



**Migration**  
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# Scotland and Immigration

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History & Miscellaneous: MW 491

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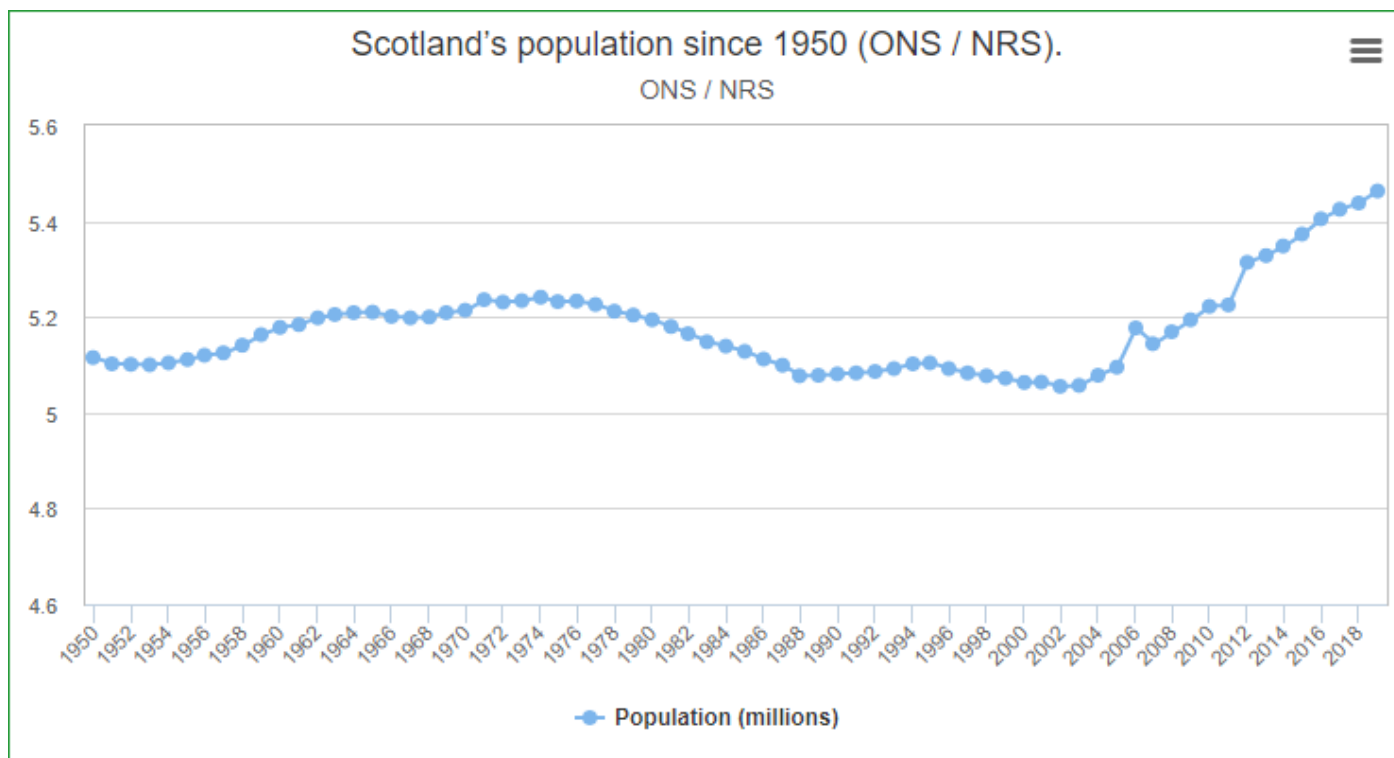
## Summary

1. The population of Scotland has been increasing for the last 20 years and is approaching 5.5 million. Meanwhile the foreign-born share and the proportion of the population made up of other ethnicities have both more than tripled - from about 3% to 10-11% of the total. The impact of immigration is especially marked in the major cities where the percentage of births to non-UK born mothers has reached 36% in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, 32% in Glasgow and 18% in Dundee. Meanwhile, public opinion in Scotland recognises that immigration has benefits but is keen for it to be controlled at sensible and sustainable levels.

## Introduction

2. It is sometimes claimed that Scotland needs significant foreign immigration to counter a falling population due to a falling birth rate and an ageing population. The graph below shows that the population of Scotland has remained above five million for the past fifty years and has witnessed notable growth since the early 2000s.

Figure 1: Scotland's population since 1950 (ONS / NRS).



