

Attitudes to Immigration in Scotland: Cautious pragmatism?

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About Migration Policy Scotland

Migration Policy Scotland offers a home for open dialogue and informed response to migration. We harness insights from lived and learned experience to drive work that is grounded in the realities of migration in Scotland

Contents

Introduction	4
Key findings	6
Methodology and presentation of findings	7
1. Levels of immigration – perceptions and preferences	8
1.1 Perceived level of immigration	8
1.2 Preferences for increasing, maintaining or decreasing levels of immigration	9
1.3 Preferences for increasing or decreasing levels of immigration by visa type	11
1.4 Preferences for types of migration by length of stay	13
2. Immigration policy preferences	16
2.1 Recruiting from abroad	17
2.2 Graduate visas	18
2.3 Welcoming programmes	19
2.4 Eligibility for social benefits	21
3. Impacts of immigration for Scotland and local areas	23
3.1 Overall impacts at Scottish and local levels	23
3.2 Perceptions of economic, demographic, social and cultural impacts of immigration	26
4. Attitudes towards Diversity	31
5. Experiences of immigration	33
References	35
Appendix 1: Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey	36

Introduction

The 2024 Migration Policy Scotland survey of attitudes to immigration finds that public support for immigration has cooled. At the same time there is evidence of a pragmatic acceptance among the Scottish public of the economic and demographic need for immigration. Critically, given the changing economic context, there is widespread acceptance of employers' need to recruit from abroad and strong agreement that immigration helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find workers nationally and locally. Demographically, immigration is seen as able to bring people to parts of Scotland that need them, and a majority favour longer-term stays for labour migrants. Public concerns about the impacts of immigration are most strongly expressed in relation to potential social conflict, increased welfare burdens and worsening crime. However, such concerns are coupled with support for measures that can help to integrate immigrants, potentially alleviating risks. These include welcoming programmes and access to social benefits for migrant workers.

This second Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey updates our understanding of what the Scottish public thinks about immigration. It builds on our 2023 survey, developing an evidence base that helps policymakers and others make better informed choices in a complex and changing context. The survey complements UK attitudinal data by providing a representative sample within Scotland and covering issues that are particularly important in the Scottish context. This year, we have expanded both the sample size and the scope of the questions. The additional questions investigate attitudes to different types of immigration according to visa category; test views on a wider range of immigration impacts; and ascertain public views on specific policy issues where change is imminent or the subject of current debate. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey 2024 is included in the Understanding Scotland series¹ allowing for analysis across a wider range of socio-economic profile variables than in 2023. Additional data gathered, on how respondents voted in the 2019 General Election, allow analysis by party political preference. We analyse between-group differences throughout the report. The distinctive views of those voting Conservative compared to those voting for the other mainstream parties in the 2019 general election are striking. This mirrors the distinct party-political contrast found in other UK-wide surveys recently.²

Support for immigration has cooled over the past 12 months. The largest group now favours a reduction (42%) rather than an increase in numbers. Although, when interpreting these results we should keep in mind that there is a large difference between people's estimation of immigration levels and the actual level of immigration. Nonetheless, the growing support for a reduction in immigration which we found, chimes with recent UK-wide data which shows a similar trend as well as rising salience of immigration as an issue of concern.³ The Ipsos Issues Index shows the proportion of respondents who believe immigration to be the most important issue facing Britain rising to 23% in January 2024, up from 15% a year earlier.⁴ While growing public support for immigration reduction is clear, it is less apparent from our survey data how people would want such a decline to be achieved. People's preferences for the kinds of immigration they would like reduced favours routes with smaller inflows.

1 Understanding Scotland – Understanding Scotland (understanding-scotland.co.uk)

2 E.g.: Rolfe, H., Katwala, S., and Ballinger, S (March 2024) *Immigration and the Election: Time to choose*, British Future and Richards, L., Fernandez-Reino, M., and Blinder, S. (September 2023) *UK Public Opinion towards Immigration: Overall attitudes and level of concern*, Migration Observatory

3 Rolfe, H., Katwala, S. and Ballinger, S. (March 2024)

4 Ipsos (January 2024) *Ipsos Issues Index*, Ipsos

This creates a practical dilemma, especially as the larger immigration routes continue to attract considerable support. In the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey 2024, fewer than 1 in 5 people support a reduction in numbers arriving for work or study, or on specific humanitarian schemes. Indeed, there is substantial support for increasing numbers on these routes.

On immigration impacts the Scottish public remains more positive than negative, especially at national level. Across a range of impacts people were more likely to agree than disagree with positive statements at both national and local level. Agreement is strongest both nationally and locally on the benefits immigration offers in filling jobs for which it is hard to find workers, enriching Scottish cultural life and bringing new people to areas that need them. Views on possible negative impacts are more mixed. Overall people are less decisive about immigration impacts at local level. This may be because levels of immigration in Scotland remain relatively low, meaning local level impacts are not discernible. The majority of respondents (51%) report no social contact with immigrants at all. Despite this, attitudes to diversity are strongly positive: 65% believe diversity is good for Scotland and more than half (52%) agree that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live.

The findings of this second round of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey highlight that public attitudes change and are often contradictory. It is important not to become complacent about public views or to treat these as immutable. Attitudinal data provide helpful, up-to-date insight on public views that can help define the scope for action, but they are not well-suited to guiding policy choices. Migration Policy Scotland does not take the view that migration policies should be defined by public views on immigration.⁵ Follow-on research can help to unpack apparent contradictions and develop further understanding of preferred responses to policy dilemmas. But policy making on immigration needs to consider the trade-offs implicit within policy choices in a way that polling does not.

In the run up to a general election this year public and political rhetoric on immigration is even more highly charged than usual. Net migration figures have reached an historic high. The UK government aims to bring this figure down and has responded with a range of measures.⁶ Salary thresholds for skilled worker visas have been raised, as have a range of visa fees and charges. Those on health and social care visas have been barred from bringing dependant family members with them, as have the majority of international students. The minimum income requirement for family visa applications has also been raised. In addition, the UK government has stated its determination to prevent small boat crossings in the Channel and overhaul the asylum system.

At the same time substantial change is looming. Developments in Artificial Intelligence and the need to reduce carbon emissions imply significant changes in workforce needs that are likely to require migrant workers. Policymaking on immigration needs to develop solutions to the interconnected challenges emerging economically and demographically while addressing the issues that arise as societies change. Divisive politics on immigration pose an obstacle to this while claiming to be based on divisions in public opinion. We have found a resurgence in support for reducing immigration in Scotland in the second round of this survey. We have also found indications of acceptance from the public that policymakers need to draw on immigration to help address the challenges that lie ahead. It is becoming ever more important to move beyond a divisive political debate towards the learning and compromise needed to develop effective real-world solutions.

⁵ For a discussion see Blinder, S. (May 2012) *Public Opinion and Public Policy: Complexities of the Democratic Mandate*, Migration Observatory

⁶ See further: Randolph, H. and Kay, R (March 2024) *The Potential Impact of Recent UK Immigration Announcements in Scotland*, Fraser of Allander Institute

Key findings

1. The largest group of respondents prefers a reduction in the level of immigration (42%). This is a clear shift from 12 months ago where the largest group preferred an increase. However, in contrast to UK-wide surveys, the proportion favouring a reduction is not currently the majority.
2. Survey responses suggest a pragmatic outlook on the contribution immigration makes to the Scottish economy. There is widespread support for employers to recruit from abroad, strong agreement that immigration helps fill jobs where workers are needed and clear support for increasing or maintaining the current number of work and study visas.
3. Views on the impacts of immigration remain more positive than negative, especially at national level. Importantly, given Scotland's population concerns, there is strong agreement that immigration brings new people to areas that need them and a clear majority in favour of longer-term stays and access to settlement for labour migrants.

Methodology and presentation of findings

Migration Policy Scotland drafted the survey questionnaire in consultation with Diffley Partnership and other experts. The survey was included within the Understanding Scotland series, and invitations to complete the survey between 1st-5th February 2024 were sent out through the online ScotPulse panel.⁷ This yielded 2,305 responses from across all 8 Scottish Parliamentary regions. For the purpose of statistical analysis, responses have been weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender. The questionnaire contained 15 questions and is reproduced in Appendix 1.

This report presents the key findings of this polling, including between-group differences and comparisons to our previous round of polling where relevant, with the aid of data visualizations.⁸ To look for relationships or variations between sub-groups two-sample t-tests explore the likelihood that percentage differences have occurred because of true differences within sub-groups of the population. Statistical differences between groups are reported at the 95% level. Differences are reported when statistically significant and reporting does not include the result of every statistical test conducted; the most relevant and salient results are highlighted.

The wider Understanding Scotland series gathers data on respondents' socio-economic profiles such as age, gender, education, employment status, evaluations of economic conditions, social group and geographic location, including Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). We have drawn on these where relevant in our analysis of between-group comparisons. Furthermore, because attitudes to immigration often vary by party-political preference, our survey asked respondents about their vote at the most recent UK General Election. This allows us to make comparisons between groups defined by broader political views.

Finally, the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey asks questions about respondents' social contact with immigrants and about their attitudes to diversity. This is done to develop insight into the relationship between people's attitudes to immigration, their attitudes to diversity and their experiences of immigration. This is particularly important in Scotland where levels of immigration and associated diversity within the population are relatively low when compared, for example, to much of England. Throughout the report we detail the relationship between experiences of and attitudes to immigration and diversity. The responses to the attitudes to diversity and the social contact questions are described in detail in the final sections of the report.

⁷ Scotpulse

⁸ Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'N/A' categories, or to questions allowing multiple answers. Aggregate percentages (e.g. 'agree'/'disagree') are calculated from absolute values, therefore aggregate percentages may differ from the sum of the individual scores due to rounding.

1. Levels of immigration – perceptions and preferences

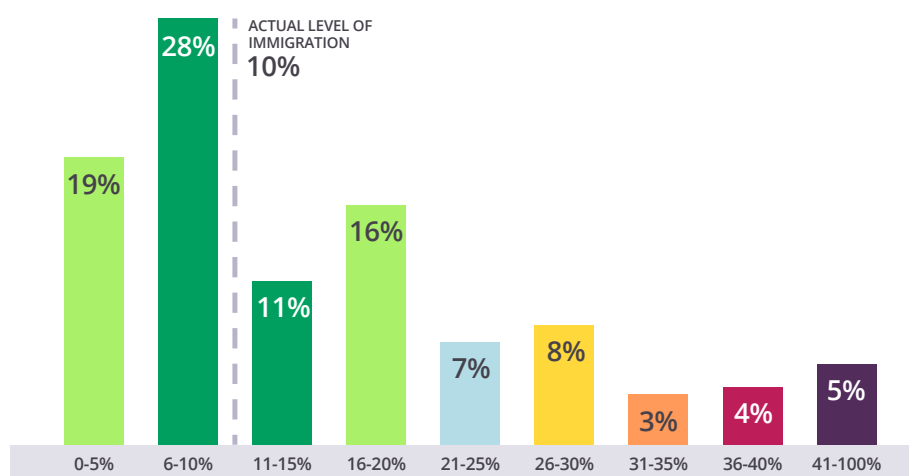
The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey includes questions to understand what people in Scotland believe the level of immigration to be and questions on whether they wish the level of immigration to increase, decrease or stay the same. These are standard questions in many surveys of attitudes to immigration. This first section describes our findings on perceived levels of immigration and on preferences regarding the level of immigration, both generally and in relation to specific types of immigration focusing on different visa types and length of stay.

