MIGRATION POLICY SCOTLAND

Attitudes to Immigration in Scotland: Growing polarisation, hardening views

SEPTEMBER 2026

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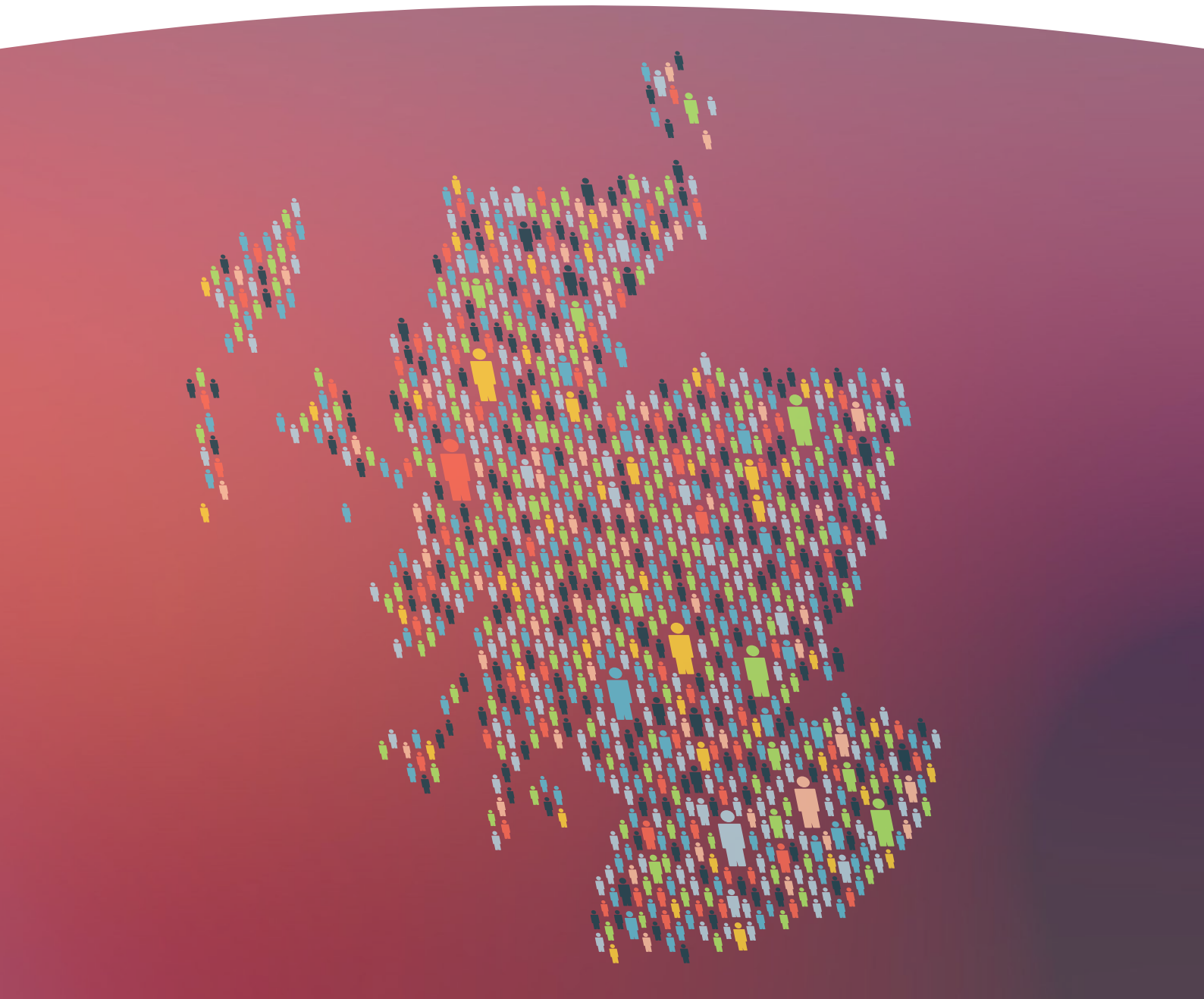

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About Migration Policy Scotland
Migration Policy Scotland offers a home for open dialogue and informed response to migration. We harness insights from lived and learned experience to drive work that is grounded in the realities of migration in Scotland

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Introduction

Attitudes to immigration in Scotland are increasingly marked by a divergence of views and a general shift towards more negative opinions. Over the past 3 years immigration levels have fallen significantly. From an historic peak in 2023, net migration fell by more than two thirds, dipping below pre-pandemic levels to 171,000 by December 2025. Levels of net international migration to Scotland have also fallen steeply. From a peak in 2023 of around 69,400, net international migration to Scotland fell to just 9,300 in the year ending June 2025, the lowest annual figure since 2020. At the same time immigration's salience remains high. It ranked among the public's top 3 most important issues in UK-wide polls throughout 2025-26.[1] More unusually, given that immigration is a reserved matter under the devolution settlement, it emerged as the third most important issue facing Scotland in the summer of 2025 and has continued to hold this ranking ever since, albeit at some distance behind the top two issues.[2] At a time when immigration is so prominent and hotly contested in both public opinion and political debate, Migration Policy Scotland's Attitudes to Immigration survey provides important insight. Based on representative data, our survey allows the views of the Scottish public on immigration to be explored in greater depth. Now in its 4th Wave, our annual survey also provides scope for understanding of how attitudes shift and change over time.