3. Since 2000 net migration has added an average of 21,600 a year to the Scottish population. A gross total of 40,000 people leave Scotland every year for other parts of the UK but there is still a net inflow from elsewhere in the country of about 8,000 people per year. Midlothian, Aberdeenshire and East Dunbartonshire have in the past attracted the majority of internal migrants. Net migration **from overseas** has fluctuated considerably since 2000, and reached 28,000 in 2019 (a joint-record - with 2009 - for a calendar year) as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Net migration to Scotland from overseas (ONS, long-term international migration by area or origin within the UK)<sup>1</sup>.

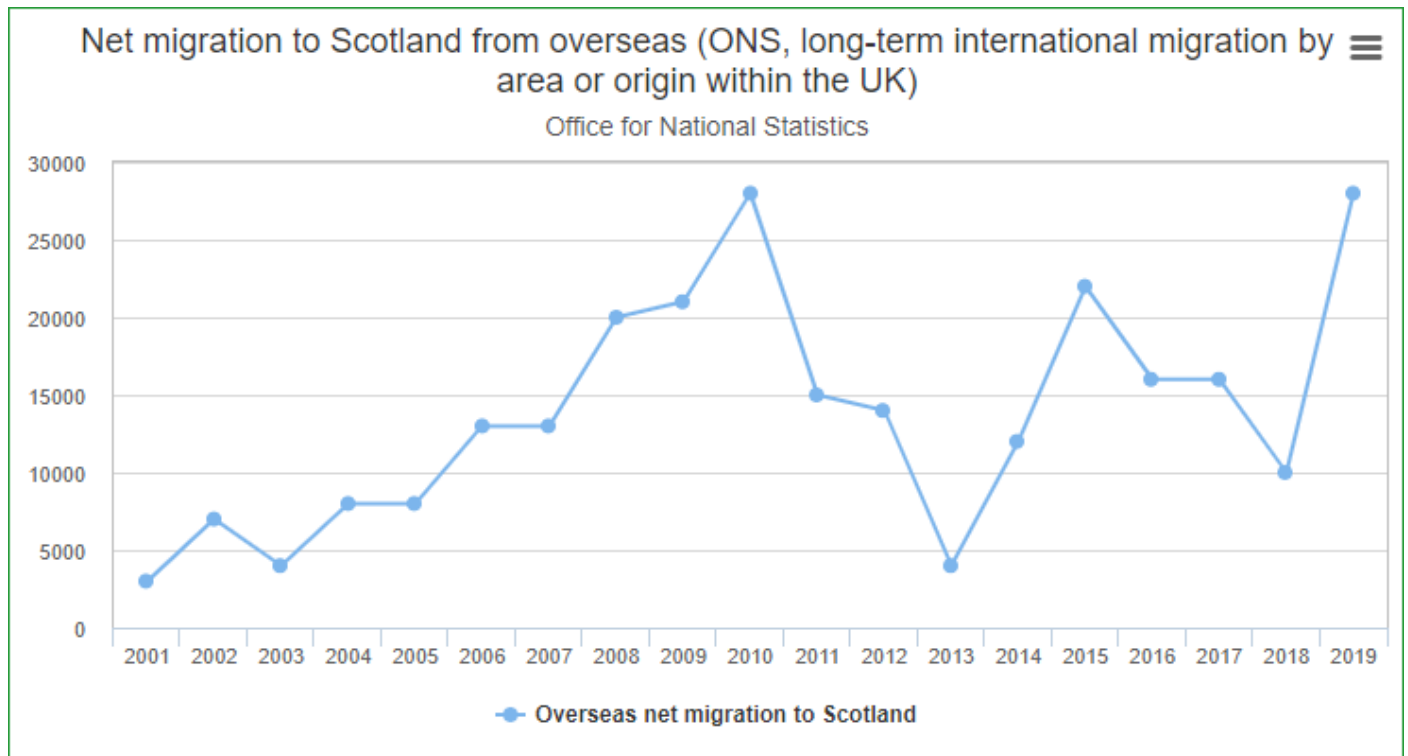
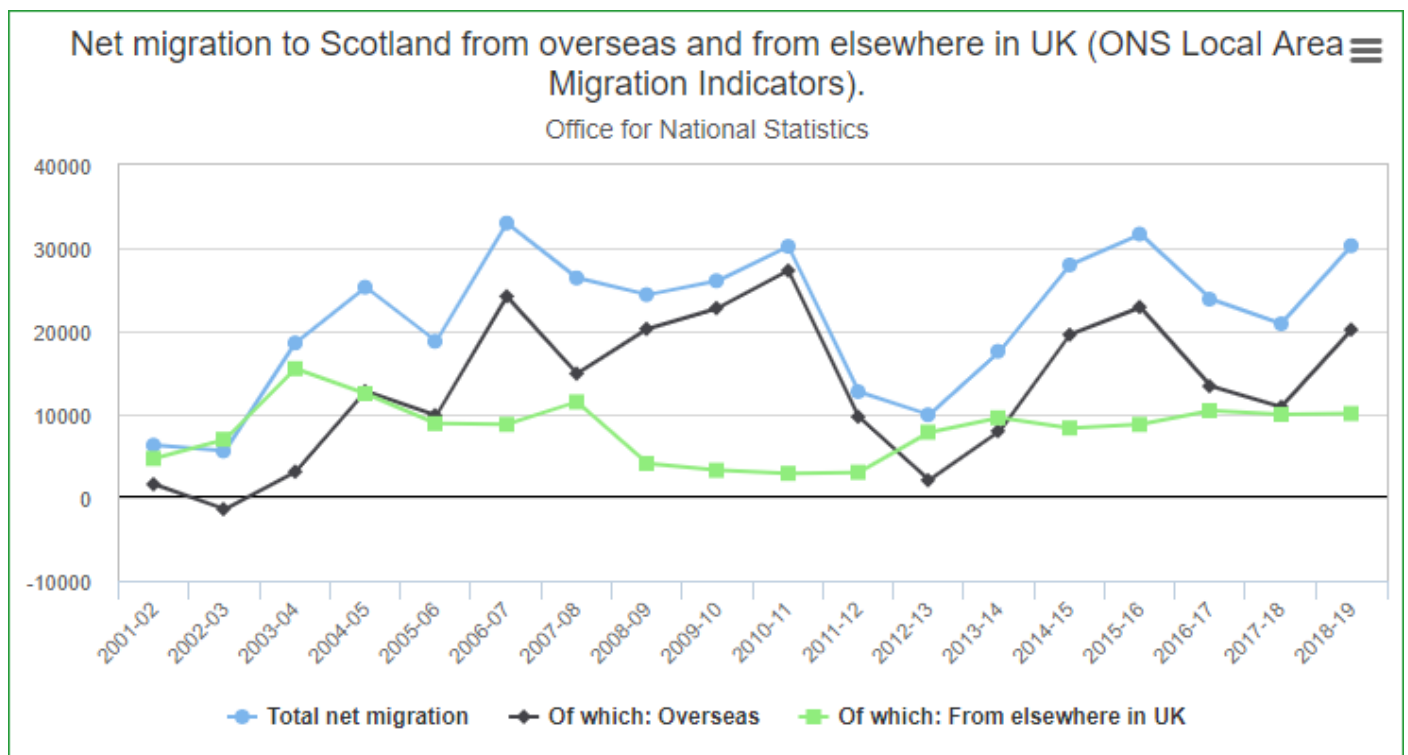


