymena 028 2564 8822

Inter Ethnic Forum on [Facebook](#)

### **Invisible Traffick**

Northern Ireland 07936 951 960

[invisibletraffick.org](http://invisibletraffick.org)

### **Law Centre NI · Migration Justice Project**

Belfast 028 9024 4401

[lawcentreni.org/migration-justice](http://lawcentreni.org/migration-justice)

### **Minority Ethnic Support Armagh**

Armagh 028 3753 7595

[mesarmagh.com](http://mesarmagh.com)

### **North West Migrants Forum**

Derry 028 7136 2184

[nwmf.org.uk](http://nwmf.org.uk)

### **STEP · South Tyrone Empowerment Programme**

Dungannon 028 8775 0211

[stepni.org](http://stepni.org)



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**Community Foundation for Northern Ireland**

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**Cooltura**

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**Craigavon Traveller Support Committee**

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**FactCheckNI**

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**Inter Ethnic Forum**

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**Invisible Traffick**

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**Law Centre NI's Migration Justice Project**

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**Migrant Centre NI**

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**Minority Ethnic Support Armagh**

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**North West Migrants Forum**

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**NUJ**

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**STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Programme)**

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**Ukrainians in NI Community Group**

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