1.1 Perceived level of immigration

According to data from June 2021, roughly 10% of the Scottish population was born outside of the UK.⁹ We find that a plurality of respondents tend to overestimate the level of immigration in Scotland. 43% of respondents believe the proportion of immigrants to be over 15% of the population. Just 19% underestimate the immigrant population by a similar margin believing it to be 5% or lower. The spread of responses is shown in figure 1. Our findings confirm a general tendency to overestimate immigrant populations in surveys. However, this overestimation is not as large as in last year's Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey, where 47% of respondents overestimated this proportion to the same degree.¹⁰

Figure 1: Perceptions of current immigration level

*In your opinion, what percentage of the total Scotland population are immigrants?
You can answer any number between 0 and 100.*



Data presented in increments of 5, excluding the last category where data segments were merged for clarity

⁹ Population by country of birth and nationality (Discontinued after June 2021) – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk). Census data for Scotland (2022) still to be published.

¹⁰ Kyambi, S. and Kay, R. (September 2023) Attitudes to Immigration: A view from Scotland, Migration Policy Scotland, Migration Policy Scotland

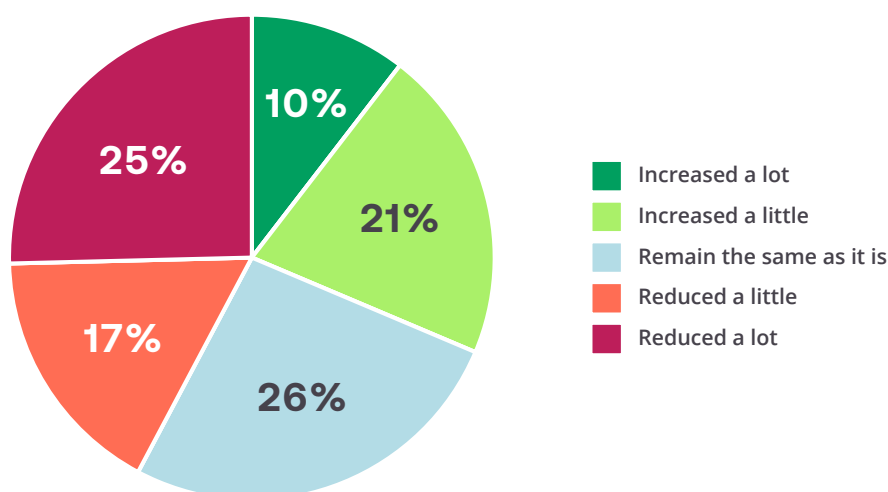
Key demographics affect perceptions of the size of the immigrant population. Gender correlates with the accuracy of estimations: 44% of men estimate the size of the immigrant population as between 6-15% compared to 33% of women. A higher propensity to overestimate the size of the immigrant population is associated with certain other characteristics and perspectives. These include lower social grade and higher levels of neighbourhood deprivation, as well as more negative attitudes towards diversity, support for immigration reduction and the belief that immigration impacts are negative.

1.2 Preferences for increasing, maintaining or decreasing levels of immigration

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey asks respondents about their preferred level of immigration. When interpreting these results, we must keep in mind the large difference between people's estimation of immigration levels and the true immigration rate. The largest group of respondents would prefer to see a reduction in the number of immigrants coming to Scotland (42%), of these the larger group would like to see immigration reduced 'a lot' (25%). 31% express a preference for immigration to increase, while 26% want it to remain the same.

Figure 2: Preferred level of immigration

Do you think the number of immigrants coming to Scotland nowadays should be increased (a lot, a little) remain the same, or reduced (a little, a lot)?



Some important differences in the preferred level of immigration are associated with voter choice. Those who voted for the Conservative Party in the 2019 UK General election are most likely to say that they want to see immigration reduced (68%), compared to those who voted for the other main political parties, including Labour (43%), Liberal Democrats (31%), and SNP (29%). In contrast, those who voted for the SNP are most likely to say that immigration should be increased (42%), compared to Labour (28%), Liberal Democrats (27%), and Conservatives (14%). Those who voted for the Liberal Democrats are most likely to say that immigration should remain the same (42%), in comparison to those who voted Labour (30%), SNP (28%), and Conservative (18%).

Analysis of the survey results indicates that attitudes to diversity and views on immigration impacts also correspond to preferences for levels of immigration in the ways one might expect. Those who hold positive views about diversity are more likely to believe that immigration should be increased, while those who hold negative views are more likely to believe that immigration should be decreased. Similarly, those who believe that immigration

has a positive impact on Scotland and their local area are more supportive of increases in immigration (53%; 55%), than those who believe that immigration has a negative impact at either level (7%; 7%). And those who believe immigration has a negative impact at national and local level are more likely to support reductions in immigration (89%; 84%), compared to those who believe immigration has a positive impact at each level (15%; 15%). It is worth noting however, that whilst there is a strong association between holding negative views of immigration impacts and support for reducing numbers, a substantial portion of those who view immigration impacts positively (32%; 31%) prefer that numbers remain as they are rather than increase.

Analysis of the survey results found splits by the following key demographics – gender, social grade, neighbourhood deprivation, education, and social contact.

Gender. Men are more likely than women to say that they wish to see immigration reduced (47%; 38%) – and reduced a lot (29%; 22%).

Social grade. Those in social grades ABC1 are more likely than those in grades C2DE to say that immigration should be increased (35%; 26%). Those in grades C2DE are also more likely than those in grades ABC1 to say that immigration should be reduced (50%; 36%) – and reduced a lot (34%; 19%).

Neighbourhood deprivation. Individuals who reside in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD4 and 5) are more likely than those who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD1) to say that they want to see the number of immigrants coming to Scotland increased (35%; 27%).

Education. Those with a degree, further degree or equivalent are more likely than those with all other levels of education to believe that immigration should be increased (43%; 27%).

Social Contact. Those who regularly speak to immigrants are more likely to support an increase in immigration levels (42%) compared to those who report having no social contact (24%).

Our findings this year demonstrate a sizeable shift since our 2023 survey where just 28% wished to see a reduction in numbers, while 38% wished to see an increase and the proportion wanting immigration levels to remain the same was 34%. This marks a return to a more common breakdown of responses in UK attitudinal data. Table 1 lays out changes between our 2023 and 2024 findings, as well as comparisons between the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey and the UK-wide Ipsos/British Future Immigration Tracker. Such comparisons should however be approached with caution – these surveys have been conducted at different points in time and include slightly different response options.

Table 1: Preferred levels of immigration Scotland-UK comparison, 2024, 2023

Should the number of immigrants coming to Scotland/Britain be increased (a lot, a little) reduced (a lot, a little) or remain the same

	2024		2023	
	MPS Attitudes Survey ¹¹	Ipsos/British Future Tracker ¹²	MPS Attitudes Survey	Ipsos/British Future Tracker
Increased (a little, a lot)	31	16	38	22
Remain the same	26	23	34	22
Decreased (a little, a lot)	42	52	28	48
DK	NA	8	NA	8

The Ipsos/British Future tracker and the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey both reflect more restrictive views in 2024 than in 2023. The most dramatic shift is in opinions in Scotland favouring a reduction – an increase from 28% to 42%. Yet the preference for immigration to be reduced remains less pronounced in Scotland than in the UK-wide survey. For the UK as a whole, a majority (52%) favour a reduction in immigration. While this is now also the most common response in Scotland, at 42% it remains shy of a majority response. The gap in views between the Scottish and UK-wide surveys has shrunk across the board with the greatest alignment of views occurring in relation to the proportion of responses favouring a reduction – a 20 percentage point gap in 2023 has shrunk to a difference of 10 percentage points in 2024. The biggest remaining gap between the different survey findings is the larger proportion of respondents in Scotland favouring an increase (15 percentage points higher than for the UK as a whole).

1.3 Preferences for increasing or decreasing levels of immigration by visa type

So far, we have discussed general preferences for changes to overall levels of immigration. Yet it is well-known that such general views can mask considerable variation in attitudes to specific types of immigration and publics can exhibit strong preferences for different groups of immigrant by country, reason for entry, levels of skills and qualifications, occupations and so on.¹³ The expanded Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey therefore explores some of this variation in relation to visa types, including visas for work, study, family reunion and humanitarian protection.

Figure 3 illustrates responses in descending order of preference. These show a clear preference for immigrants arriving on work visas with support for increasing the numbers arriving on any work-related visa at 48% or higher. The strongest support is for increasing the numbers arriving on skilled worker visas (59%).

11 MPS Attitudes Survey Question: “Do you think the number of immigrants coming to Scotland nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, or reduced a lot?” (2024, 2023)

12 Ipsos/British Future Immigration Tracker Survey question: “Do you think the number of immigrants coming to Britain nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, or reduced a lot?” (Rolfé, H., Katwala, S., and Ballinger, S. (March 2024) and (September 2023))

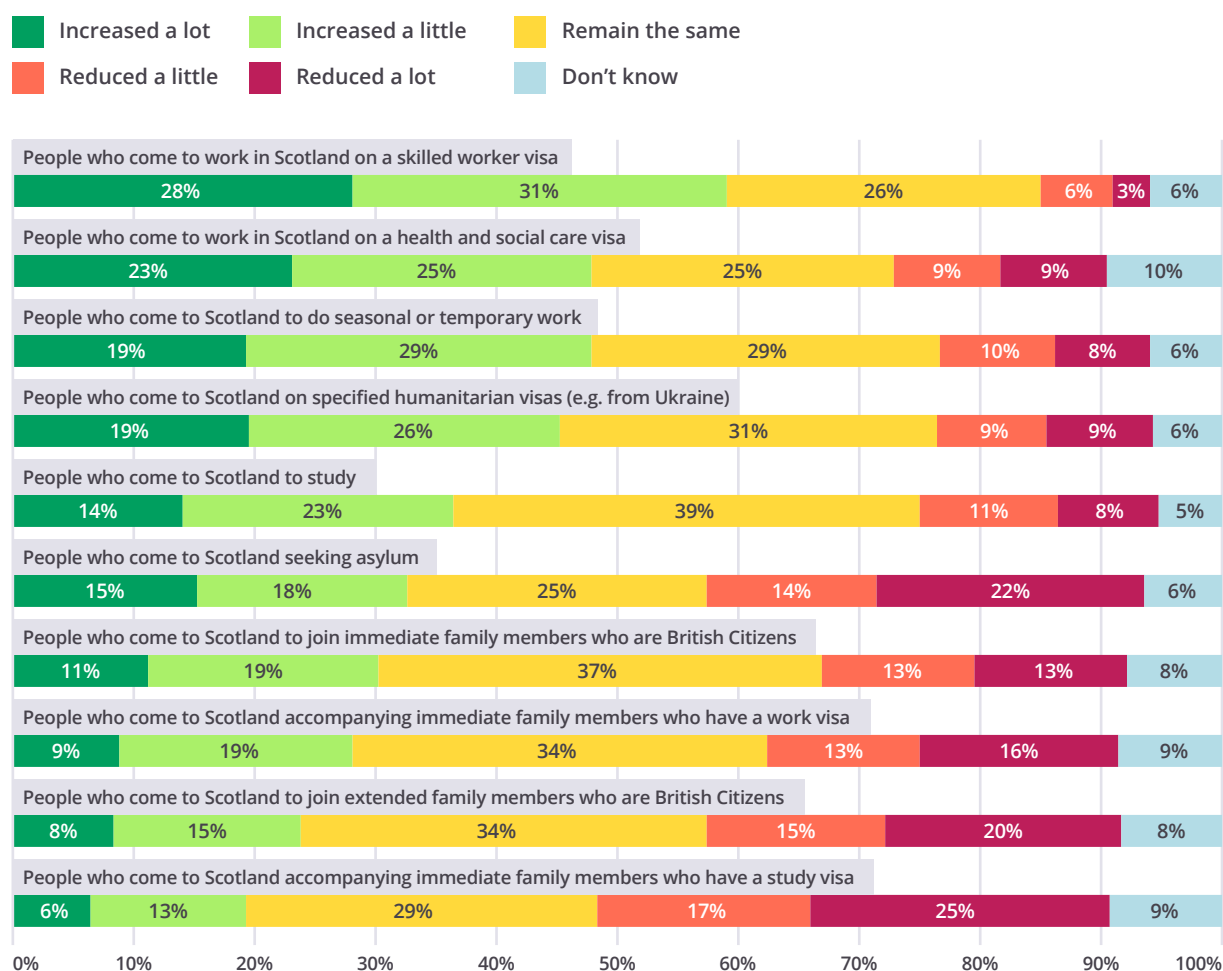
13 See further: Ford, R., and Mellon, J. (2020). The skills premium and the ethnic premium: a cross-national experiment on European attitudes to immigrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*

In broad terms the least popular groups are those arriving to join or accompany a family member. Here, fewer responses favour an increase and there is a higher level of support for reductions. This is highest in relation to those accompanying people on study visas where the preference for reduction is 42%. Aside from visas to accompany students, the responses show little difference in views based on whether an immediate family member being accompanied or joined is themselves an immigrant or a British Citizen. However, where the person arriving is an extended family member of a British Citizen we see a more pronounced decline in support.

