EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

# Global migration and immigration to the UK

A briefing note outlining the trends in global and national migration data and how to bridge biblical convictions when discussing immigration policy in the UK.

## Purpose

To equip Christians to think biblically and respond missionally when it comes to political discourse on global migration and its impact on national politics and local communities.

## Executive summary

The migration and immigration debate has proven to be an insolvable challenge for policymakers and has created a wedge within local churches and across the UK church.

In this briefing note, we encourage Christians to appreciate how this issue requires **both** a brave and kind response. To engage well we suggest a three-pronged response:

1. Think biblically
2. Engage politically
3. Act missionally

## Global trends and the UK context

### 304 million

**International migrants**

According to the United Nation's international migration data in 2024, 304 million migrants lived outside their country of birth

### 47%

**Christians**

The Pew Research 2024 publication stated 47% of Christians live outside of their country of birth as of 2020.

### 48%

**Female**

The same United Nation's publication in 2024 found women constituted 48% of international migrants.

### 813,000

**Total migration to the UK per annum**

The Office for National Statistics confirmed 813,000 figure for the year ending December 2025. Over two-thirds were from non-EU countries.

Global migration trends and immigration policy to the UK has been a main talking point in British political discourse, communities and churches for decades.

The experiences of South Asian who fled to the UK from Uganda in the 1970s, the Windrush generation and the challenges faced having arrived and lived in the UK for many years, the rise in small boat crossings, population increase amongst Muslims in the UK, and rioting and civil unrest across the country have all contributed to polarising debate amongst politicians and within churches.

The pace and scale of change in international migration is increasing year on year. This scale of movement globally has placed increased pressure on regional institutions and national governments to respond. Across Europe, nation states are implementing stricter border controls in an attempt to preserve national identity. Collectively, Europe has shifted away from its post-World War II sentiment and commitment to resettling refugees domestically.

As a result, immigration has become increasingly politicised in recent years, but the issue is more than politics for the British church.

Immigration to the UK has had a positive impact to Protestant and Catholic churches, reversing years of church decline through planting and establishing social justice ministries that serves the poorest in society across the UK and Europe. [1] British-born church leaders together with migrant brothers and sisters are together making Jesus known to communities across the UK.

Lausanne's research and insights team corroborate these findings in its State of the Great Commission Report and anticipate by 2050, that, "there will be major economic and population demographic changes.' [2] Below are several key findings from the report that are relevant to the UK church and migration debate:

- Pentecostal and charismatic expressions of faith are growing rapidly around the world
- Global evangelical Christianity has shifted from the Global North the Global South (ie African, Asian, Latin American or Oceania).
- There is an increase in the number of international students
- International migrants preferred destinations are in Europe, Asia and North American (see figure 1).