Figure 3: Net migration to Scotland from overseas and from elsewhere in UK (ONS Local Area Migration Indicators)<sup>2</sup>.



4. As a result of immigration, the foreign-born population of Scotland has more than trebled from just over 150,000 in 2000 / 2001 to 530,000 in 2019 / 2020 (over half of whom live in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee). The EU born population rose from 2003 to 2017 but has since flattened out so that the non EU-born population remains slightly larger at 53% of the total. Since 2010, the most notable increases were in Glasgow (where the non-UK born total rose from 63,000 to 103,000 - from 11% to 17% of the total) and Edinburgh (here the non-UK born total increased from 62,000 to 103,000, from 13% to 20% of the total).

Figure 4: Foreign-born population of Scotland - ONS APS (thousands).

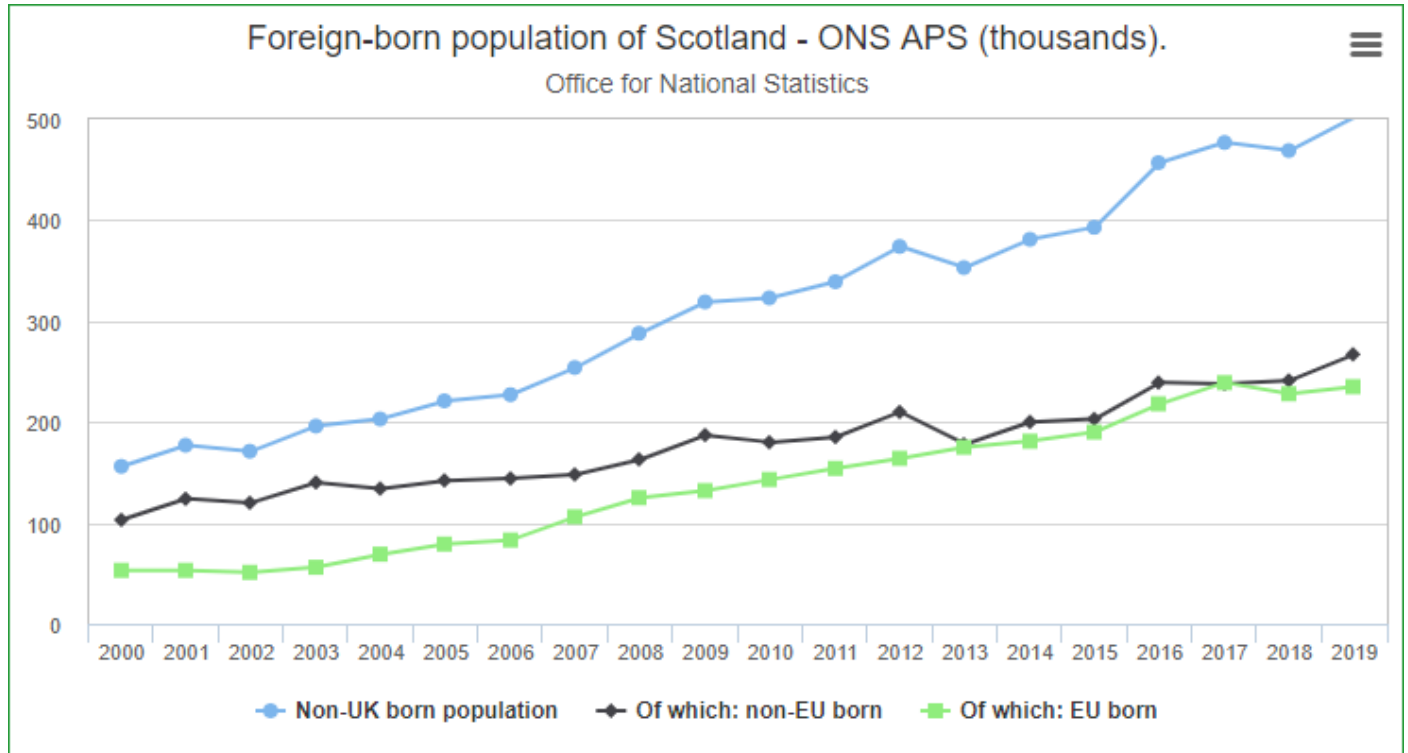


Table 1: Top five areas of UK witnessing highest relative rise in non-UK born - ONS Annual population Survey

Region	2001/02 foreign-born population	2019/20 foreign-born population	Increase	% change
Scotland	177,000	528,000	351,000	198%
Wales	83,000	209,000	126,000	152%
Northern Ireland	54,000	134,000	80,000	148%
East Midlands	230,000	569,000	339,000	147%
North West	297,000	685,000	388,000	131%

## Births to Scottish born mothers

5. Births to Scottish mothers are part of what statisticians call “natural change” – that is the total of births minus the total of deaths in a given year. In 1965, Scotland’s natural change in population was 40,600 but it had fallen to 4,600 by 1975. In more recent years the natural change in Scotland has fluctuated between - 7,700 and + 6,000.

## Births to non UK born mothers in Scotland

6. Births to non UK born mothers increased from 14% in 2010 to 17.5% in 2019 (that is 8,700 out of 50,000 births).<sup>3</sup>

7. There were, however, much higher rates in some cities – 36% in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, 32% in Glasgow and 18% in Dundee. Table 2 below shows the ten Scottish local authorities with the largest increases in the share of births to non-UK born mothers between 2010 and 2019. Particularly notable were the changes in Midlothian and Falkirk where the share more than doubled.