Support for people arriving in Scotland for protection reasons is notably split depending on the mode of arrival. There is greater support for the already high numbers of people coming to Scotland on specified humanitarian visas (e.g. from Ukraine) (45% increase; 31% stay the same; 18% reduce). In contrast, opinions on the relatively small number of people coming to seek asylum are the most polarised (33% increase, 25% stay the same, 36% reduce).

Figure 3: Preferred level of immigration by visa type

Should each of the following types of visa be increased, kept the same or reduced?



Differences in opinion between social groups on preferred level of immigration by visa type generally mirror differences between social groups' preferences on overall levels of immigration. Those in higher social grades and with higher educational qualifications are generally more likely to support increases in immigration across all the categories specified.

For some social groups differences are especially pronounced around particular visa types.

Gender. Support for those coming to the UK to join or accompany a family member differs along gender lines. Men are more likely than women to believe that numbers should be reduced for immediate family members accompanying those who have a work visa (men 32%; women 26%), immediate family members accompanying those who have a study visa (47%; 38%), and immediate family members accompanying those who are British Citizens (28%; 22%). Men are also more likely than women to believe numbers should be reduced for those arriving on both specified humanitarian visas (21%; 15%) and seeking asylum (43%; 30%).

Age. The youngest generation – 16 to 34 – are more likely than those over 55 to seek increases in immigration from people who come to Scotland to study (43%; 32%). Those over 55 are more likely than all younger age groups to seek reductions in all varieties of family visas.

Location. Those in urban regions are more likely than those in rural regions to favour reductions in seasonal or temporary work (19%; 13%).

These findings on attitudes towards preferred levels according to visa categories demonstrate a practical challenge in migration policymaking. While overall preferences do lean towards reducing migration inflows, when we examine preferences according to visa categories, we find relatively low levels of support to reduce and indeed considerable appetite to increase those routes currently attracting some of the largest numbers of arrivals – namely work and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian and student visas. By contrast, the greatest appetite for reductions is focused on groups that represent relatively small numbers of arrivals – those on family visas, asylum seekers and the dependants of those on work or study visas.¹⁴

1.4 Preferences for types of migration by length of stay

In addition to preferences for particular visa categories, people also express preference by length of stay. Scotland's political leaders see a role for immigration in mitigating population challenges as well as meeting labour market needs. This makes it particularly useful to understand public views on immigrants staying in Scotland for the longer term. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey asks a question about people's preferences for labour migrants to be offered the option of long-term stay and settlement. There is strong support for longer-term stays in the survey responses. More than half (53%) of Scots surveyed support long-term immigration, with the opportunity to settle. This is more than double the support for the view that migrants coming to Scotland for work should do so for a short time only with the requirement to return to their countries of origin (25%).

The strong preference for longer-term stays echoes recent UK-wide survey data. For instance, in 2018 research for the National Conversation on Immigration found that while 58% of respondents wanted a reduction in immigration, 61% nevertheless agreed that "It is better when migrants commit to stay in Britain, put down roots and integrate". In the same study only 39% thought that: "It is better when migrants come here to work for a few years without putting down roots and then return home."¹⁵ Research by Kantar Public and Migration Observatory (June 2023) found just over double the support for people coming to the UK 'to stay permanently' (28%) compared with support for people coming for 'less than one year' (12%) or for 'between one and five years' (12%).¹⁶

14 Summary of latest statistics – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

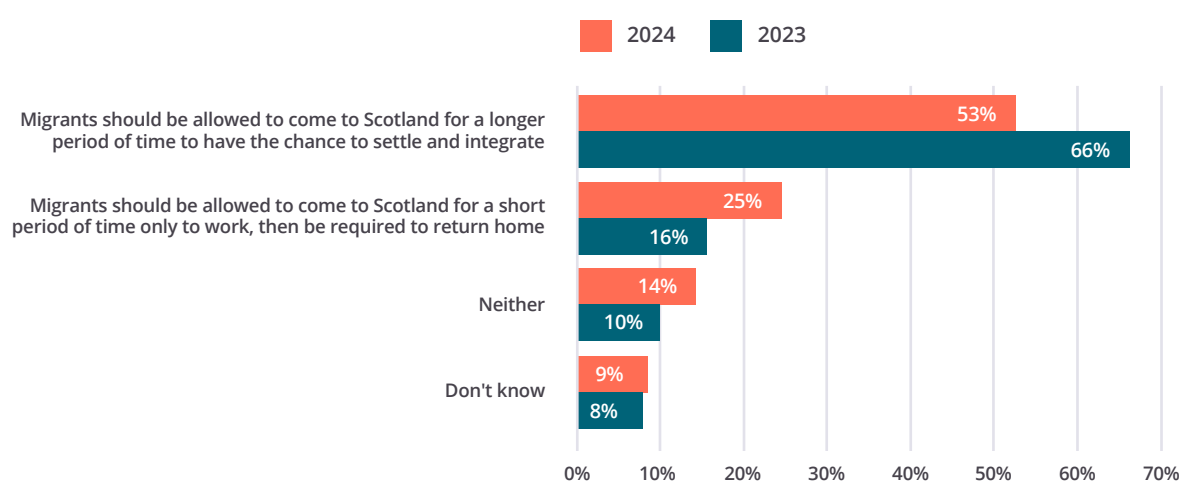
15 Rutter, J. and Carter, R. (September 2018) *National Conversation on Immigration: Final report*, British Future and HOPE not hate

16 Kantar Public and Migration Observatory (June 2023) *Public Attitudes to Immigration*, Kantar and Migration Observatory

Yet the preference for longer-term stay is not a given. In 2011 research found greater support for reductions in permanent immigration (57%) compared to temporary immigration (47%).¹⁷ A comparison between findings from the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey in 2024 and those from 2023 when the same question was asked also demonstrates change. There is a marked decline in the strength of preferences for longer-term settlement. In 2023 this stood at 66% with just 16% declaring a preference for short-term stays.

Figure 4: Preferences for length of stay, Scotland 2024, 2023

Thinking about migration to Scotland for work, which statement comes closest to your preference?



Despite a decline in support since 2023, all groups continue broadly to support long-term immigration over short-term immigration. However, opinions have changed more markedly amongst some groups than others.

Age. Those aged 16 to 34 remain the most supportive of long-term immigration (58%), however, this has fallen by 21 percentage points in the last 12 months. Those aged 55-64 as well as those over 65 years old are the most likely to support short-term immigration with the requirement to return home (29% and 29%).

Social grade. Those in social grades ABC1 are more supportive of long-term immigration than those in C2DE, at 59% and 44% respectively (a decrease from 72% and 59% in 2023).

Neighbourhood deprivation. Scots living in the most affluent areas are more supportive of longer-term immigration than those in the least affluent areas (60% SIMD5; 46% SIMD2).

2019 UK General Election vote. Those who voted for the Conservative Party at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely than those who voted for other mainstream parties to believe that immigrants should be allowed to come to Scotland for a short period of time only to work, then be required to return home (44% Conservative; 17% SNP). Generally, those who voted for any party other than the Conservative Party prefer migrants to be allowed to come to Scotland for a longer period of time to have the chance to settle and integrate.

¹⁷ Migration Observatory (October 2011) *Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding public opinion on immigration in Britain*, Migration Observatory

Social Contact. Those who report that they regularly speak with immigrants, are more likely than those who have no social contact with immigrants to support longer-term immigration (61%; 46%).

Attitudes to Diversity. Support for longer-term immigration is much higher amongst those who agree that a mix of different people makes a place more enjoyable to live in than it is amongst those who disagree (79%; 8%). Conversely, those who agree that they would prefer to live in an area where people are of the same ethnic background are much more likely than those who disagree with this statement, to believe that immigrants should be allowed to come to Scotland for a short period of time only to work (51%; 9%).

Immigration controls include restrictions on length of stay as well as entry. Understanding public preferences on this aspect of immigration is particularly pertinent where demographic concerns feature amongst migration policy considerations, and where changing workforce needs may require a variety of lengths of stay. Therefore, it would be valuable to develop a more nuanced understanding of the consistent preference for longer-term immigration expressed in recent polling. Follow-on qualitative research, for instance, might unpick the extent to which public concerns relate to the instability that can accompany the churn of shorter-term inflows or whether preferences are linked to assumptions about other characteristics of those who come for longer or shorter stays. Deeper insight along these lines would be beneficial to inform policy design that considers more carefully how best to support local communities, both newcomers and existing populations, to harness the benefits of immigration and to meet challenges effectively. Scotland's changing workforce needs and ongoing population challenges will likely create needs for both longer and shorter-term immigration to a range of localities in the foreseeable future.

2. Immigration policy preferences

The second round of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey offered scope to pose additional questions. These were used to gather data relevant to policy areas where there is either recent or proposed policy change, or where there is wider public debate about the need for change. The issues underlying such policy debates and proposals are often driven by changes in the wider economic and social context as well as changing immigration routes and experiences. In Scotland as elsewhere, workforce and skills needs are set to shift radically in the transition to an economy that meets a commitment to Net Zero and responds to rapidly expanding Artificial Intelligence capabilities. Given this dramatically changing economic and workforce context, it is more important than ever to understand conditions under which the Scottish public views recruitment of foreign workers as acceptable. Recruiting workers from abroad is often a speedier option for addressing labour and skills shortages, but it is also one that may provoke resistance where potential competition for jobs is viewed negatively. To test views on the legitimacy of labour recruitment from abroad we introduced a question exploring the extent to which respondents agree or disagree that employers can turn to overseas labour to meet skills needs, and under which conditions.

The significant role that higher education institutions play in the Scottish economy as well as a desire to retain younger immigrants, especially those with higher skills, has shaped support for post-study work visas amongst Scotland's political leaders for two decades. The Fresh Talent Initiative – Work in Scotland Scheme was introduced in 2004, and then subsumed under the UK points-based system Tier 1 (post-study work) visa in 2008. Following the ending of this in 2012 no dedicated post-study visa existed until the introduction of the graduate visa in 2021. However, in response to high levels of net migration, and citing concerns regarding potential abuse of the graduate route, the UK Government has instructed the Migration Advisory Committee to undertake a rapid review of the graduate visa scheme, reporting by 14 May 2024.¹⁸ The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey 2024 includes a question to investigate Scottish public support for the post-study work visa, now termed the graduate visa route.

As well as policies controlling immigration routes and rights to entry, policy has an important role to play in managing relationships between new arrivals and existing residents. New approaches to immigrant integration are emerging and complementary pathways including humanitarian visa schemes and community sponsorship models are contributing to an evolution in approaches to welcoming immigrants. This prompts a need to understand public appetite for welcoming immigrants in Scotland. We have introduced a question to understand both levels of support for welcome programmes and willingness of individuals to participate. Increased understanding on these points may help to inform initiatives for immigrant integration both generally and related to significant new groups arriving under visa schemes, such as those for Ukrainians and Hong Kongers.