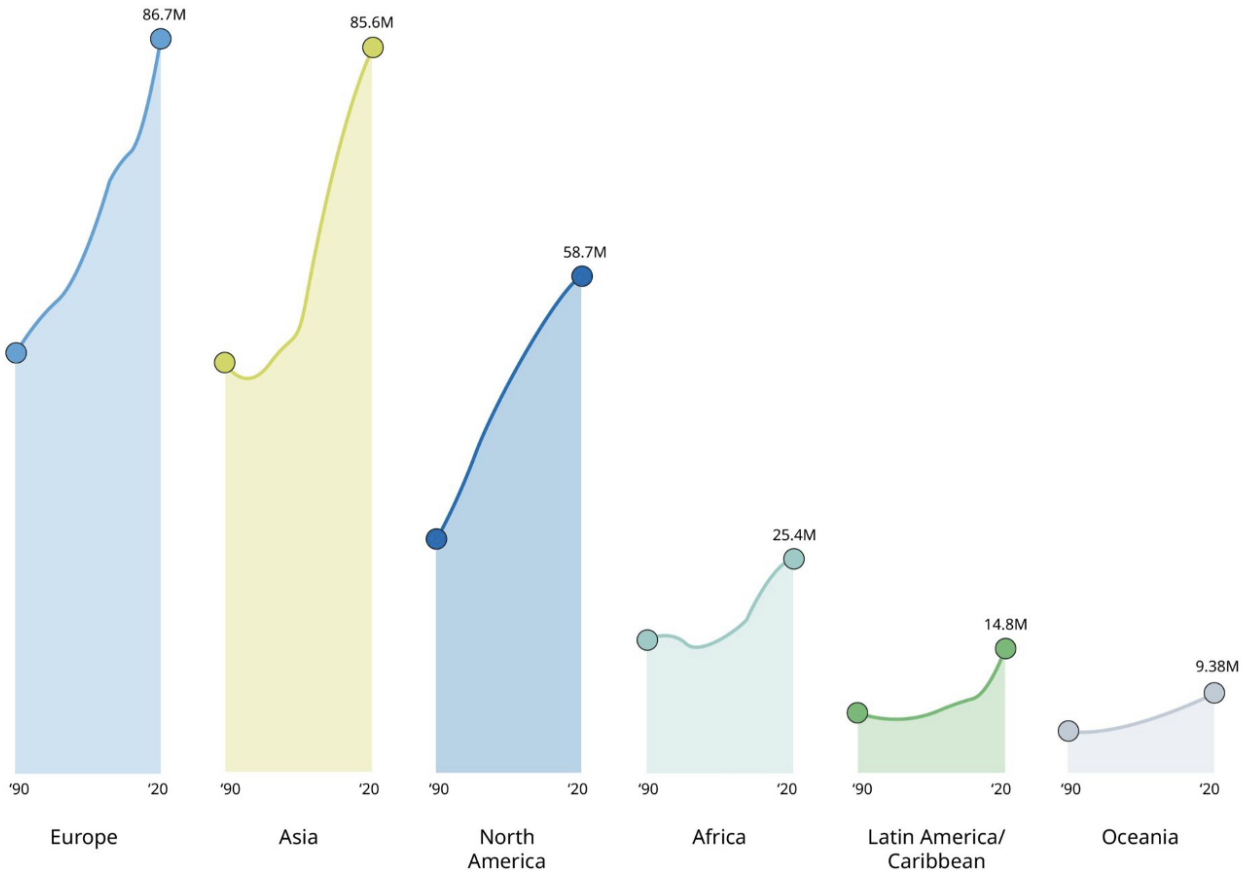


*Figure 1: Migration Destination 1990 – 2020*

*Source: lausanne.org/report/community/migration*

### Ethnic diversity across the UK evangelical church

In autumn 2026, the Evangelical Alliance published the first phase research exploring evangelical belief and practice in the UK. Below is an infographic from the report showing the ethnic diversity within evangelicalism against the average UK population:

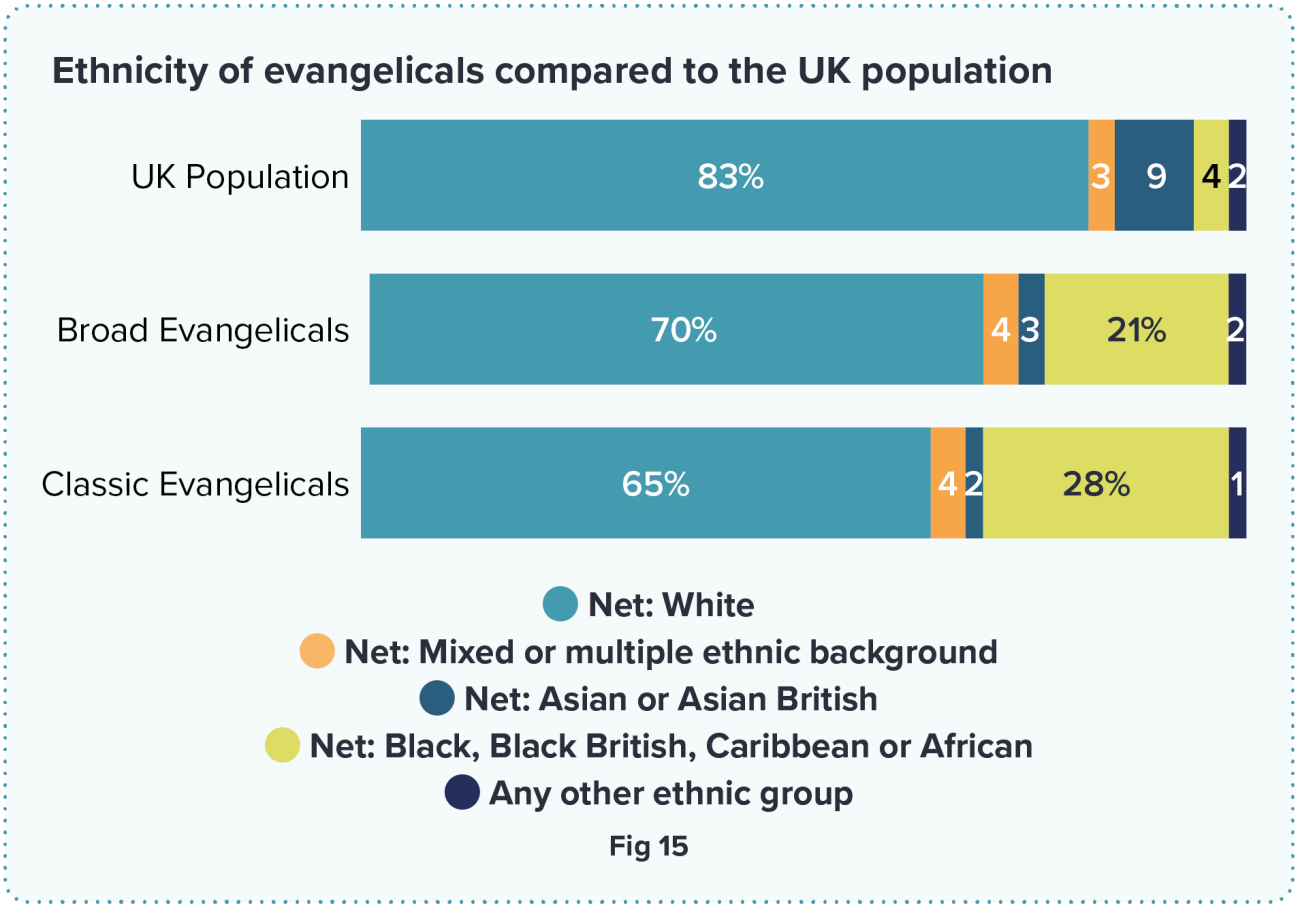

Fig 15

## The theologies of migration

The Bible does not shy away from the depths of human suffering and experience. Scripture and our faith wrestle with themes of nationhood, displacement, the scattering of people (diaspora) and citizenship in a way that should inspire and inform Christian apologetics, mission outreach and advocacy work.

The story of Joseph (son of Jacob) is one of human trafficking and slave labour before becoming prime minister of Egypt. Ruth and Naomi's experiences set out the vulnerabilities of widows and unmarried women in a patriarchal culture. Esther's is a story of courage in a context of slavery, and the years Israel were in exile shows us personal cost of humiliation, violence and abuse. Yet in all these accounts we encounter a God who draws close to human suffering and longs for righteousness and justice to prevail.

**A biblical framework for migration and the migrant**

### CREATION (GENESIS 1–2)

The Bible begins with a generous, life-giving God who creates a world that displays His glory and is intended to flourish. Human beings are made in the image of God and are given dignity, purpose and responsibility as stewards of creation (Genesis 1:26–28).

From the beginning, people are placed in particular places and communities not simply for their own good, but to participate in God's purposes in the world. Every person – native or migrant– bears God's image and possesses inherent worth. This provides the foundation for a Christian understanding of migration: our starting point is the equal dignity and value of every human being.

### FALL (GENESIS 3–11)

Sin fractures humanity's relationship with God, with one another and with creation. The story of Genesis quickly becomes a story of exile, displacement, violence, oppression and the pursuit of power – from Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden to Cain's wandering and the empire-building of Babel.

Migration in our world is often shaped by these realities: conflict, persecution, injustice, poverty and human ambition. The Fall reminds us that both compassion and caution are necessary. Human beings are capable of extraordinary hospitality, but also exploitation, fear and injustice. Migration exists within a world that is both glorious and deeply broken.

### REDEMPTION (GENESIS 12 TO THE GOSPELS)

God's redemptive story begins with Abraham; a migrant called from his homeland so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed" through him (Genesis 12). Throughout scripture, God works through people on the move, culminating in the Exodus, where He rescues an oppressed people and commands Israel to remember their own experience by protecting the foreigner, practising hospitality and pursuing justice (Exodus 22:21; Deuteronomy 10:18–19).

This story reaches its fulfilment in Jesus. In the incarnation, Christ enters our world, identifies with human vulnerability, and even lives as a refugee in Egypt. Through His death and resurrection, He creates one new people from every nation, tribe and language, reconciling people to God and to one another (Ephesians 2:11–22). The church is therefore called to proclaim the gospel, welcome the stranger, seek justice, and love its neighbour without distinction.

