



# GMS Flash Alert

## Immigration Edition

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# United Kingdom – Net Migration Hits Record Levels

Data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 25 May 2023 indicates that net migration to the U.K. has added 606,000 to the population in 2022, which is an increase of 164,000 over 2021's total, but slightly less than predicted.<sup>1</sup>

Coinciding with the ONS data being released, changes in immigration rules relating to international students were announced the same week. Among other things, to reduce net migration, the Home Secretary announced that only international students on a postgraduate research program can be accompanied by their dependants.<sup>2</sup> (For prior coverage, see [GMS Flash Alert 2023-110](#), 25 May 2023.)

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## WHY THIS MATTERS

It is to be seen as to whether the ONS data will impact further government policy in respect of U.K. immigration rules, particularly in the context of a global race for talent and the business need to address skills shortages in certain industries. Employers need to be aware of changes to immigration rules and government policy trends in managing their workforce needs.

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## Further Details

According to ONS data, in 2022 an estimated 1.2 million people arrived in the U.K., whilst 557,000 left in the same period. Most of the people arriving in the U.K. in 2022 were non-EU nationals (925,000), followed by those from the EU (151,000), and British nationals (88,000).

The numbers have been affected by unique events, including those in Ukraine and Hong Kong, which have contributed to the relatively high levels of immigration. It should also be noted that for the first time, asylum seekers have been included in the figures.

The U.K. prime minister has insisted that although migration is not out of control, the figures are too high. Although the figures are reflective of new methods used by the ONS to include asylum seekers, unprecedented events unfolding in the world, and the lifting of travel restrictions following the pandemic, the prime minister has said that measures to tighten visa rules for overseas students would help bring levels down over time.

The following should be noted when considering the ONS data:

- Estimates provided are “provisional, experimental and have a degree of uncertainty” around them given the methodology that is used.
- Approximately 114,000 arrivals to the U.K. were from Ukraine and 52,000 were from Hong Kong.
- For the first time, the ONS include asylum applications in this year’s migration estimates: 76,000 applications received for asylum in 2022.

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## KPMG INSIGHTS

Government rhetoric around reducing net migration to the “tens of thousands” has become more prevalent recently and there is political pressure for the prime minister to address claims of “migration being out of control.” Businesses should monitor U.K. government policy around immigration in light of recent pronouncements and commitments – this may help them to assess and prepare for any future impact on their ability to attract, recruit, and retain global talent.

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## FOOTNOTES:

1 U.K. Office for National Statistics, [“Long-term international migration, provisional - year ending December 2022” \(25 May 2023\)](#).

2 See the news story on the U.K. government website: [“Changes to student visa route will reduce net migration”](#) (23 May 2023).

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## Contact us

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