¹⁸ MAC commissioned to review the Graduate Route – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), 11 March 2024

Entitlements to publicly funded benefits are also a significant, and often contested, aspect of immigrant integration. Restricting access to publicly funded support has been presented by successive governments as an important measure to ensure the fiscal benefits of immigration and discourage higher numbers of arrivals, particularly amongst certain groups of immigrants. At the same time, strict restrictions on eligibility for support are seen by many organisations and community groups working directly with immigrants as a key barrier to integration, equality, and social justice. This has led to increasing calls for a review of the No Recourse to Public Funds rule. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey 2024 includes a question on the extent to which the Scottish public believe benefits and social housing should be accessible to immigrants.

2.1 Recruiting from abroad

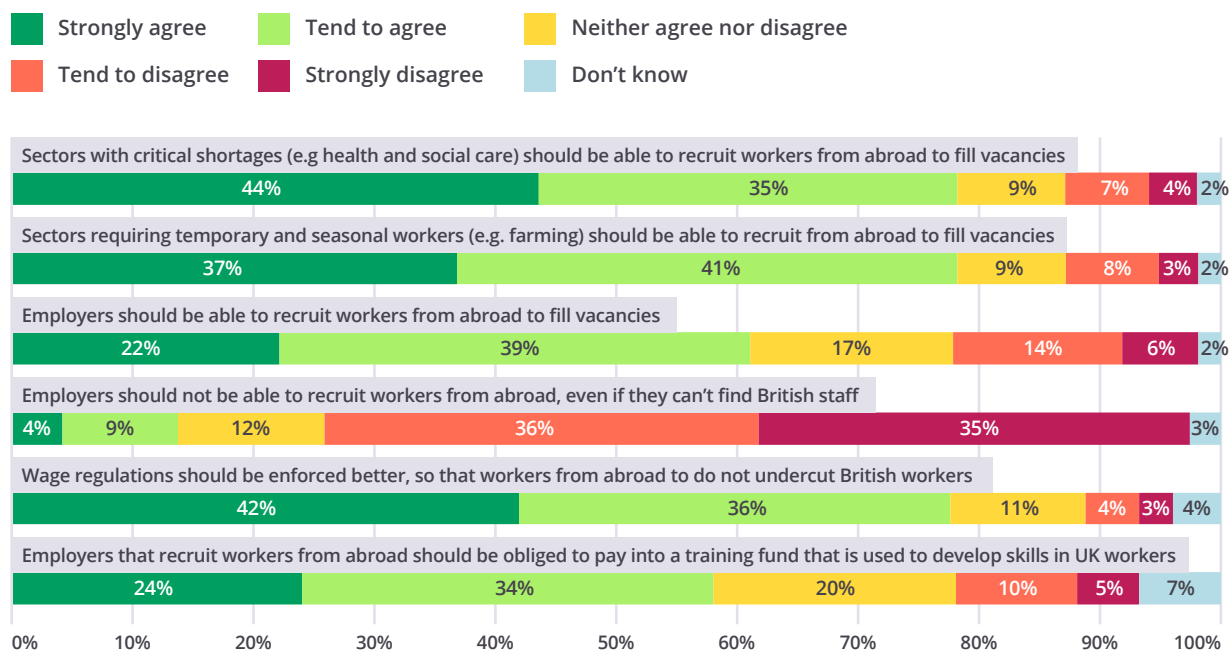
As labour needs are set to change substantially in the near future it becomes increasingly critical to understand the conditions under which wider publics are supportive, or not, of employers recruiting from abroad. The question in the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey tests public acceptance of key rationales exploring how views vary depending on whether the jobs into which immigrants are recruited fill vacancies, meet critical shortages, or fill seasonal/temporary jobs. The survey also elicits respondents' views on whether employers recruiting immigrant labour should be required to contribute in a specified way towards training the UK workforce and whether wage regulation should be more strictly enforced to prevent undercutting.

In general, we find that Scottish public attitudes are supportive of recruiting from abroad. Over three quarters of Scots (79%) agree that sectors with critical shortages (e.g. health and social care) should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies while only 11% disagree. Similarly, over three quarters (78%) of the public agree that sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers (e.g. farming) should be able to recruit from abroad to fill vacancies. When these stipulations are removed, support for recruiting from abroad lessens although it remains strongly supportive. Three in five Scots (61%) agree that employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies while a fifth oppose (20%). Only 14% of the Scottish public agree that employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff. This finding echoes recent data from the World Values Survey in which the UK ranked third amongst countries with the lowest levels of agreement that when jobs are scarce employers should prioritise the native-born population over immigrants. This marks an important shift, as in 2009 a far larger proportion of the UK public agreed (69% compared to 30% in 2022) and the UK ranked towards the middle of the countries surveyed rather than near the top.¹⁹ However, alongside these views there is also strong support for policies to protect wages and develop skills amongst UK workers. Our findings show that 78% of the Scottish public agree that there should be better enforcement of wage regulations to avoid undercutting British Workers, and 58 % support the idea of a training fund for UK workers into which employers recruiting from abroad would be obliged to pay.

19 Duffy, B. et al (March 2023) *UK Attitudes to Immigration: How the public became more positive*, The Policy Institute

Figure 5: Recruiting from abroad

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



In general, patterns of agreement with these statements evidence similar demographic breaks as those examined throughout the report.

Gender. Women are more likely than men to be supportive of recruiting from abroad. 65% of women compared to 57% of men agree that employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies.

Social grade. Those in grades ABC1 are more likely than those in grades C2DE to agree that employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies generally (65%; 55%); to fill vacancies in sectors with critical shortages (83%; 73%) and to fill vacancies in sectors requiring seasonal workers (83%; 71%).

Neighbourhood deprivation. Residents of the most affluent areas (SIMD5) are more likely than those in the most deprived areas (SIMD1) to agree that employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies (67%; 57%).

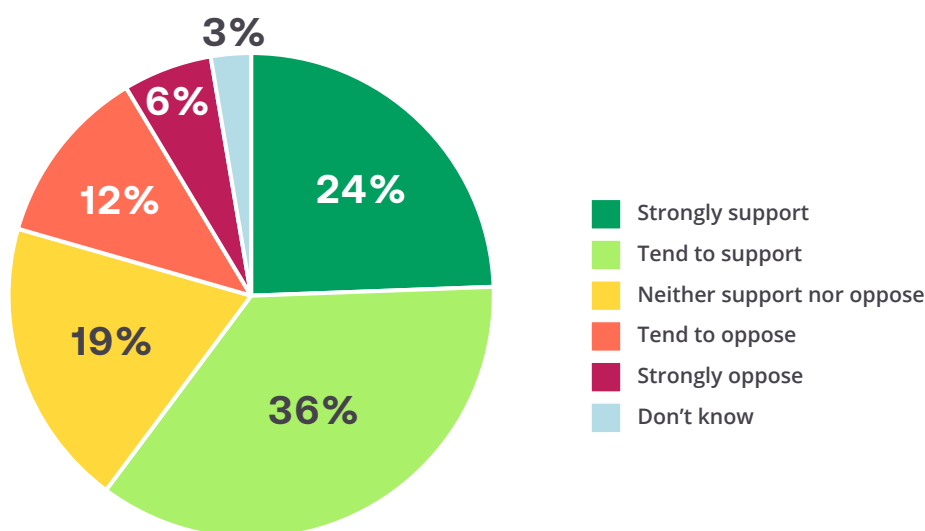
2019 UK General Election vote. Those who voted for the Conservative Party at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely than those who voted for other parties to agree that employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff (Conservative 25%; Labour 12%; SNP 11%).

2.2 Graduate visas

Respondents were asked about their support for the graduate visa, where international students are allowed to remain in the UK for up to 2 years after graduation, to work in any job. A majority (60%) of Scots state that they are supportive of this policy. The remaining responses are evenly split between 19% who neither support nor oppose the policy and 18% who oppose it.

Figure 6: Support for graduate visa policy

Do you support or oppose the 2-year post-study visa policy?



Some demographic groups are more likely to be supportive of the graduate visa than others. The most distinct differences are that younger generations tend to be more supportive of the policy with support as high as 70% among those aged 16-34, while among those aged 65 and over support tails off to 51%. Those with a degree, further degree, or equivalent are also significantly more supportive (72% compared to 47% among other groups). Those from social grades ABC1 are more supportive as well (63% compared to 58% among C2DE groups). Those who have a positive economic outlook are most supportive of the graduate visa policy; 72% of those who think the economic conditions are better compared to 58% of those who think the economic conditions are worse. Opposition to the policy is also strong among those who are unemployed, with 36% of those unemployed for any reason opposed. When voting patterns at the 2019 UK general election are considered, the most support comes from those who voted for the Green Party (76%), SNP (71%), Liberal Democrat (68%) and Labour (60%). Only 39% of those who voted Conservative are supportive of the graduate visa policy.

Support for the policy appears to be slightly higher in Scotland than the UK as a whole. The 2024 Ipsos/British Future Immigration Tracker asked a similar question and found that the largest group (48%) supported the 2-year post study graduate visa, however this was not a majority response.²⁰ A further 25% neither supported nor opposed the policy and 20% opposed, whilst 7% selected 'Don't Know'.

2.3 Welcoming programmes

In response to shifting patterns of immigration and often linked to dedicated resettlement schemes, many European and North American countries have introduced programmes where people can become 'welcomers', meeting newly arrived immigrants socially and helping them to settle and integrate. In the UK new welcoming responses include innovations

²⁰ Comparability should be treated with caution given the question phrasing is slightly different across the surveys. The MPS Survey question is: "Currently international students are eligible to apply for a 2-year post-study visa which allows them to work in any job. Do you support or oppose this policy?". The Ipsos/BF Survey question is: BF Q: Currently international students at UK universities are eligible to apply for a 2 year post-study visa which allows them to work in any job after they have finished their course. After 2 years, the visa expires, and they must either leave the UK or apply for a new visa including meeting certain requirements such as a minimum income. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose international students being able to apply for 2-year post study visas?" Both surveys were carried out in February 2024.

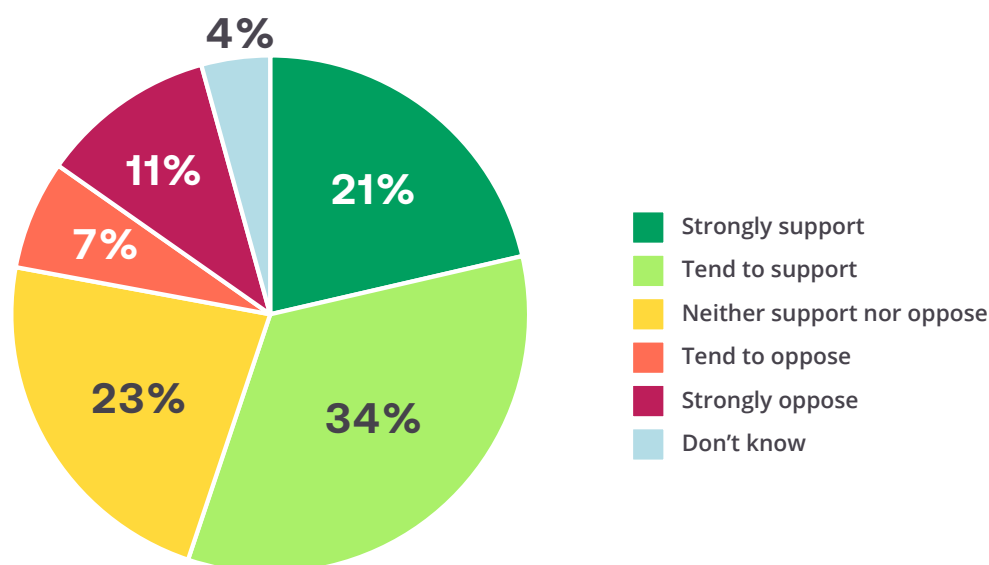
such as community sponsorship for refugee resettlement and the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as well as the establishment of welcome hubs for those arriving from Ukraine and Hong Kong. Research by UK think tank More in Common, suggests that these developments provide opportunities to secure wider public support particularly among those groups who are more sceptical of immigration.²¹

In Scotland, Welcome Hubs have been created for those arriving under visa and sponsorship schemes for Ukrainians and Hong Kongers. Significant work has gone into updating the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.²² Developing a broader strategy to welcome immigrants and support their integration becomes more important as immigration to Scotland increases and diversifies. Such a strategy could support Scottish Government programmes to attract and retain immigrants to Scotland.²³ With this broader context in mind, our survey asks how supportive respondents are of welcoming programmes for newly arrived migrants, with no reference to particular groups or routes.