RENEWAL (ACTS TO REVELATION)

At Pentecost, the scattered nations hear the gospel in their own languages, anticipating God's renewed people gathered from across the Earth (Acts 2). Christians live as citizens of God's kingdom while seeking the peace and flourishing of the places where God has placed them (Jeremiah 29; Philippians 3:20).

The Bible ends with a vision of renewal: a redeemed multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language worshipping before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9–10). Until Christ returns, the church is called to model this coming kingdom through unity, reconciliation, hospitality and faithful witness among all people.

**Summary**

A biblical theology of migration holds together two essential truths: every person is made in the image of God (Imago Dei), and God is gathering people from every nation into His kingdom through Jesus Christ (Missio Dei). This calls the church to combine compassion with justice, hospitality with wisdom, and faithful gospel witness with a commitment to the flourishing of both migrants and the communities in which they live.

## The culture and politics of migration

Figures used in the info graphic below are taken from a range of sources. For example Office for National Statistics, the UK Government and The Migration of Observatory.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **69.5 million** | **41,500** | **171,000** |
| people live in the UK, and this is projected to rise | people took small boat crossings in 2025 | Total net migration to the UK for year ending December 2025 |

Total number of people receiving asylum support from the government in the year ending December 2025

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **6,688** | **2,608** | **94,354** | **3,353** |
| Scotland | Northern Ireland | England | Wales |

In 2024, the global number of international migrants was 304 million, this trend is expected to increase. The three core drivers that part explain this trend are:

1. Individuals seeking work.
2. A desire to live closer to family.
3. A desire to pursue studies.

For decades successive UK governments have developed an immigration policy that enables family reunion and in the case of points 1 and 3, issuing higher numbers of visas to stimulate the economy. Today, those decisions are under intense scrutiny by the British public and media.

There are growing concerns that the impact of immigration to the UK is net negative when it comes to integrating new migrants into a shared civic and cultural identity. In communities, the number of migrants to an area have presented challenges for local authorities to encourage integration of ethnic and religious minorities within an area as well as financial constraints in its ability to provide housing and access to public services. There has also been an increase in academic literature, coinciding with growing fears nationally on demography change projected in the UK where White British people will become a minority by 2063. [3]

For over the past 30 years politicians have sought to respond to each of these challenges by shaping UK laws and influencing discourse on immigration to the UK. Most notably figures such as, Enoch Powell, Baroness Margaret Thatcher, Sir Tony Blair, Nigel Farage, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson, The Rt Honourable Shabana Mahmood and Rupert Lowe to name a few.

The media elites divide these politicians positions on a left right continuum, but this is unhelpful and could be better understood as a ‘communitarian’ versus a ‘cosmopolitan’ point of view; regardless of one’s political affiliation.

A simplified explanation for a cosmopolitan perspective is one who advocates for open borders policy and generally considers national boundaries as limiting individual human rights. Whereas a communitarian perspective places greater emphasis on national and local cultures and a responsibility of the state to regulate rates of immigration accordingly that takes into consideration national identity. The dividing lines in today’s debate are based on how the government controls its borders and whether in so doing it should have a generous asylum and refugee system. Christians’ political and policy position on immigration can vary and fit along a ‘communitarian’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ continuum.

Communitarian and cosmopolitan are two contrasting frameworks that help Christians make some sense of political parties shifting positioning on this issue and also public perception and attitude towards immigration rates in recent years. Historically immigration has been viewed positively as an economic and civic good [4], but now, for reasons listed the majority of Brits would like to see a reduction in migration figures to the UK and tighter border control. [5]

> **Summary:** Regardless of what one’s convictions are, it is important that the body of Christ in the UK are alert to the weaponising of Christianity from either the political left or right when it comes to immigration policy.

# How the UK church is responding

Migration figures and government policy measures together impact each of the four nations, sectors and local economies differently; hence Christians are engaged and are responding in different ways to the impact of immigration policy on individuals and communities. Below are seven ways the UK church are responding:

### Pastoral support

In response to the heightened racial tensions in the UK at the moment, we are aware of networks like **Intercultural Ministries Ireland**[6] and other denominations facilitating regular prayer gatherings inviting pastors and senior leaders in their respective networks to come together, share the burdens of ministry and provide mutual encouragement.