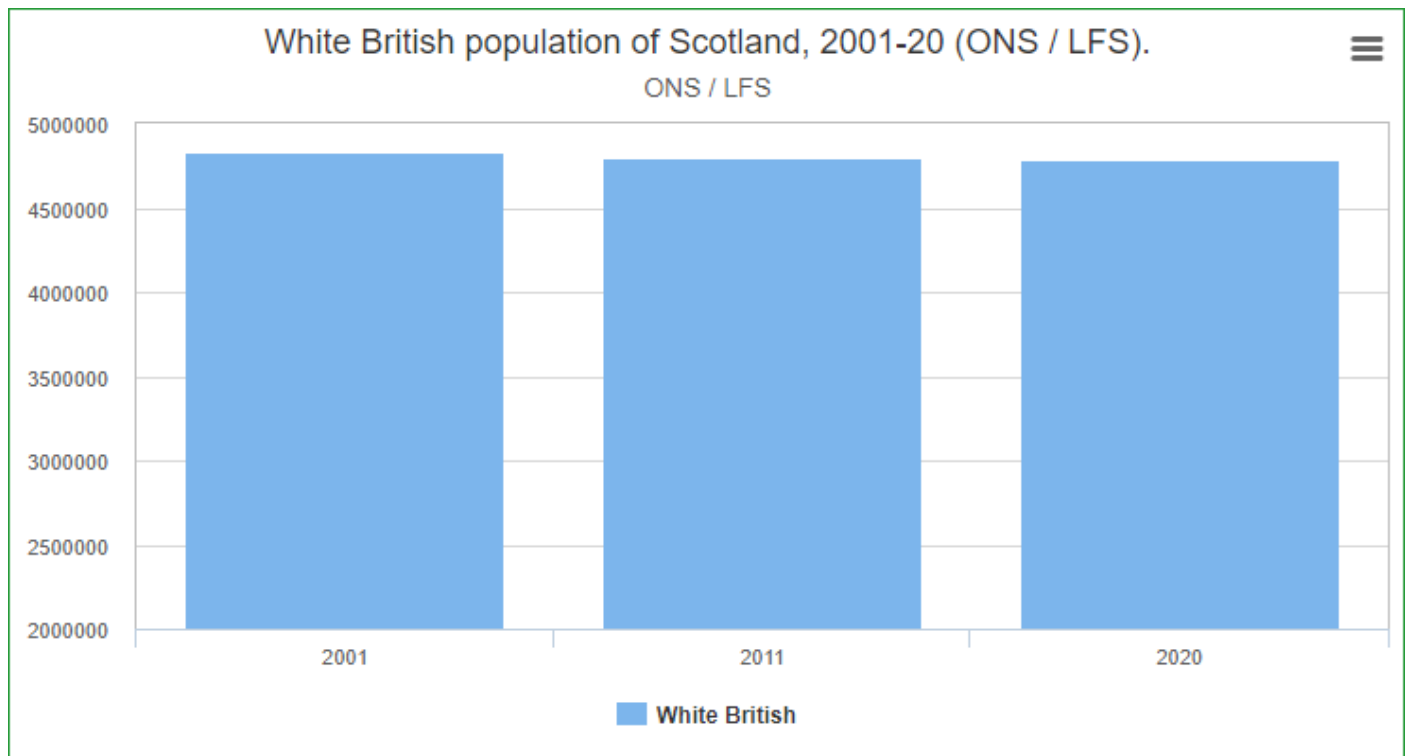
Table 2: Change in share of births to foreign-born mothers, 2010-19 (ONS Local area migration statistics).

Local authority	% births to foreign-born mothers		
	2010	2019	Change (% points)
Midlothian	7.0	17.0	10
City of Edinburgh	27.5	35.7	8
Glasgow	25.0	32	7
Falkirk	6.2	13.2	7
Perth and Kinross	13.5	18.5	5
Renfrewshire	8.6	12.6	4
East Renfrewshire	9.6	13.6	4
Renfrewshire	8.6	12.6	4
Argyll and Bute	9.6	13.2	4
West Dunbartonshire	4.9	8.9	4

# Demographic change in Scotland

8. Statistics from the Labour Force Survey suggest that the White British population has fallen by 52,300 since 2001 (Figure 4 below).

Figure 5: White British population of Scotland, 2001-20 (ONS / LFS).



9. Meanwhile, the combination of immigration and higher birth rates for some immigrant groups has more than tripled the share of the population made up of other ethnicities, from 150,000 to just under 610,000 (Figure 5 below).

Figure 6: Share of total population made up of other ethnicities (ONS / LFS).