We find that more than half of Scots (55%) are supportive of welcoming programmes for newly arrived immigrants. Opposition is low, with fewer than a fifth (18%) against such programmes. There is some indecision on the programmes: 23% neither support nor oppose while a further 4% don't know.

Figure 7: Support for welcoming programmes

How strongly would you support or oppose the Scottish Government creating a welcoming programme linking British people with newly arrived migrants to help them settle and integrate in Scotland?



21 Tyrl, L. and Surmon, T. (March 2023) *Welcoming Ukrainians: The host's perspective*, More in Common

22 New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 - 2022 (www.gov.scot)

23 Such as Scotland's Migration Service

While more people in Scotland support than oppose welcoming programmes, there are variances observed across groups of the population:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to oppose such programmes (21%; 15%).

Age. Whilst all age groups tend to be supportive of welcoming programmes, support is stronger amongst younger people. 62% of those aged 16–34 and 58% of those aged 35–44 support such programmes, while for all age groups over 45 the number supporting stands at 51%.

Social grade. Those in social grades ABC1 are more likely than those in social grades C2DE to support welcoming programmes (59%; 50%). Conversely, those in social grades C2DE are more likely than those in social grades ABC1 to oppose (23%; 14%).

Region. More people in the Highlands and Islands (63%), Glasgow (63%) and Lothian (62%) Scottish Parliamentary regions support the idea of welcoming programmes than anywhere else. Those in Central Scotland are more likely to oppose (22%).

Education. People with a degree, further degree or equivalent are more likely than those with any other level of education to support welcoming programmes (69%).

2019 UK General Election vote. Those who voted for the Green Party are most supportive of welcoming programmes (77%) followed by those who voted SNP (68%). There is more support than opposition observed across all parties, with the exception of the Conservatives, where support stands at 31%. Indeed, those who voted Conservative at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely to oppose welcoming programmes than those who voted for any other party (Conservatives 40%; Labour 16%; Liberal Democrats 10%; SNP 9%; and Green Party 9%).

Among those who either support or neither support nor oppose the idea of welcoming programmes, only three in ten (30%) are likely to personally take part in a welcoming programme.²⁴ Around a third are not very likely to participate (34%) and 27% are not at all likely to participate in a welcoming programme.

2.4 Eligibility for social benefits

Eligibility for social benefits is an area of policy that affects the experiences of immigrants already resident within the UK, but may also be viewed as a ‘pull factor’ for those considering a move. As such this is a contentious area of policy making and one which features prominently in public and political narratives concerning immigration control, equality and social justice from both sides.

In current UK policy, No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a condition frequently attached to visas and one that applies to those with irregular immigration status. This condition restricts many immigrants’ eligibility to access social benefits. The number of immigrants subject to this condition has risen substantially in recent years, due to the increase in the number of people arriving in the UK on visa routes. At the end of 2022 the number of people in the UK with visas that typically include an NRPF provision stood at 2.58 million, up from 1.48 million at the end of 2020.²⁵ Many organisations and individuals working with immigrants have concerns about the impact of NRPF conditions.

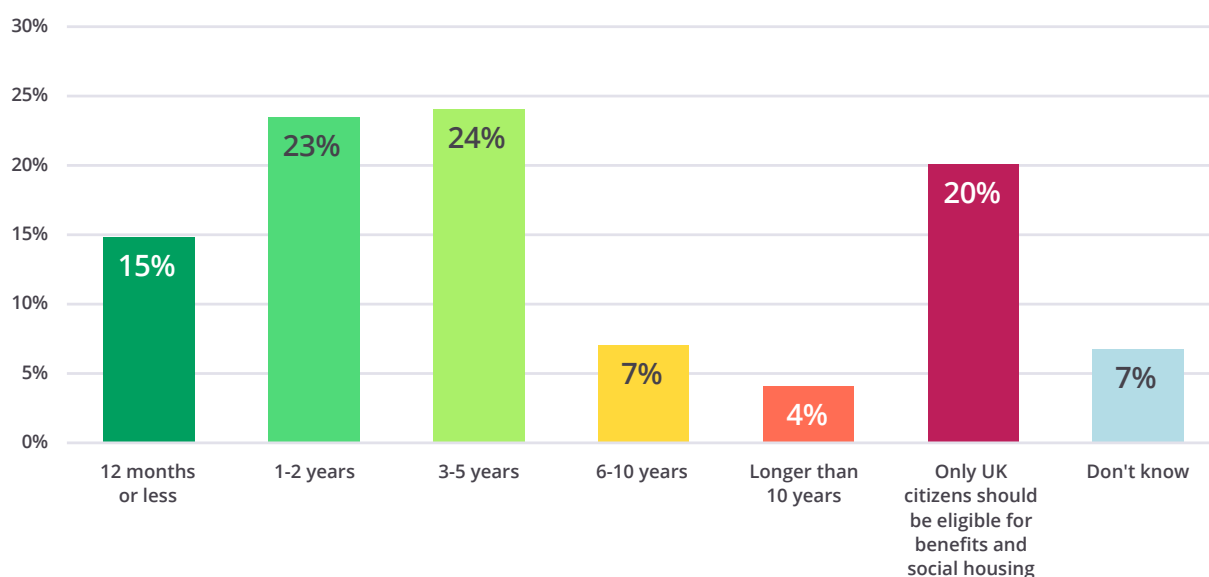
²⁴ Sample size for this question: 1,777.

²⁵ Cuiibus, M. and Fernandez-Reino, M. (November 2023) *Deprivation and the No Recourse to Public Funds Condition*, Migration Observatory

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey asks how long immigrants should work and pay tax in the UK before they are eligible for benefits and social housing. Our findings show considerable division amongst the Scottish public on this question. The majority of respondents support immigrants gaining eligibility for benefits and social housing within 5 years (62%) with 38% taking the view that eligibility should arise within 2 years of working and paying taxes. However, a fifth of Scots believe eligibility for benefits and social housing should be reserved to UK citizens only.

Figure 8: Attitudes to eligibility for social benefits

How long should immigrants work and pay tax in the UK before they are eligible for benefits and social housing?



There are also divisions of opinion between social groups within the population, with some more clearly supportive of shorter eligibility timescales.

Gender. Women were more supportive than men of a 1-2 year eligibility timeframe (27%; 20%).

Social grade. Those in social grades ABC1 were more supportive than those in social grades C2DE of a 3-5 year eligibility period (27%; 20%). Those in the C2DE grade were more likely than those in ABC1 to state that only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing (24%; 17%).

Economic evaluations. Those who believe general economic conditions are much better now than a year ago are more likely than those who believe they are much worse, to think that immigrants should work and pay tax in the UK for 12 months or less before being eligible for benefits and social housing (69%; 14%). In contrast, those who believe that economic conditions are worse are more likely than those who believe they are better to say only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing (23%; 10%).

2019 UK General Election vote. Those who voted for the Conservatives at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely than those who voted for other main parties to say only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing.

3. Impacts of immigration for Scotland and local areas

Dominant political and public narratives in Scotland continue to support a view of immigration as necessary and beneficial both to Scotland as a nation and to local areas. Immigration is presented in these narratives as bringing potential to contribute to local and national economies, to assist in strategic responses to demographic challenges and to enrich cultural diversity. The Scottish Government has developed new services and plans towards these ends.²⁶ The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey includes questions exploring the extent to which public attitudes support a similar view. Respondents are asked a series of questions about perceived benefits and/or costs of immigration at both national and local levels.

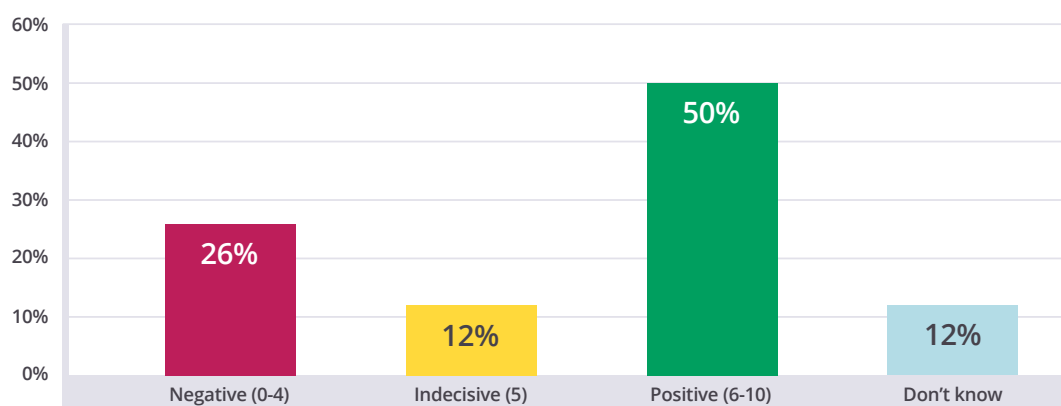
3.1 Overall impacts at Scottish and local levels

Our first question on impacts asks respondents to score the impact of migration on Scotland and their local area, on a scale from 0 to 10. We found that a plurality of Scots view immigration as having a positive impact at national level. At local level the largest group also view impacts positively, although more respondents were undecided or selected 'don't know' than at national level.

At national level, when scores are grouped together as negative (0-4), neutral (5), and positive (6-10), 50% believes the impact to be positive and just over a quarter view impacts as negative (26%).

Figure 9: Perceived impacts of immigration on Scotland

On a scale of 0-10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on Scotland?
(0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive")

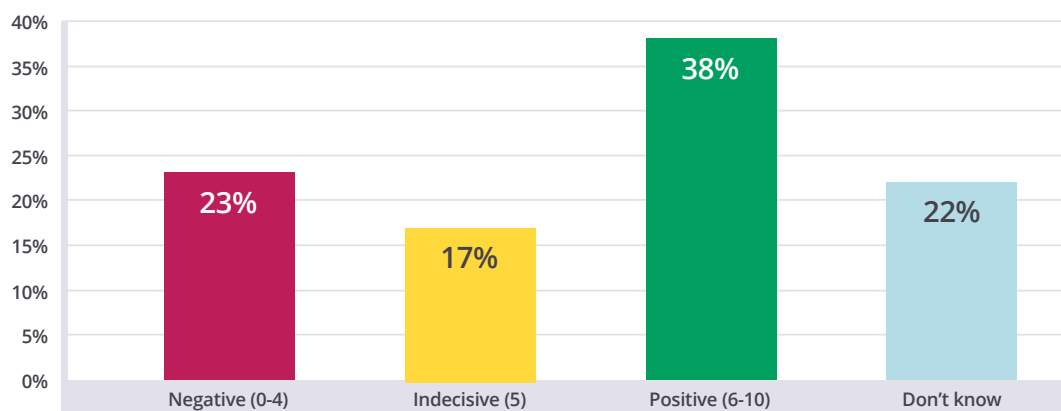


Scoring of impacts at the local level shows a broadly similar pattern although a larger proportion are indecisive (17%) or select 'don't know' (22%). At local level 38% of respondents view impacts positively and 23% view impacts as negative.

