# My mother’s quiet resilience amid growing hostility towards immigrants in the UK



On the day of the last general election, my mother woke before dawn, driven by a sense of duty that many in her position might not fully comprehend. Although she has no right to vote in the UK, she dedicates her days off to volunteer at polling stations, still believing in the democratic process of a nation she has called home for 15 years. Originally hailing from Italy, she holds legal residence in the UK and shares her life with a British partner, yet despite her substantial contributions, she often feels the weight of judgement simply because of her accent.

Her fluent English and commitment to her adopted community are overshadowed by the experience of being treated with condescension. Activities as basic as communicating with her manager or applying for pension assistance can feel daunting, filled with cultural missteps. She often reminds me of the importance of gratitude, a lesson rooted in her belief that her presence here is a privilege rather than a right.

Deeply engrained in British customs, she embodies a spirit of politeness, offering thanks even when faced with misunderstanding. This attitude was painfully evident when I faced eviction; despite the threats from our landlords, her immediate response was to suggest leaving a thank-you gift. It is this all-consuming need to feel grateful, to prove her worth, that starkly contrasts her life before immigrating—where she never felt the need to repay a moral debt for simply existing.

In the face of adversity, she serves as a model of resilience, attending local community initiatives such as the Red Cross and participating in the 2021 census, despite encounters of hostility and indifference. The recent wave of anti-immigration sentiments, sparked by riots across England and Northern Ireland, has only intensified the insecurity felt among many foreign-born residents. These events serve as stark reminders of the precariousness of her situation.

Following Brexit, the rise of the right-wing Reform UK party, led by Nigel Farage, has cast a long shadow over the accepted narrative of British identity. Such shifts translate into increasingly tough immigration policies; recently, Prime Minister Keir Starmer proposed changes that would limit visa options for skilled and low-skilled workers alike, adding to growing apprehensions among immigrants who already feel unwelcome. A recent YouGov poll revealed another equally alarming figure: 70% of respondents believe immigration levels have been too high over the past decade.

The rhetoric from political leaders has only served to exacerbate the discomfort experienced by my mother and others like her, painting them as burdens rather than contributors. Despite the economic realities confirming that immigration typically enhances national productivity—according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UK’s migration levels are comparable to other high-income countries—the perception remains skewed.

My mother finds motivation in her dreams of contributing towards a future society that recognises her contributions. Yet, she is increasingly aware that her position as an immigrant makes her a target for political machinations. The government’s recent announcements, including plans to curb net migration, reveal a political climate where immigrants are often viewed with hostility rather than as members of the community. The Office for National Statistics reported that net migration hit a staggering 906,000 in mid-2023, a significant rise from previous years, and the population is projected to grow to 72.5 million by 2032, with many attributing this growth to migration.

With the increasing difficulty for immigrants to establish themselves and live without fear, many, including my mother, are re-evaluating their futures in the UK. The privilege of an EU passport grants her a potential exit strategy, a means to return to safety in Italy, where the sentiment towards immigrants is complex yet less fraught with hostility. Fears around the rise of extreme right discourse in government policy and its potential outcomes are genuinely unsettling.

Despite these challenges, she continues to demonstrate remarkable fortitude. Even after participating in her first anti-racism protest—understanding the risks, such as alienation from colleagues—she maintains her unwavering spirit, greeting others with kindness. Her experience serves as a poignant reminder that the struggle for acceptance and belonging in a new homeland often burdens those who contribute richly to society.

As she still makes her way to the polling station to give back to her adopted country, it’s heartening to note her enduring resolve. No matter how little acknowledgment she receives from the political sphere, she embodies the spirit of resilience that many immigrants demonstrate daily, contributing profoundly to the very society that often struggles to recognise their worth.