In 2024, before public unrest on issues linked to immigration had become a regular phenomenon on streets across the UK, Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration survey data provided an early indicator that views in Scotland were becoming more sceptical. For those questions where we have data covering all four waves of the survey (2023-2026) the shift in views between wave 1 (2023) and wave 2 (2024) remains the largest year-on-year cooling. Nevertheless, the trend towards more restrictive views continues. Our 2026 data show for example, that the proportion favouring a reduction in overall immigration levels has risen to 50%. As in previous years, however, there is significant variation from this when people are asked about specific entry routes – indeed, for each route asked about, support for reductions is lower than 50%, and for nearly all routes 50% or more would like arrivals to increase or remain the same. Work visas are looked upon most favourably with support for these to increase or remain the same at 70% or higher.

News coverage, political rhetoric and voting behaviour over the previous year may render unsurprising this evidence that Scottish views overall have become less favourable towards immigration. The past year has seen protests against asylum accommodation in places like Falkirk and Aberdeen as well as the election of Reform UK Party candidates to the Scottish Parliament on an anti-immigration ticket. More unexpected and also troubling is what this year's survey reveals about growing polarisation on immigration in Scotland. Our data on changes in perceptions of immigration clearly show that rather than simply shifting towards becoming more negative, peoples' perceptions of the impacts of immigration are becoming both more certain and more polarised both at national and at local levels. Those seeking to understand public attitudes to immigration often point out that the largest group are those in the middle who take more nuanced views on the issues and are more open to persuasion in either direction. In Scotland that group is getting smaller with more people leaning into one or other side of the debate. Nor is the split even – more often, and often more strongly, they are adopting more sceptical views.

1 YouGov (2026) **The most important issues facing the country 2011-2026.**

2 In August 2026 the proportion of respondents citing each issue as one of the three the top priorities facing Scotland was: Cost of Living/ Inflation (47%), Healthcare and the NHS (40%), Immigration (25%). Diffley Partnership, Charlotte Street Partners and David Hume Institute (August 2026) **Understanding Scotland Economy Tracker.**

Voting preferences frequently produce statistically significant splits in attitudes to immigration and this is also reflected in this year's Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration data. Voters for right and centre right parties (Reform UK and Conservative) consistently hold more restrictive and sceptical views than voters for other parties. Green Party voters often hold the most liberal views. These findings mirror UK-wide patterns where party political affiliation and views on immigration have become more closely correlated as immigration has become a more politically contentious issue.[3] And yet, on several questions the views of Reform UK voters are significantly more negative than those of voters who supported any other party, including the Conservative Party. For example, 83% of Reform UK voters view the impact of immigration on Scotland as negative, compared to only 43% of Conservative voters. This kind of gap is replicated in views on diversity where 63% of Reform UK voters disagree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to 34% of Conservative voters, 16% of Labour voters, 13% of Liberal Democrat voters, 9% of SNP voters and just 2% of Green Party voters. These data suggest that Reform UK voters may be outliers in their policy preferences.

Attitudinal data from a wide range of surveys regularly show that people who are younger, female, more educated, living in more affluent neighbourhoods and from higher social grades tend to have more liberal views on immigration. Data from our 2026 survey are consistent with this view, however, they also show very strikingly that the largest and most consistent differences in views correlate to variation in the extent of social contact with immigrants. People who experience any level of contact with immigrants are likely to have far more pro-immigration views than people who say that they do not have any social contact with immigrants. In fact, these differences dwarf variations by other socio-demographic splits. For example, those with some degree of social contact with immigrants are far less likely than those with no social contact to favour a reduction in immigration levels (a gap of 24 percentage points), whilst the gap in views between those from higher and lower social grades, or between the most and the least deprived neighbourhoods is only 12 percentage points on the same issue. With regard to the benefits of diversity three-quarters (76%) of those who have any degree of social contact with immigrants agree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to half (47%) of those without social contact. Again, this is a much starker contrast than when views are examined in relation to gender, age or socio-economic status. This finding should not be interpreted as a simple causal relationship, however. Survey data of this kind does not tell us whether increased social contact leads to more positive views, or conversely whether those who hold more negative views choose to avoid social contact with immigrants.