26 See for example: Action Plan to Address Depopulation and Scotland's Migration Service.

Figure 10: Perceived impacts of immigration on local area

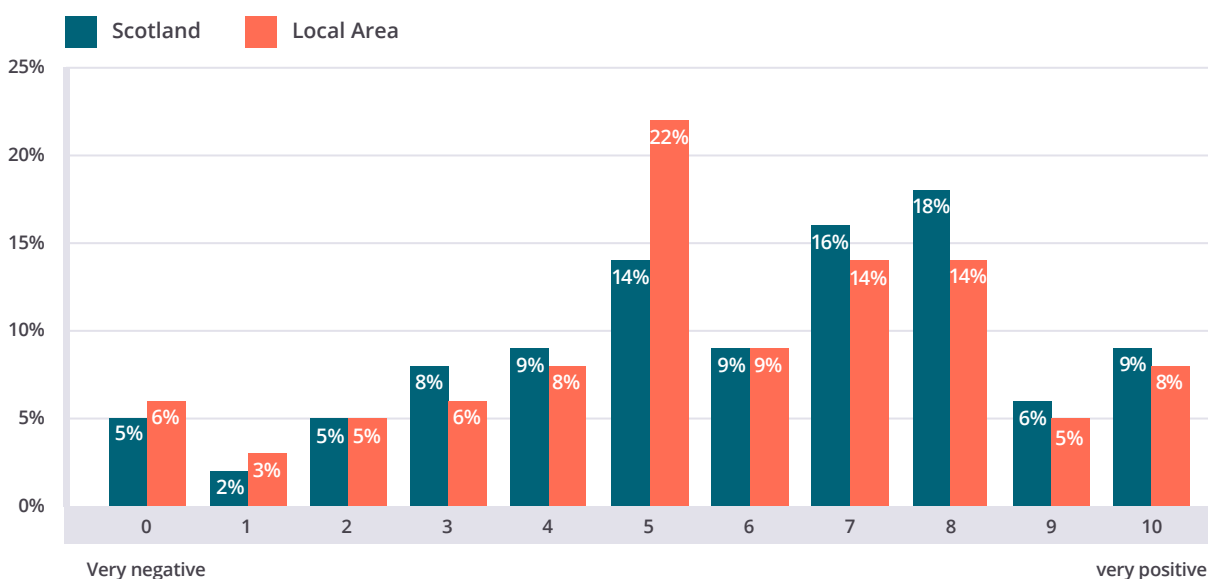
On a scale of 0-10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on your local area? (0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive")



When scores are disaggregated across the full 11-point scale (excluding 'don't know' responses), a clustering of answers towards the neutral middle is clear, especially with regards to local impacts. We find average scores of 5.87 for impacts on Scotland and 5.54 for impacts at the local level. This denotes a modest positive impact, albeit one which has fallen somewhat since 2023 when average scores were 6.31 for national impacts and 5.82 for local. Notably, as in the last wave, the mean perceived impact of immigration is higher at national than at local level. This is unusual in research on public attitudes to migration²⁷ and may be reflective of the fact that many people in Scotland have little direct experience of the impacts of migration in the areas where they live.

Figure 11: Comparison of perceived impacts on Scotland and local areas²⁸

On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on...? (0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive")



27 Duffy, B. and Frere-Smith, T. (January 2014) *Perceptions and Reality: Public attitudes to immigration*, Ipsos Mori Social Research

28 The figures presented here exclude 'Don't Know' responses to allow comparison with 2023 data

Respondents' assessments of the impacts of migration correspond to other attitudes and opinions. At both national and local levels, there is an association between negative scores and having voted for the Conservative Party at the last UK general election in 2019. Believing that general economic conditions are worse now than a year ago; and negative views of diversity are also associated with negative scores. Conversely positive scores at both levels are associated with having voted SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrat or Green; believing that general economic conditions are improving; and positive views on diversity.

We can also identify some differences between opinions on impacts at either level by demographic characteristics:

Scotland. Women (mean 6.22) are more likely to assign a higher score to the impact of migration. Those in social grades ABC1 (6.23) and those holding a degree, further degree or equivalent higher education (6.93) also tend towards a more positive view than the overall average.

Local area. Views on the impact of migration at a local level, show similar trends: Women (5.85) are again more likely to assign a higher score to the impact of migration, as are those in social grades ABC1 (5.89) and those with degrees, further degrees or equivalent (6.57). Those in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD1) are more likely than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD5) to hold negative views, lowering the mean score for this group to 5.11.

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey question on impacts at national level is almost identical to a question regularly asked in the Ipsos/British Future tracker and in 2024 both surveys have been conducted almost simultaneously. It is useful to explore some comparisons although these should be treated with caution. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey continues to find more positive attitudes (50%) than the UK-wide tracker (40%) and fewer negative ones (26%; 35%).

Table 2: Comparison with UK-wide data on attitudes to impacts of immigration

	2024		2023	
	MPS Attitudes Survey	Ipsos/British Future Tracker	MPS Attitudes Survey	Ipsos/British Future Tracker
Positive (6-10)	50	40	59	43
Indecisive (5)	12	17	23	15
Negative (0-4)	26	35	18	37
Don't Know	12	8	NA	6

3.2 Perceptions of economic, demographic, social and cultural impacts of immigration

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey also includes questions allowing us to get a more detailed view of how specific impacts of immigration are viewed both nationally and locally. The survey asks respondents about the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements about economic, demographic, social and cultural impacts of immigration. These have been extended in this round to include statements on social conflict and risks of terrorism. In the discussion that follows we begin by exploring responses to positive statements before moving to discuss responses to negative statements, however in the survey these are randomised to improve the accuracy of responses.

In general, the survey found a greater tendency to agree than to disagree with statements that support a positive view of immigration at both national and local levels.

On national impacts of immigration, over two thirds (69%) agree that immigration helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find workers in Scotland, over half agree that immigration enriches Scottish cultural life (55%), and that immigration brings people to areas of Scotland that need them (51%). Respondents were also more likely to agree than to disagree with statements about the positive impacts of immigration on the Scottish economy and on innovation.

On local level impacts, respondents were again more likely to agree than to disagree with positive statements but were less emphatic in their positive views than at national level. The only statement to which over half of respondents agreed (56%)²⁹ was that immigration helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find local workers. Agreement with all other statements ranged from 48% – immigration enriches local cultural life – to 39% – immigration brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in the local area.

²⁹ Aggregate percentages in the description here are calculated from absolute values and may differ from the sum of the individual scores due to rounding.

Figure 12: Levels of agreement and disagreement with positive impacts of immigration at national and local level

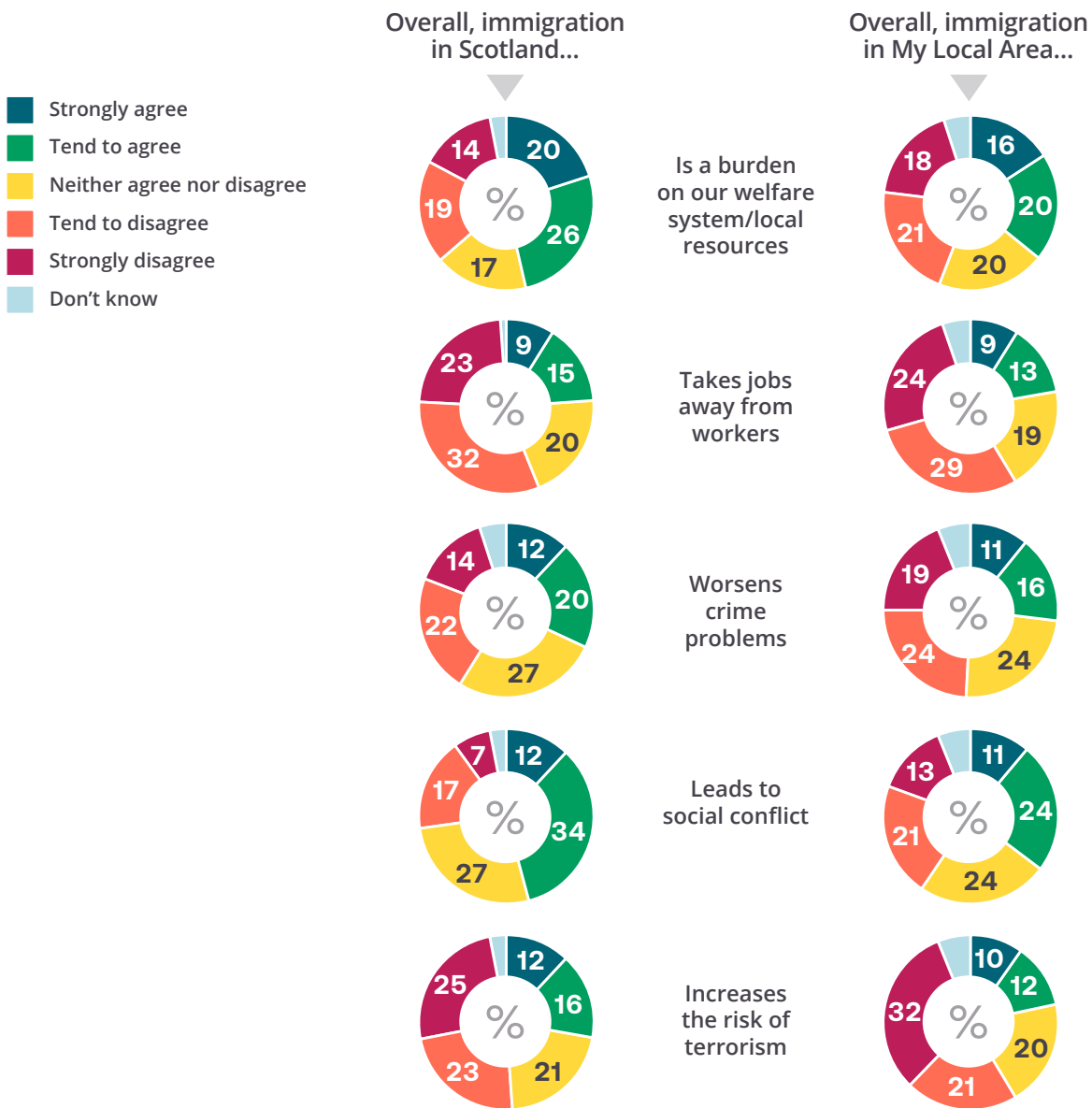


Responses to negative statements present a more mixed picture. The only statements that are clearly rejected by over half of respondents are that immigration takes away jobs from workers either nationally (54% disagree, 24% agree) or locally (54% disagree, 22% agree) or and that immigration increases the risk of terrorism locally (53% disagree, 22% agree). There is also more disagreement than agreement that immigration increases the risk of terrorism nationally (48% disagree, 28% agree) and that immigration worsens crime at a local level (43% disagree, 27% agree).

On other aspects opinions are more evenly split, particularly at local level. On a number of issues there is more negative agreement nationally than there is locally. At national level 46% agree and 34% disagree that immigration is a burden on the welfare system, whilst at local level 36% agree and 39% disagree that immigration is a burden on local resources. On social conflict, 46% agree and 24% disagree that immigration leads to conflict at national level, whilst at local level 35% agree and 35% disagree.³⁰

³⁰ Aggregate percentages in the description here are calculated from absolute values and may differ from the sum of the individual scores due to rounding.

Figure 13: Levels of agreement and disagreement with negative impacts of immigration at national and local level



The comparison between local and national assessments of specific impacts, both positive and negative, reflects the discrepancy between scoring of national and local impacts more generally. Asked about local impacts, respondents are both less clearly in agreement with positive statements and more likely either to disagree with or to be evenly split over negative impacts. This supports the idea that in many local areas the impacts of immigration are simply harder to discern.

As we discuss in the following two sections immigration is not evenly spread within Scotland and our findings show a high number of respondents who report no regular social interaction with immigrants. Individuals with no regular social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who regularly speak to immigrants to agree with negative statements about the impact of immigration on Scotland. These include that immigration is a burden on our welfare system/local resources (54%; 37%), takes jobs away from workers in Scotland (31%; 16%), worsens crime problems (38%; 26%), leads to social conflict (53%; 41%), and increases the risks of terrorism (34% vs 20%). A similar effect is seen on the impacts of immigration on the local area.