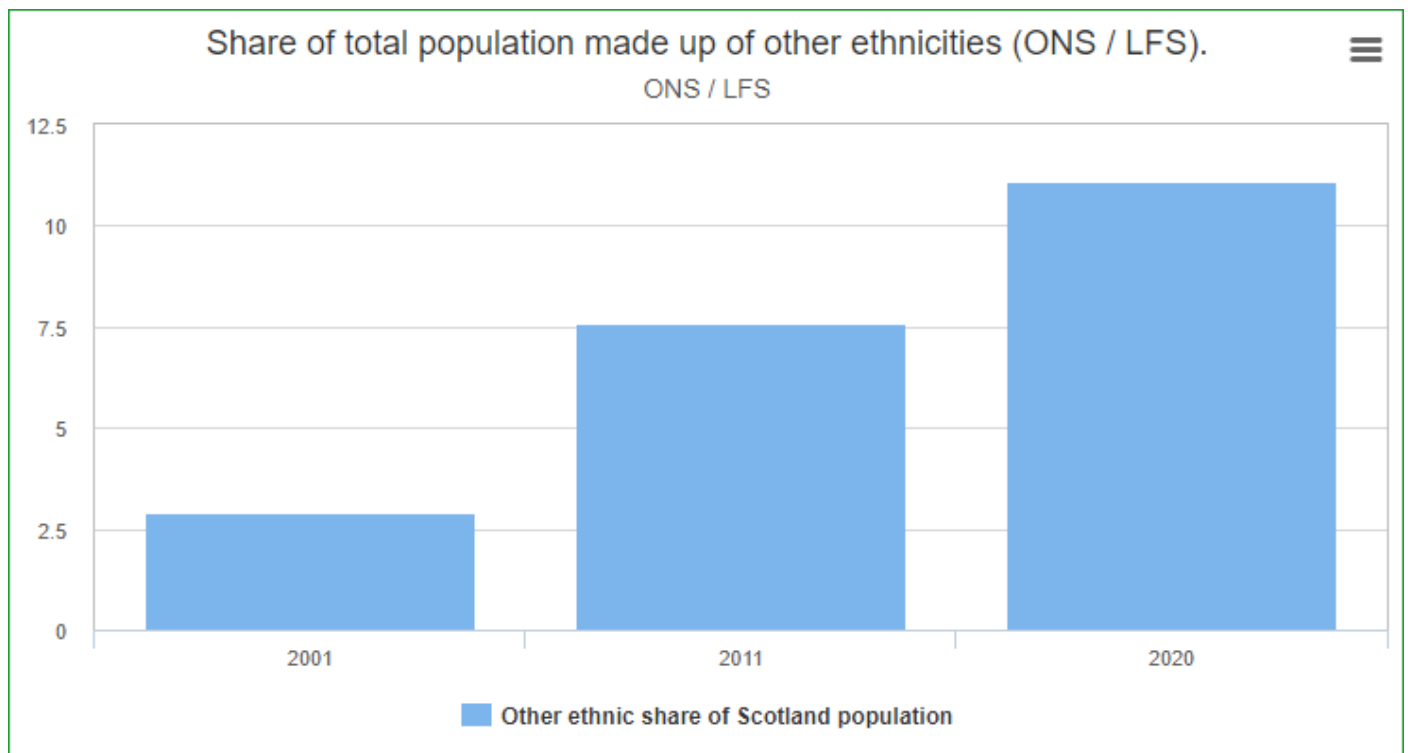
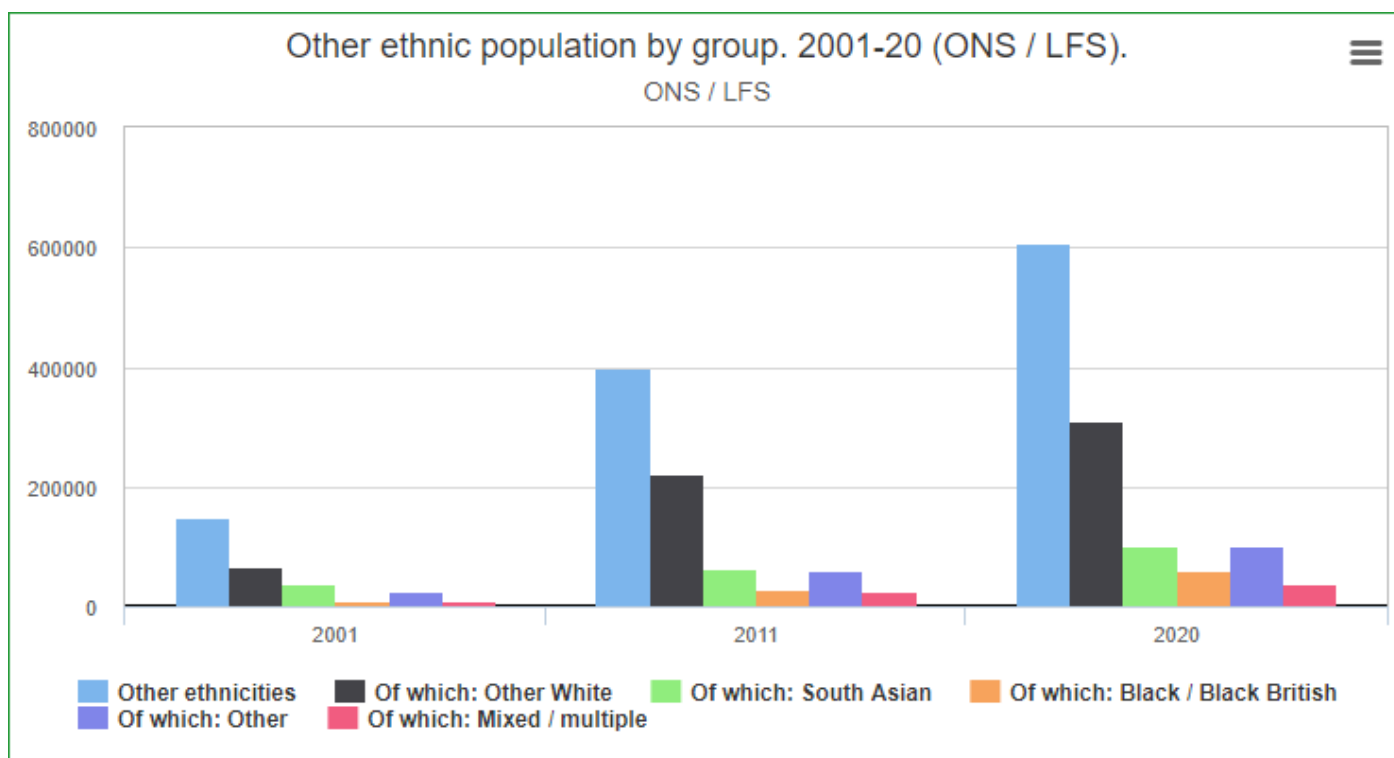