Migration Policy Scotland does not take the position that migration policies should be defined by public views on immigration. The factors that should be weighed up by policy makers in this area are much more complex than those that can be captured through public opinion polling. Nonetheless, better understanding of attitudes, how these change over time and how they relate to socio-demographic groupings or other opinions, can play an important role in identifying opportunities for policy change and highlighting areas of alignment, divergence or miscommunication between political messaging and wider public views.

3 Curtice, J., Scholes, A., Morton, G. and Thaker, M. (Feb 2026) **British Social Attitudes 43 – A first look,** National Centre for Social Research.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Attitudes to Immigration in Scotland have become more restrictive. This continues a trend apparent since 2024. As in previous years however, views are less restrictive where questions are couched in more specific terms.
2. The overall drift towards greater restriction masks a hardening of views on both sides of the immigration debate. This may indicate that there are fewer people holding more nuanced or uncertain views and who may be more open to persuasion in either direction on this issue.
3. People's views strongly correlate with voting behaviour demonstrating the increasingly intense political contestability of immigration in Scotland. While views divide broadly along a growing left-right split, Reform UK voters often express significantly more negative views and preferences than those who support any other party, including the Conservative Party.
4. Social contact is a key factor. There is a clear relationship between the extent of social contact people have with immigrants living in Scotland and their views on a whole range of questions. Those who have no social contact are much more likely to hold negative or restrictive views. This should not however be interpreted as a simple causal relationship.

Methodology and Presentation of Findings

Migration Policy Scotland commissioned Diffley Partnership to conduct the fourth wave of our annual Attitudes to Immigration Survey in February 2026. The survey is part of a national poll of adults in Scotland, exploring experiences with and perceptions of immigration. This report sets out key findings of this polling and draws comparisons to results from previous waves of the survey conducted in February 2025 (Wave 3), February 2024 (Wave 2) and January 2023 (Wave 1).

In each wave of the survey the questionnaire has been designed by Migration Policy Scotland with advice from Diffley partnership and other experts. All waves of the survey follow a similar methodology, with core questions remaining the same, however, there are some changes between waves. Consistencies and changes across the four waves are laid out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Differences in methodology across waves

Wave	Date	Number of Questions	Changes to question wording?	Administration	Total responses	Weighting scheme
Wave 4	1-4 Feb 2026	18	No	ScotPulse, Understanding Scotland	2,161	Gender and age to Scottish adult population estimates 2024
Wave 3	4-10 Feb 2025	15	No	ScotPulse, Understanding Scotland	2,194	Gender and age to Scottish adult population estimates 2021
Wave 2	1-5 Feb 2024	15	Yes	ScotPulse, Understanding Scotland	2,305	Gender and age to Scottish adult population estimates 2020
Wave 1	17-19 Jan 2023	8	N/A	ScotPulse	1,162	Gender and age to Scottish adult population estimates 2020

Invitations to complete the survey are sent out through the Scotpulse panel[4] each year. Since Wave 2 (2024) the survey has been included in the Understanding Scotland series[5] significantly increasing the sample size. This method of administration allows our survey to benefit from data routinely gathered from Scotpulse panel members and via the Understanding Scotland series. This report provides analysis by a range of standard variables including age, gender, ethnicity, two-fold urban/rural classification, social grade and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

In addition to these standard variables, the survey includes questions on respondents' levels of social contact[6] with immigrants and attitudes to diversity (all waves) as well as vote choice at the most recent UK General Election (Waves 2-4). These questions allow for further comparisons based on respondents' experiences of immigration, social attitudes and political views.

For the purposes of statistical analysis, at each wave, responses have been weighted to Scottish adult population estimates by age and gender. The questionnaire for Wave 4 (2026) is reproduced in Appendix A including any variations to questions between years of the survey.

This report summarises the key findings of Wave 4 of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey, with the aid of visualisations. It includes descriptive statistics of the overall sample and of between group differences. To look for relationships or variations between sub-groups, two-sample t tests for differences in proportions and means were applied, where appropriate. Statistical differences between groups are reported at the 95% level. Differences are only reported when statistically significant and reporting does not include the result of every statistical test conducted; the most relevant and salient results are highlighted. Changes over time are discussed, by presenting a comparison to findings from Waves 1-3 of the survey, drawing attention to potentially significant trends.[7]

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

4 Scotpulse (**www.scotpulse.com**)

5 Understanding Scotland – Understanding Scotland (**https://understanding-scotland.co.uk**)

6 Where social contact is discussed as a variable throughout this report, we compare the responses of those who report no social contact, with the responses of those who report at least one form of social contact. For full wording of the social contact question and the list of options, please see Appendix A, Question 17.