### Campaigning for freedom of religion or belief overseas

Different denominations, streams of church, church plants in the UK and/or ministries led by migrants now living and settled in the UK have a strong connection with the global church and ministries overseas. It is through these partnership that many advocate and campaign for freedom of religion or belief (FORB) overseas.

### Welcome

Local churches and Christian ministries, for decades, have been at the forefront of welcoming migrants into one's home or church family and providing financial, emotional, spiritual and physical support for new arrivals; helping them to integrate into local communities and wider British society.

At the height of the Syrian, Ukraine and asylum hotel crisis, the church was befriending and supporting parents with baby clothing and signposting them to further charitable support and legal advice.

### Intercultural unity and gospel witness

The intercultural church and unity gatherings across the UK serve as a prophetic witness at a time of societal fragmentation. Together, they embody Galatians 3:28 and have the potential to outwork John 17 where the gospel power is demonstrated through uniting believers from a working class, minority ethnic and migrant background.

You can learn more about intercultural ministries by resources we've published on eauk.org or by connecting with **Global Connections**, **OMF International**, **Intercultural Churches UK** and **WEAVE**.

### Reaching Muslims with the gospel

Within a ten-year period, the Office for National Statistics reported a population increase in the number of Muslims in living in England and Wales. In 2011, 2.7 million Muslims lived in the UK and in 2021 that figure rose to 3.9 million [7]. The population increase has changed the demography of communities like Bolton, Blackpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester, London, Luton and Manchester, [8] which is proving to be a point of tension and frustration amongst deindustrialised communities across Britain and the working-class.

Member organisations resourcing the UK church to share Jesus with Muslims are **Elam**, **London City Mission**, **Mahabba Network**, **Solas Centre** and the **Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics**.

The prominence of Islamic belief and practice in public life has become a hot button issue in national debate but also a rising concern across our membership. **See also Islam in the UK on the Briefing Room page**.

### Discipleship

As of June 2025 the UK population is 69.5 million people [9] and is projected to increase to 71 million due to an increase in international net

migration by 2034.[10] Immigration has been an integral part of Britain's history and the UK church. Today, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is a contested issue in our politics but for the UK church, a story of blessing and missional opportunity. [11]

### Community-wide transformation

Tackling community tensions has become a central policy objective for the UK government and devolved parliaments. This is in part due to the riots across England and Northern Ireland in 2024 and nationalist and immigration protest marches.

Churches and Christian ministries are integral institutions, local experts and trusted voices; oftentimes because of how long they have served in an area. Alongside national campaigning and evangelism, Christians should consider becoming regular contributors to local stakeholder forums and national government's social cohesion strategic response. This can be an effective outworking of Jeremiah 29: 5–7.

## Evangelical Alliance's position

**EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE'S POSITION**

For over 30 years, the Evangelical Alliance has worked on issues relating to migration and immigration policy through our involvement in the Religious Liberty Commission, African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance (ACEA), One People Commission, South Asian Forum and/or through the organisation's public policy and parliamentary engagement work.

We do not take an official position on what the annual migration figure to the UK should be and affirm biblical convictions can lead to different political positions with regards to border policy. What we do encourage is collaboration between Christians to addressing the issue rather than name calling or divisive rhetoric online or in person.

Through our media engagement and public policy work we acknowledge the rate of immigration impacts place, people and the poor differently, and so are committed to speaking out on policies that entrench inequality, dehumanise individuals and exacerbate tensions in the UK.

## Key takeaways

**01**

**All people are made in the image of God and should be treated fairly, with dignity and respect regardless of ethnicity, nationality or immigration status.**

**02**

**The Christian faith is growing in the Global South, and many are migrating to the Northern hemisphere to co-labour with home-born Christians in the UK.**

**03**

**The number of Muslims in the UK are expected to rise over the next decade, whether by migration or increased birth rates. It is therefore important Christian ministries develop a suite of resources to engage with Islam and reach Muslims with the gospel.**

**04**

**Jesus is returning for a multi-ethnic, multi-class and multi-lingual church; made up of people with different national identities. May UK Christians celebrate how diverse the church is and defend the unity found in Jesus.**

**05**

**The UK immigration system is in need of reform. Christian ethics call for both compassion and justice: welcoming the stranger while recognising borders and the rule of law.**

# Helpful resources

Active discipleship will be crucial to how well the church models an alternative community to the cultural divides in Britain.