Figure 7: Other ethnic population by group. 2001-20 (ONS / LFS).



10. As elsewhere in the developed world, Scotland’s population is ageing as a result of improving medical care. However, immigration is not an effective remedy as immigrants also grow older so a continuous and increasing level of net migration would be needed to keep the average age down. It is much more effective to raise the retirement age so that the growing number of healthy, older people can continue to contribute to the economy and society. Incentives to companies to increase productivity can also be helpful. Simply bringing in workers reduces the opportunities for work and training for young Scots and builds up problems for the future.

## Asylum and resettlement

11. Since 2014, nearly 3,600 refugees and dependants have been directly resettled to Scotland under the largest of four resettlement schemes that have been in place<sup>4</sup>. This is 16% of the UK total (21,800) during that period, although Scotland accounts for only 8% of the total UK population. Since 2017, the largest number of resettled people (382, just under 1/5) have gone to Edinburgh.

12. It is also important to note that many resettled refugees and supported asylum claimants are placed in inner city areas which already have strained public services and high unemployment. In 2016, Glasgow was placed second top in a list of 10 UK areas for the number of asylum seekers per head of population - with one per every 189 residents<sup>5</sup> and the city hosts about 10% of the 30,000 to 40,000 main applicants who claim asylum in the UK each year; 99% of the total of just under 4,000 asylum seekers receiving taxpayer-funded housing or payments in Scotland as of December 2020 were accommodated in Glasgow (the total supported in Scotland increased by nearly 400 since 2017). It is important to note that (44%) of areas in Glasgow City Council are ranked among Scotland’s most deprived.<sup>6</sup>

# Public opinion on immigration

13. Public opinion in Scotland is very clear in stressing the need for more carefully controlled and reduced immigration – similar to the view in the rest of the UK.

Over the last year, those in Scotland who think that immigration in the last ten years has been too high has risen from 40% to **54%** (YouGov, Spring 2021).

**82%** of respondents in Scotland think that government should ensure that employers prioritise getting British workers back to work instead of making it easier to bring in more foreign workers (Deltapoll, May 2020).

**66%** of people surveyed in Scotland thought that the government was wrong to propose allowing employers to hire an **unlimited** number of overseas workers to fill skilled jobs at pay levels barely above the minimum wage (Deltapoll, May 2020).

**66%** thought that the government was not doing enough to tackle the problem of people illegally crossing the English Channel in small boats from France and Belgium (Deltapoll, May 2020).

**76%** of respondents in Scotland wanted to keep in place an annual cap on work permits issued to foreign workers (Deltapoll, November 2019); the UK government has now scrapped this cap.

**60%** of respondents in Scotland thought that the immigration level experienced over the past five years was a **substantial concern** for the public (Deltapoll, November 2019).

**64%** of people surveyed in Scotland said projected rapid UK population growth being driven by record levels of immigration was a major concern for the public (Deltapoll, November 2019).

**60%** of respondents in Scotland supported a target of reducing net migration to the UK to less than 100,000 per year (Deltapoll, June 2018).

**61%** of respondents in Scotland support the compliant environment policies aimed at deterring illegal immigration (YouGov, April 2018).<sup>7</sup>

## Alternative policies to mass immigration

14. Scotland's population issues are real. Although the population is projected to rise by 2.5% by 2043 this would be the lowest growth in the UK (compared to 10.3% for England and 9% for the UK as a whole). Meanwhile, the working age population is projected to fall from 64% to 62% by 2043, and natural change (births minus deaths - already negative at -7,700 people per year) is expected to fall to lower levels than have ever previously been recorded.<sup>8</sup>

15. However, the implications for population change in Scotland have been stark compared to other parts of the UK (with a 198% change in the foreign-born population since 2001, the highest in the UK compared to any other devolved nation or English region<sup>9</sup>). Not surprisingly - as they witness the multifarious impacts - the public think immigration has been too high.