Attitudes to diversity also strongly correlate with views on impacts. Those who think that diversity is good for Scotland are consistently more likely than those who do not, to agree with positive statements about impacts at national level. Those who believe that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live are more likely than those who do not to agree with positive statements about impacts at the local level.

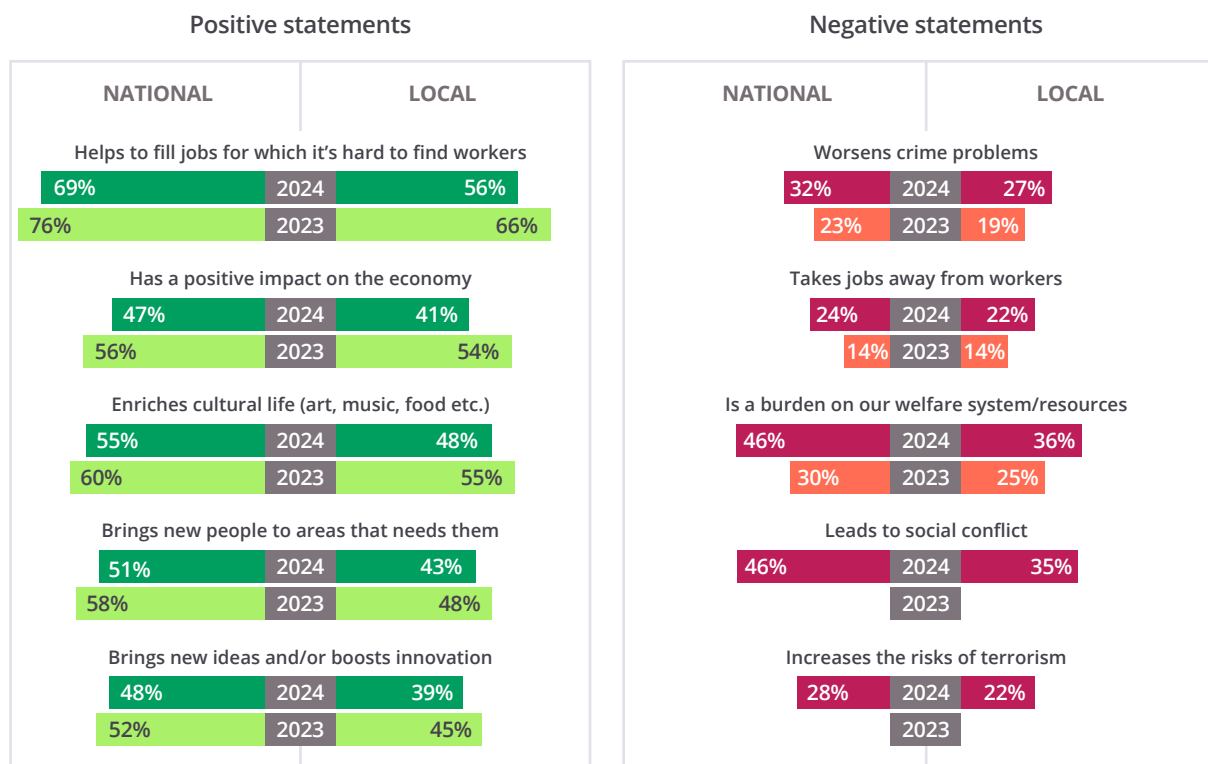
When respondents' political views are taken into consideration, there is a notable difference between the ways in which impacts of immigration are assessed by those who voted Conservative in the last UK general election, compared with those who voted for all other main parties, where there is considerable consensus. When asked whether immigration fills jobs for which it is hard to find workers in Scotland, there is agreement from at least three quarters of those who voted Labour (74%), SNP (76%), Liberal Democrat (79%) or Green (86%), but fewer than half of those who voted Conservative (49%). More than half of those who voted Green (52%), Labour (52%), Liberal Democrat (58%) and SNP (63%) agree that immigration brings new people to areas of Scotland that need them, whilst only a quarter (24%) of those who voted Conservative feel the same. Conversely, just over three quarters of those who voted Conservative (76%) agree that immigration is a burden on welfare, whilst less than half of those who voted Labour (47%) Liberal Democrat (44%), SNP (33%) or Green (32%) agree.

There are also observable differences between demographic groups, the most significant of these being between gender and social grade. However, these are not as stark as the differences linked to social contact, attitudes to diversity, or party-political preferences as outlined above.

Gender. Men are typically more likely than women to agree with negative statements about immigration. Men agree more often than women that immigration is a burden on our welfare system (49%; 43%), takes jobs away from workers in Scotland (28%; 21%), worsens crime problems in Scotland (39%; 26%), leads to social conflict (51%; 41%) and increases the risks of terrorism (33%; 23%). Women agree more often than men that immigration enriches Scottish cultural life (58%; 52%).

Social grade. Scots in social grades ABC1 are more likely than those in grades C2DE to agree with positive statements about immigration. For instance, more of those in grades ABC1 agree that immigration has a positive impact on the Scottish economy (51%; 43%), helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find workers in Scotland (74%; 61%), brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in Scotland (52%; 42%), enriches Scottish cultural life (60%; 49%) and brings new people to areas of Scotland which need them (54%; 46%). Those in grades C2DE are more likely than those in grades ABC1 to agree with negative statements, including that immigration is a burden on the welfare system (53%; 41%), takes jobs away from workers in Scotland (31%; 19%), worsens crime problems in Scotland (39%; 27%) and leads to social conflict (51%; 42%).

Figure 14: Comparison of agreement with positive and with negative statements, 2024, 2023.



By comparison with findings from our 2023 survey, in this round the extent of agreement with positive statements about immigration impacts is more muted. At a national level, agreement that immigration helps to fill jobs for which it's hard to find workers has decreased by seven percentage points from 76% to 69%. Agreement that immigration brings new people to areas of Scotland that needs them has fallen from 58% to 51%. More general agreement that immigration has a positive impact on the Scottish economy has fallen nine percentage points from 56% to 47%. Similar changes are observable in views on impacts at local level.

In contrast there has been an increase in the number of people agreeing with negative statements about immigration impacts. On national level impacts, agreement that immigration is a burden on welfare has increased by 16 percentage points from 30% in 2023 to 46% in 2024. Agreement that immigration takes jobs away from workers in Scotland has increased by 10 percentage points from 14% to 24%. Agreement that immigration worsens crime has increased by 9 percentage points from 23% to 32%. Again, similar changes can be observed in views on impacts at local level. These changes highlight that public opinions change and evolve and should not be treated as fixed. At the same time with just two rounds of the Migration Policy Attitudes Survey at this stage we should be careful not to interpret these changes as necessarily indicative of a trend.

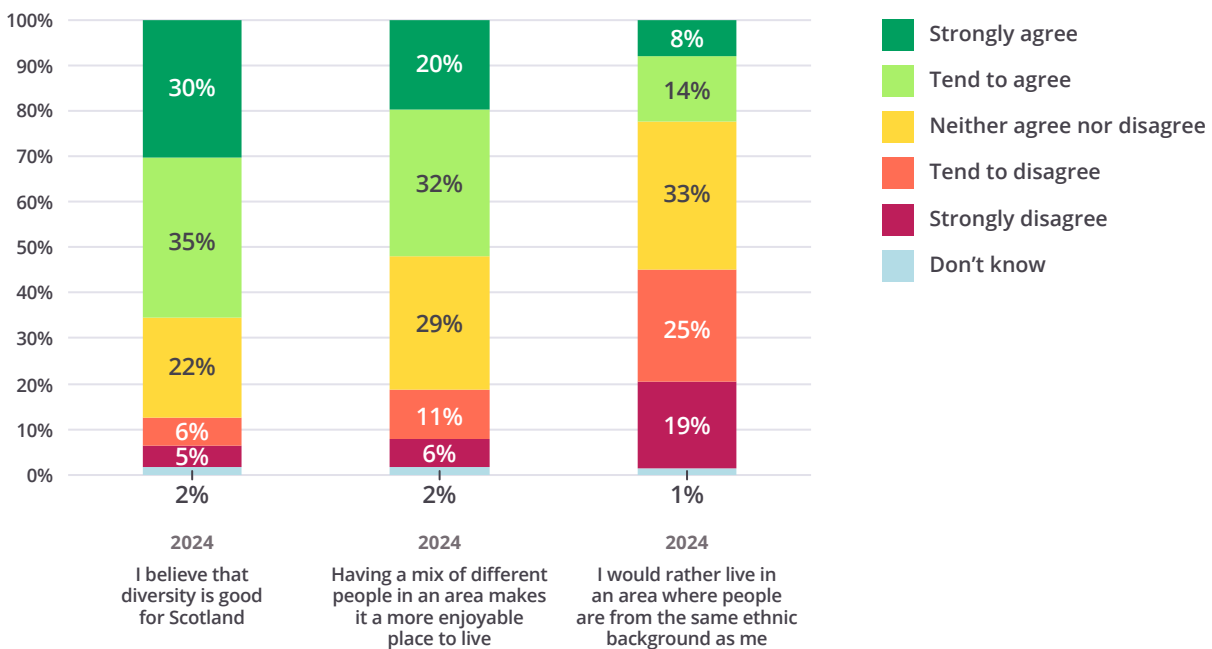
4. Attitudes towards Diversity

Scotland has a 20th Century history of relatively low levels of immigration, resulting in a population with relatively low levels of ethnic and national diversity. This is changing as a result of increased immigration since the early 2000s. In percentage terms Scotland has seen the fastest increase within the UK of its immigrant population. At the turn of the 21st Century approximately 3% of the Scottish population were born outside of the UK, by 2021 this population had more than tripled in size to 10% of the Scottish population.³¹ In Scotland, as elsewhere, international migrants have tended to move to and settle in larger towns and cities meaning that experiences of diversity are likely to differ between urban and rural settings.

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey seeks to understand how diversity is viewed by people living in Scotland. Survey respondents are asked for their views both on whether diversity is good for Scotland in a more abstract sense and more specifically about whether they would prefer to live in a more or less diverse area. In responses to both types of question we find positive attitudes towards diversity. A clear majority (65%) believe diversity is good for Scotland, and more than half (52%) agree that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live. 44% disagree and only 22% agree when asked whether they would prefer to live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background.

Figure 15: Attitudes to diversity

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following?



31 Population by country of birth and nationality (Discontinued after June 2021) – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Attitudes to diversity are formed within a wider context of people's experiences of immigration. Our findings show that those respondents with higher levels of social contact with immigrants are more strongly positive about the benefits of diversity. 78% of those who regularly speak with immigrants agree that diversity is good for Scotland, whilst amongst those who have no regular contact with immigrants, this figure is 58%. On preferences regarding diversity in the area where they live, 65% of respondents who regularly speak with immigrants agree that having a mix of people makes an area more enjoyable to live in, whilst only 42% of those who report no regular contact with immigrants feel the same.

Attitudes to diversity also differ according to political views. Those who voted for Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, and SNP are more likely to agree with positive statements about diversity and disagree with negative statements than those who voted for the Conservatives.

Demographic characteristics also correlate differently with attitudes to diversity. Women are generally more likely than men to agree with positive statements and to disagree with negative statements about diversity. The youngest age groups – those aged 16 to 34 – are the most likely to agree with positive statements about diversity: nearly two thirds (63%) of those aged 16 to 34 believe that having a mix of different people in an area make it a more enjoyable place to live, this falls to just under half (47%) of those aged 35 and older.

When compared to our findings from the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey 2023 we notice that attitudes towards diversity have lost some of their positive intensity in the current round. Previously, nearly three quarters (74%) believed that diversity was good for Scotland, compared to nearly two thirds (65%) this year, and whilst in 2023 three in five (60%) thought that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live, in 2024 this figure is down to just over half (52%). Conversely, although still a minority, more Scots are reporting that they would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background: 22% agree with this statement in 2024, compared to 18% in 2023.