Below is a shortlist of books, podcasts and small group resources from organisations, academics and theologians. They, in different ways, equip Christians and the global church to think biblically, engage politically and act missionally as we encounter different religious or racial minorities living in the UK.

### Small groups resources

- **Elam,** Safar discipleship app for Persian-speaking Christians, safar.org/
- **Evangelical Alliance (2024),** Visions of Justice and Hope, eauk.org/resources/our-resources/reports/visions-of-justice-and-hope
- **Christian Renewal Ministries (2023),** Abundant Life (Chinese-Traditional) course [Online]. Available at: shop.seaninternational.org/products/abundant-life-chinese-traditional

### Books or theological journals

- **David Wise, Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, Usha Reifsnider et al (July 2025),** Polyphonic God: Exploring intercultural theology, churches and justice
- **Alexander Chow (March 2025),** Chinese heritage in British Christianity – more than foreigners
- **Jamaal E Williams, Timothy Paul Jones** and **Mark Deymaz (2023),** In Church as it is in heaven: Cultivating a multiethnic kingdom culture
- **Jehu J Hanciles (2021),** Migration and the making of global Christianity
- **Sadiri Joy Tira and Testsunao Yamamori (2020)** Scattered and Gathered: A global compendium of diaspora missiology
- **Dr. Jonathan P Burnside (2000),** The Status & Welfare of immigrants: the place of the foreigner in biblical law and its relevance to contemporary society

### Videos or podcasts

- **Eastern European Institute of Theology (Sept 2025),** Migrants, refugees and foreigners: Old Testament perspectives and imperatives, youtu.be/VJct4fVaDzY?si=YDpWOxFRglNXogse
- **Dr Elaine Storkey (2024),** Migration and women – teaching at Global Migration Summit, youtube.com/watch?v=iwT5anvmjzo&list=PLjgVitI3YpvOxYSryK3PecwuYq59BSIUZ&index=3
- **Spring Harvest Festival (2020),** Cross-cultural mission in relation to migrants, youtube.com/watch?v=FmVBq3tEMe4

# References

[1] **Several examples**: The Centre for Missionaries from the Majority world; Rev Les Isaac with Street Pastors; Rev Celia Apeagyei-Collins founder and CEO of Rehoboth Foundation; Ram Gidoomal chairman of South Asian Concern; Jonathan Oloyede with National Day of Prayer and Worship or Revd Carmel Jones the founder of Pentecostal Credit Union.

[2] Lausanne Movement (2024), State of the Great Commission Report [Online]. Available at: lausanne.org/report. Accessed 10 August 2026.

[3] The Telegraph (June 2025), White British people will be a minority in 40 years, report claims [Online]. Available at: telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/06/03/white-british-minority-in-40-years-report-claims/ . Accessed 25 August 2026

[4] National Centre for Social Research (June 2024), British Social Attitudes 41 | Immigration – changing attitudes, policy preferences and partisanship [Online]. Available at: natcen.ac.uk/publications/british-social-attitudes-41-immigration Accessed 10 August 2026

[5] The Migration Observatory (Jan 2025), UK public opinion toward immigration: overall attitudes and level of concern [Online]. Available at: migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-of-concern/ or YouGov (August 2026), Britons have a more negative view of immigration in 2026 than in 2016 [Online]. Available at: yougov.com/en-gb/articles/55329-britons-have-a-more-negative-view-of-immigration-in-2026-than-in-2016 or The Times (August 2026), Attitudes to immigration harden over decade of small boats and war [Online] Available at: thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/channel-crossings-uk-stance-migration-hvz35zlbv . All accessed 10 August 2026

[6] interculturalireland.org/

[7] Office for National Statistics (2021), Census 2021 [Online]. Available at: ons.gov.uk/census/maps/change/identity/religion/religion-tb/muslim . Accessed 10 August 2026

[8] Ibid

[9] Office for National Statistics (November 2025), Provisional population estimate for the UK: mid-2025 [Online]. Available at: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/provisionalpopulationestimatefortheuk/mid2025 Accessed 25 August 2026

[10] Office for National Statistics (April 2026), National population projections: 2024 – based [Online]. Available at: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2024based . Accessed 10 August 2026

[11] **Usha Reifsnider, Imitaz Khan, Jonathan Oloyede** and **Manoj Raithatha** have all written extensively about their conversion to Christianity.