16. A falling share of the working age population, and gaps in labour provision, do not automatically make a case for more overseas immigration as there are alternative policy responses. One of those is to attract more workers from the rest of the UK, including those from the Scottish diaspora. By one estimate, the number of people outside Scotland who identify as Scots is around 18 million in the New World alone, including 6 million in the U.S. (not counting an almost equal number of Scots-Irish, meaning descendants of Ulstermen), 5 million in Canada and nearly 2 million in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

17. As the David Hume Institute has noted, members of this diaspora are 'often wealthy, highly-skilled and suited to many of the roles that Scotland needs to prosper'. It added in a 2019 report, however, Scotland has not successfully cultivated this group of workers, 'even though many of them are in London - less than 400 miles from the Scottish border'. The institute identified campaigns in Ireland, Australia and New Zealand where emigrants had been encouraged to return.<sup>11</sup>

18. In addition, given that a gross total of around 40,000 people depart Scotland for other parts of the UK each year (with the peak departure age being in the early 20s) much more needs to be done to entice younger Scots (as well as overseas students who study in Scotland) to remain after graduation. This could be done with a more conducive business environment, more competitive tax rates, more lucrative and attractive job opportunities, higher wages and better working conditions.

## Conclusion

19. Despite claims that the Scottish public favour ever higher levels of immigration, the polling outlined above shows that this is simply not true. Scots want controlled immigration at sensible levels but their views have been ignored as the foreign-born population has more than trebled since 2000 - adding over 350,000 people (much more than the population of Aberdeen). The impact has been felt disproportionately in a few areas - especially Glasgow and Edinburgh - where housing, school places and public services witness the most pressure. Parts of major Scottish cities (including some of Scotland's most deprived areas) have also seen major changes to their populations over the past few decades, especially in particular parts of Glasgow.

20. This happened even as the public remained firmly in favour of controlled numbers. With 'natural replacement' having dropped, and an ageing population, the answer cannot be to paper over deep-seated demographic issues by resorting to very high levels of immigration. A more responsible policy would be to do more to encourage a larger portion of the 40,000 people who leave every year for other parts of the UK to stay in Scotland. Policies should be instituted which make it worth the while of young people to stay in the country and start families. This should involve creating an environment that fosters better training, more job opportunities and higher wages. The Scottish Government should also do more to attract those in the huge worldwide Scottish diaspora to return and chip in to contribute to Scotland's future.

5 May 2021

# Notes

1. ONS, Long-term international migration by Destination within the UK", November 2020, URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalmigrationareaofdestinationororiginwithinthektable206>
2. ONS, Local area migration indicators, August 2020, URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithinthek/datasets/localareamigrationindicatorsunitedkingdom>
3. ONS, Local area migration indicators, August 2020, URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithinthek/datasets/localareamigrationindicatorsunitedkingdom>
4. Four resettlement schemes have been in place, under which more than 30,000 people have come to the UK since 2004 - Gateway Protection Programme, Mandate Scheme, Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme. Home Office resettlement statistics. URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/758206/asylum4-sep-2018-tables.ods](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/758206/asylum4-sep-2018-tables.ods) and URL: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/962021/resettlement-local-authority-datasets-dec-2020.xlsx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962021/resettlement-local-authority-datasets-dec-2020.xlsx)
5. BBC News, June 2016, URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-36429041>
6. 'Scotland's most and least deprived areas', STV, January 2020, URL: <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/revealed-scotlands-most-and-least-deprived-areas?top>
7. YouGov, April 2018, URL: [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/dqjh8rbx2e/InternalResults\\_180425\\_Immigration.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/dqjh8rbx2e/InternalResults_180425_Immigration.pdf)
8. National Records of Scotland, Scotland population projections 2018-based, 21 October 2019 (Corrected 2020), URL: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/nrs-visual/prog-pop-18/pop-proj-2018-scot-nat-info.pdf>
9. ONS Annual Population Survey statistics, 2001/2 to 2019/20.
10. Niall Ferguson, Bloomberg, April 2021, URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-04-18/niall-ferguson-to-save-the-u-k-give-scotland-the-canada-treatment>
11. The report also highlighted the Irish marketing move by explaining: "In the 1990s, Ireland managed to reverse its pattern of net emigration by targeting Irish emigrants and their children. People returning home at Christmas and Easter vacations were welcomed with an invite to 'give Ireland a second chance'." David Hume Institute, September 2019. See also BBC News, September 2019.