# UK plans new reservoirs as immigration and climate change threaten water supplies



The UK is facing a critical water crisis, with warnings that some regions could run out of drinking water in just a decade. This alarming forecast arises amid record levels of immigration, which government officials have linked to rising demands on the country’s water supply. The pressing situation has prompted Labour’s Environment Secretary, Steve Reed, to announce plans for two major reservoirs in East Anglia and Lincolnshire, marking the first such developments in over 30 years. By elevating these projects to a nationally significant status, the government aims to expedite their approval process, which could provide essential resources for approximately 750,000 homes in some of the nation’s most water-stressed areas.

The implications of immigration on water demand are stark. A report by Migration Watch UK estimates that net migration could contribute an additional 6.3 million people to England's population by 2034/35. This increase is projected to result in an additional daily water demand of around 850 million litres. As the UK’s population grows, so too does the urgency to expand water infrastructure to avert notable increases in household water bills and mitigate the potential for shortages.

Despite the severe forecast, the underlying issues plaguing the UK’s water supply extend beyond population growth. Sir James Bevan, head of the Environment Agency, has pointed to climate change and inefficient water usage as contributing factors to the looming shortages. He has previously described the situation as an "existential threat," emphasising the necessity for behavioural changes to safeguard England’s water future. Furthermore, experts have pointed out that despite experiencing record rainfall in recent years, the country struggles with outdated and inadequate water storage infrastructure, which is ill-equipped to manage the increased demand.

Urbanisation compounds these issues, as more people flock to cities, exacerbating the pressure on water resources. Research has highlighted that cities like London face particularly acute shortages if current trends continue. A report from as early as 2012 revealed that London loses nearly one billion litres of water each day due to infrastructure leaks, underscoring the dire need for improved management and conservation efforts. Thames Water, responsible for much of the capital's supply, has faced criticism for its failure to implement long-term plans to mitigate water loss, reflecting a broader need for urgent action and reform across the UK's water management systems.

Critics within the political landscape add to the discourse, with Shadow Environment Secretary Victoria Atkins attributing the reservoir crisis to Labour's management failures in both farming policies and immigration control. This sentiment reflects an ongoing debate about accountability and pragmatic responses to a problem that appears to be intensifying.

Scientists and experts warn that the projections are sobering; without stringent measures and comprehensive planning, the risk of summer water shortages looms large. The need for new reservoirs is echoed in calls for a coordinated national strategy to contend with anticipated deficits of up to five billion litres per day by 2050. The National Audit Office has already highlighted the necessity for at least nine new reservoirs, among other infrastructure initiatives, with estimated costs reaching significant figures.

As the nation grapples with these challenges, the integrated approach to water conservation, improved infrastructure, and effective policy implementation may determine the UK’s capacity to manage its water resources adequately in the face of rising demand and intensifying environmental pressures.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2061461/brits-warned-drinking-water-migration), [[2]](https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/255/immigration-and-the-demand-for-water-in-england)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/255/immigration-and-the-demand-for-water-in-england), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47620228), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/why-uk-facing-water-shortages-despite-record-rainfall-explainer), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/hp/front/shortage-of-london-water-in-10-years-7182626.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/no-plan-to-address-looming-uk-water-shortage-damning-report-finds-5098728)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2061461/brits-warned-drinking-water-migration), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2061461/brits-warned-drinking-water-migration> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/255/immigration-and-the-demand-for-water-in-england> - Migration Watch UK's briefing paper examines the impact of immigration on water demand in England. It estimates that net migration will add 6.3 million people by 2034/35, leading to an increased daily water demand of approximately 850 million litres. The paper highlights the need for additional water resources, such as new reservoirs, to meet this demand, and discusses the potential costs to households in the form of increased water bills. The analysis underscores the importance of addressing water supply challenges in the context of population growth due to immigration.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47620228> - In 2019, Sir James Bevan, head of the Environment Agency, warned that England could face water shortages within 25 years due to climate change and population growth. He described this as an 'existential threat' and advocated for more efficient water use. Bevan emphasized the need for behavioural changes to ensure long-term water security, highlighting the urgency of addressing these challenges to prevent future water scarcity.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/why-uk-facing-water-shortages-despite-record-rainfall-explainer> - An article in The Guardian explores why the UK faces water shortages despite experiencing record rainfall. It discusses factors such as inadequate water storage infrastructure, urbanisation, and climate change. The piece highlights the challenges in managing water resources effectively and the need for improved infrastructure and policies to address the growing demand and mitigate the risk of water scarcity.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn> - Scientists warn that the UK is at risk of summer water shortages and potential hosepipe bans. The article discusses the impact of climate change, population growth, and infrastructure issues on water supply. It highlights the need for better water management and conservation efforts to prevent future shortages and ensure a sustainable water supply for the country.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/hp/front/shortage-of-london-water-in-10-years-7182626.html> - A report from 2012 warns that London faces water shortages within a decade unless action is taken to stem leaks. The capital loses almost one billion litres of water each day before it reaches the customer, accounting for 40% of the national total. The report criticizes Thames Water for failing to plan long-term and urges better education on water conservation.
7. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/no-plan-to-address-looming-uk-water-shortage-damning-report-finds-5098728> - A report from April 2025 highlights the UK's lack of a coordinated national plan to address a projected daily water shortage of five billion litres by 2050. The National Audit Office states that nine new reservoirs are needed, among 30 major projects, at a cost of £52 billion, in addition to the £290 billion set to be spent maintaining the current network.