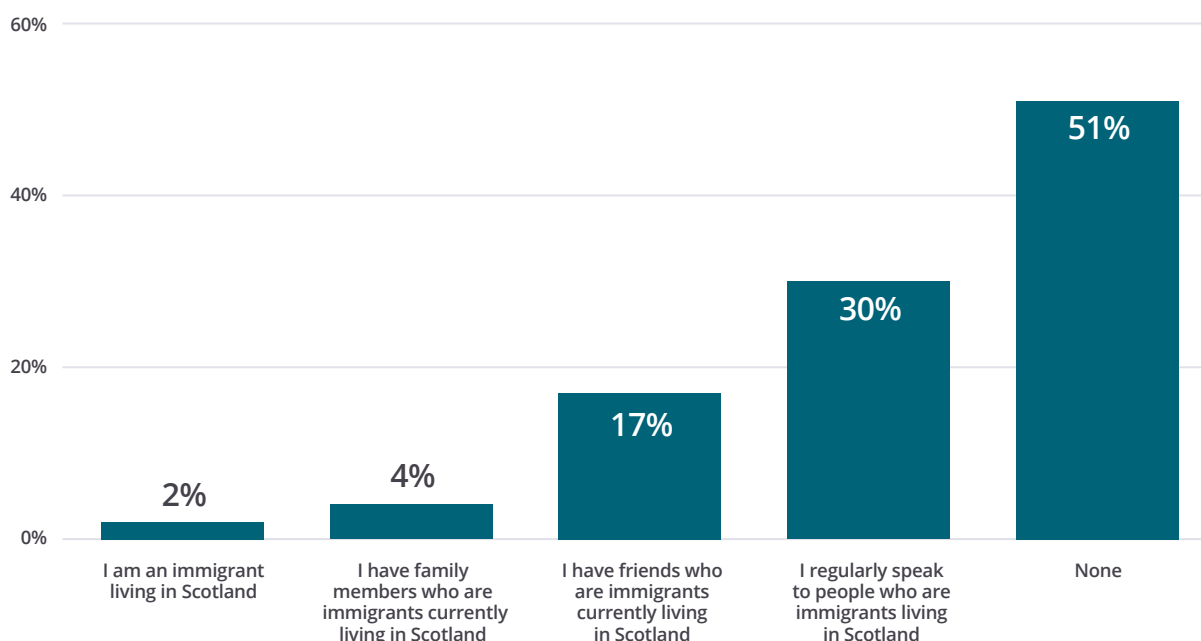
5. Experiences of immigration

Attitudes to immigration in Scotland are formed in the context of low levels of diversity. We are interested to know how far respondents may be drawing on day-to-day experiences of immigration in forming their opinions, and one way to capture this is to understand whether they have direct, personal relationships or interactions with immigrants, or experience of living in an area with significant levels of immigration. To this end the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey gathers data on levels of social contact with immigrants and explores its relevance to attitudes and preferences. Where we have been able to find significant differences in attitudes or preferences between groups with differing levels of social contact, this has been explained in the preceding sections.

The survey asked respondents to select from a number of statements those which best described their degree of social contact with immigrants. It is striking that more than half (51%) have no regular interaction with immigrants in their community and less than 1 in 5 (17%) have friends who are immigrants currently living in Scotland. Around 1 in 3 (30%) say that they regularly speak to people who are immigrants.

Figure 16: Levels of social contact with immigrants

Which of the following statements applies best to you?



Individuals were allowed to select multiple categories of social contact

Social contact with immigrants appears to differ between groups defined by party-political preference. Those who voted for the Scottish National Party at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely (36%) than those who voted Labour (27%) or Conservative (20%) to say they regularly speak to immigrants. They are also more likely to have friends who are immigrants

(SNP 22%; Labour 15%; Conservatives 12%). Those who voted for the Conservative Party at the 2019 UK General Election are more likely than those who voted for most other parties to say that they have no interaction with immigrants (Conservatives 63%; Labour 52%; SNP 45%).

The survey also shows some significant differences in levels of social contact with immigrants between demographic groups.

Age. The youngest generation – those aged 16 to 34 – are more likely than all other age groups to have friends who are immigrants (27%). The oldest generation – those over 65 – are more likely than all other age groups to have no social contact with immigrants (60%).

Social grade. Those in social grades ABC1 are more likely than those in C2DE to have friends who are immigrants (20%; 14%) or regularly speak to immigrants (32%; 27%).

Neighbourhood deprivation. Those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD1) are more likely than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD4 and 5) to regularly speak to immigrants (37%; 26%). Conversely, those in less deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD3, 4, and 5) are more likely than those in the most deprived neighbourhoods – SIMD1, to report that they have no contact with immigrants (54%; 40%).

Education. Those with a degree, further degree, or equivalent are more likely to say they have friends that are immigrants (25%) than those with other levels of education.

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Appendix 1: Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes Survey

Introduction

Immigration is an important topic for Scotland and the United Kingdom. This survey is commissioned by an independent Scottish think tank (Migration Policy Scotland) to improve understanding of what people in Scotland think about immigration and its consequences. For the purposes of the survey by 'immigration' we mean people born outside the UK who have moved to Scotland to work, study, join family or because they need protection. The survey asks short questions about your opinions on and experiences of immigration and its impacts in Scotland. It should take about 10 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers, we are looking for your opinions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Gender
- Age
- Social Grade
- Household size
- Children in households
- Area
- Scottish Parliament Region and LA
- SIMD
- Urban/Rural
- Employment Status
- Education

OPINION ON IMMIGRATION LEVELS

Q1. Do you think the number of immigrants coming to Scotland nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, or reduced a lot?

- 1) Increased a lot
- 2) Increased a little
- 3) Remain the same as it is
- 4) Reduced a little
- 5) Reduced a lot

Q2. Please remember to think about immigrants as people born outside the UK who have moved to Scotland to work, study, join family, or because they need protection. In your opinion, what percentage of the total Scotland population are immigrants? You can answer any number between 0 and 100.³²

OPINION ON IMMIGRATION IMPACTS

Q3. On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on...? (0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive")

- Scotland
- Your local area

SCALE: 0-10, DK

³² MPS Attitudes Survey 2023 Question: In your opinion, what percentage of the total Scotland population are immigrants? You can answer any number between 0 and 100

Q4. There are different views regarding the impact of immigration in Scotland. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Overall immigration...³³

- Has a positive impact on the Scottish economy
- Is a burden on our welfare system
- Takes jobs away from workers in Scotland
- Helps to fill jobs for which it's hard to find workers in Scotland
- Brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in Scotland
- Enriches Scottish cultural life (art, music, food etc.)
- Worsens crime problems in Scotland
- Brings new people to areas of Scotland which need them
- Leads to social conflict
- Increases the risks of terrorism

SCALE: Strongly agree, Tend to agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't Know

Q5. Now please think about immigration to the area where you live. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Overall immigration...³⁴

- Has a positive impact on the local economy
- Is a burden on local resources
- Takes jobs away from local workers
- Helps to fill jobs for which it's hard to find local workers
- Brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in the local area
- Enriches local cultural life (art, music, food etc.)
- Worsens local crime problems
- Brings new people to an area that needs them
- Leads to social conflict
- Increases the risks of terrorism

SCALE: Strongly agree, Tend to agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't Know

OPINION ON WHICH TYPES OF IMMIGRATION ARE DESIRABLE OR UNDESIRABLE

Q6. Please tell us if you think each of the following types of immigration should be increased, kept the same, or reduced.³⁵

- People who come to work in Scotland on a skilled worker visa
- People who come to work in Scotland on a health and social care visa
- People who come to Scotland to do seasonal or temporary work
- People who come to Scotland to study
- People who come to Scotland accompanying immediate family members who have a work visa
- People who come to Scotland accompanying immediate family members who have a study visa
- People who come to Scotland on specified humanitarian visas (e.g. from Ukraine)
- People who come to Scotland seeking asylum
- People who come to Scotland to join immediate family members who are British Citizens
- People who come to Scotland to join extended family members who are British Citizens

SCALE: Increased a lot, Increased a little, Remain the same, Reduced a little, Reduced a lot, Don't Know

³³ MPS Attitudes Survey 2023: Question was the same, but statements on social conflict and risks on terrorism new to MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

³⁴ MPS Attitudes Survey 2023: Question was the same, but statements on social conflict and risks on terrorism new to MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

³⁵ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

Q7. Please now think about migration to Scotland for work. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your preference?

- 1) Migrants should be allowed to come to Scotland for a short period of time only to work, then be required to return home
- 2) Migrants should be allowed to come to Scotland for a longer period of time to have the chance to settle and integrate
- 3) Neither
- 4) Don't know

Q8. Currently international students are eligible to apply for a 2-year post-study visa which allows them to work in any job. Do you support or oppose this policy? ³⁶

- 1) Strongly support
- 2) Tend to support
- 3) Neither support nor oppose
- 4) Tend to oppose
- 5) Strongly oppose
- 6) Don't know

OPINION ON IMMIGRANT ELIGIBILITY

Q9. How long should immigrants, excluding asylum seekers and refugees, work and pay tax in the UK before they are eligible for benefits and social housing? ³⁷

- 1) 12 months or less,
- 2) 1-3 years,
- 3) 3-5 years,
- 4) 6-10 years,
- 5) Longer than 10 years,
- 6) Only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing
- 7) Don't Know

OPINION ON EMPLOYERS AND IMMIGRATION

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: ³⁸

- 1) Employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies
- 2) Sectors with critical shortages (e.g health and social care) should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies
- 3) Sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers (e.g. farming) should be able to recruit from abroad to fill vacancies
- 4) Employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff
- 5) Employers that recruit workers from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund that is used to develop skills in UK workers
- 6) Wage regulations should be enforced better, so that workers from abroad do not undercut British workers

SCALE: Strongly agree, Tend to agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't Know

³⁶ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

³⁷ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

³⁸ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

OPINION ON WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS

Q11. Some countries have introduced programmes where people can become ‘welcomers’, meeting newly arrived migrants socially and helping them to settle and integrate. How strongly would you support or oppose the Scottish Government creating a welcoming programme linking British people with newly arrived migrants to help them settle and integrate in Scotland?³⁹

- 1) Strongly support
- 2) Tend to support
- 3) Neither support nor oppose
- 4) Tend to oppose
- 5) Strongly oppose
- 6) Don't know

Q12. And how likely, if at all, would you personally be to take part in a welcoming programme?⁴⁰

- 1) Very likely
- 2) Fairly likely
- 3) Not very likely
- 4) Not at all likely
- 5) Don't know

EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRATION

Q13. Please remember that for this survey we are defining immigrants as people born outside the UK who have come to Scotland to work, study, join family, or because they need protection. Which of the following statements applies best to you?⁴¹

- 1) I am an immigrant living in Scotland
- 2) I have friends who are immigrants currently living in Scotland
- 3) I have family members who are immigrants currently living in Scotland
- 4) I regularly speak to people who are immigrants living in Scotland
- 5) None
- 6) DK/NA

Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following?

- Having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live
- I would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as me
- I believe that diversity is good for Scotland

SCALE: Strongly agree, Tend to agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Tend to disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't Know

POLITICAL PARTY SUPPORT

Q15. At the 2019 UK General Election, which party did you vote for?⁴²


- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- Green Party
- The Brexit Party
- The Scottish National Party
- A different party (Please specify)
- Don't remember
- Didn't vote
- Prefer not to say

³⁹ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

⁴⁰ Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024

⁴¹ MPS Attitudes Survey 2023 Question: Which of the following statements applies best to you?

⁴² Question asked for the first time in MPS Attitudes Survey 2024



Attitudes to
Immigration in Scotland:
Cautious pragmatism?

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