### Reference Map

1. All aspects of my mother’s story and perspective on her immigrant experience.
2. Discussion on the UK government’s proposed immigration policy changes under Keir Starmer.
3. General information about legal migration trends in OECD countries, with particular focus on labour shortages addressed by migration.
4. Insights about population projections in the UK and their implications for future immigration policy.
5. Data on population growth in England and Wales driven by net migration.
6. Examination of the net migration trend and the political landscape surrounding immigration.
7. Overview of UK legislative efforts aimed at reducing unauthorized migration and its impact on immigrant communities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/10/immigrant-mother-always-needs-prove-herself-uk-make-me-uncomfortable> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-plans-end-failed-free-market-experiment-immigration-2025-05-10/> - The UK government, led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, announced plans to overhaul its immigration policy, aiming to end what it termed a 'failed free market experiment' in mass immigration. The proposed changes, to be detailed in a forthcoming white paper, include restricting skilled worker visas to graduate-level jobs and limiting lower-skilled visas to roles vital to the national industrial strategy. Additionally, businesses will be required to invest more in training British workers. This policy shift comes amidst growing pressure to curb net migration, especially following the electoral gains of the anti-immigration Reform UK party led by Nigel Farage. Interior Minister Yvette Cooper criticized the previous Conservative government's approach, which had broadened visa eligibility to include roles such as yoga teachers and DJs after Brexit. Despite initial reductions in EU migration post-Brexit, overall immigration surged, driven by new visa rules and special schemes for Ukrainians and Hongkongers, resulting in record net migration of 906,000 by June 2023, a significant rise from 184,000 in 2019.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/c5f2ff4d-252d-45d6-ab25-44ee6bfabb96> - In 2023, legal migration to 38 OECD member countries, including the US, the UK, Canada, France, and Japan, hit a record high with approximately 6.5 million people relocating, marking a nearly 10% increase from 2022. The surge, prominently driven by the UK's recruitment for the care sector, fostered economic recovery post-pandemic by addressing labor shortages and contributing to job creation. However, the increasing migration numbers sparked voter backlash, causing many incumbent governments to lose elections. Notably, the US experienced a significant rise in asylum seekers, totaling over a million applications primarily from Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Haiti. Despite the economic benefits, some nations, including Canada, Australia, and the UK, have implemented stricter immigration controls and reassessed policies on international students to address housing market pressures. Analysts warn that restricting immigration could impede growth and exacerbate inflation, emphasizing the need for careful management of migration policies moving forward.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-population-projected-reach-725-million-by-2032-2025-01-28/> - The UK population is expected to increase to 72.5 million by mid-2032 from 67.6 million in mid-2022, primarily due to net migration, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This growth, driven by a net migration of 4.9 million people, may heighten debates over the impact on public services and the need for foreign workers. Although successive governments, including that of Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer, have aimed to reduce immigration, it remains a significant factor following the Brexit vote and the rise of the right-wing Reform UK party. Births and deaths are projected to be nearly equal, thereby having minimal natural impact on population change. The ONS also assumes a long-term net migration of 340,000 people annually from mid-2028. Last year, UK net migration hit a record of over 900,000, with immigration from countries like India, Nigeria, and Pakistan increasing, largely to fill health and social care roles.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/population-england-wales-rises-by-most-75-years-2024-07-15/> - In mid-2023, England and Wales experienced their largest population increase in 75 years, rising by 610,000 to a total of 60.9 million. This growth was predominantly driven by record net international migration, which increased to 622,000, despite 'natural' population growth (births minus deaths) dropping to just 400, the lowest since 1978. Additionally, a net 13,800 people relocated from England and Wales to Scotland or Northern Ireland. The last significant population increase occurred in 1948 due to the post-World War II baby boom and the return of British military personnel. The overall UK population was 67.6 million in mid-2022, with 2023 data pending. However, the economic output did not keep pace with the population growth, resulting in a 0.7% drop in GDP per capita. Post-Brexit changes to visas led to a decrease in EU migrants but an increase in immigration from India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. To curb this trend, the government has tightened rules to prevent low-paid social care workers from bringing dependents.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/67cfd5c4-e79f-4f48-9226-dc592aa6aa74> - In 2023, net migration to the UK decreased by 10% to 685,000, though this remains well above historical averages. The peak in net migration for 2022 was subsequently revised to 764,000. Migration remains a critical issue for voters as the upcoming general election approaches, placing Prime Minister Rishi Sunak under pressure to reduce these numbers. Economists caution that significant reductions could negatively impact universities, the care sector, and the broader economy. Home Secretary James Cleverly announced measures to counter fraudulent recruitment agents and introduced stricter compliance standards for universities, affecting international students' financial requirements. Opponents pointed out the government's failure to reduce net migration, noting a surge in work-related arrivals, particularly from India and Nigeria, predominantly for health and social care roles. Recent policy measures, including restrictions on family members of students and higher salary thresholds for skilled workers, are projected to cut net immigration by up to 300,000. Experts warn that these reductions could harm universities and care sector recruitment, creating challenging decisions for the next government.
7. <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2024_50b0353e-en.html> - The primary legislative efforts focused on reducing historically high levels of net migration, and on stopping undocumented migration, notably those arriving across the Channel in small boats. For 2023, net migration figures for the United Kingdom were estimated at 685,000, and the number of irregular arrivals detected amounted to 36,700 (down 33% from 2022) of which 29,400 were small boat arrivals (down 36% on 2022). From late 2023 to early 2024, the UK Government brought in five key changes aimed at reducing net migration: (i) restrictions on most international students from being able to bring their dependents (partners and children) (ii) removal of adult social care workers ability to bring dependants on their visa; (iii) increase of the baseline minimum salary to be sponsored for a Skilled Worker visa from GBP 26,200 to GBP 38,700; (iv) limitation of the list of jobs (Immigration Salary List) for which it is possible to sponsor someone for a Skilled Worker visa at a reduced minimum salary; (v) increase in the minimum income normally required to sponsor for a spouse/partner visa from GBP 18,600 per year to GBP 29,000 (and further rise to GBP 38,700 by early 2025). In 2023, the UK Parliament passed the Illegal Migration Act which changed the law so that individuals arriving in the United Kingdom illegally are not able to stay, and will instead be detained and promptly removed, either to their home country or to a safe third country. It aims to deter illegal entry to the United Kingdom including those made by small boat across the Channel, speed up the removal of those individuals with no right to remain, curtail the abuse of modern slavery safeguards to block removals, and commit to resettle a specific number of the most vulnerable refugees in the United Kingdom every year.