7 Due to updates to the survey wording for some questions between Waves 1 and 2, some differences between these waves cannot be directly attributed to changes in opinion amongst the population. However, due to limited changes to question wording between Waves 2-4, these findings are directly comparable. Where wording has changed this is specified in Appendix A.

1. Levels of immigration – perceptions and preferences

In public and political debate, attitudes to immigration are often characterised primarily as relating to preferences for increased or decreased numbers. Such preferences are also routinely measured in attitudinal surveys and have been included in the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey since its inception. This means that we are now able to present data on how preferences have changed over time. In addition to exploring preferences concerning overall levels of immigration, the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey also asks about preferences for increasing or decreasing levels of immigration by visa type and about preferences regarding longer-term or more temporary forms of immigration.

1.1 Perceived level of immigration

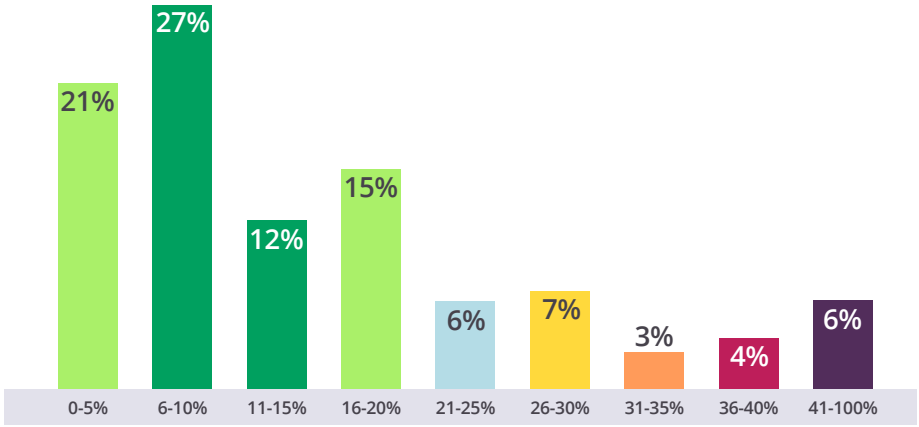
A useful starting point when discussing preferences for increased or decreased levels of immigration, is to understand what the Scottish general public believe the current level of immigration to be. In the absence of updated population data, the 2022 Scottish Census remains the most recent measure of actual population numbers available. The 2022 Scottish Census found that roughly 10% of the Scottish population was born outside of the UK at that time.[8] Fluctuating levels of net migration since 2022, including a record peak in 2023, mean that the size of that population will have grown since but is very likely to still be within 10-15% of the total population. In the absence of updated figures, we continue to consider that survey respondents who estimate a proportion of between 6 and 15 per cent are within range of the correct figure.

Respondents are asked what percentage of the total Scotland population they believe are immigrants and reminded that immigrants are defined in the survey as 'people born outside the UK who have moved to Scotland to work, study, join family, or because they need protection'. In 2026, two in five (40%) of the Scottish public overestimate the size of the immigrant population, believing this to make up over 15% of the Scottish population. Just over a quarter (26%) believe the level to be over 20%. At the other end of the spectrum, about one in five (21%) respondents significantly underestimate the percentage of the population who is an immigrant, believing the figure to be between 0-5%. In the middle, almost two in five respondents (38%) have a more accurate view of the percentage of Scotland's population which are immigrants (between 6 and 15%).

8 Home | Scotland's Census

Figure 1: Perceptions of current immigration level (Wave 4, 2026)

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

Perceptions of the level of immigration differ between some of the main socio-demographic groups captured in the survey:

Gender. Women are more likely than men to overestimate the percentage of the Scottish population who are immigrants (49%; 31%). Men are more likely than women to underestimate (25%; 18%) or be broadly accurate (44%; 33%) in their view of the current level of immigration.

Social Grade. Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to overestimate the percentage of the Scottish population who are immigrants (47%; 36%). Those in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to provide a broadly accurate estimate of the current proportion of the Scottish population who are immigrants (42%; 33%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Those living in areas with higher levels of neighbourhood deprivation are more likely than those living in less deprived areas to overestimate the percentage of the Scottish population who are immigrants. More than half (54%) of those in SIMD 1 overestimate, compared to just a third of those in SIMD 4 (34%) and SIMD 5 (33%).

Social Contact. Those who report that they have no social contact with immigrants are more likely than those with some social contact to overestimate the percentage of the population that is an immigrant (46%; 34%).

2024 UK General Election Vote. SNP voters are more likely than Reform UK voters to underestimate the level of immigration (25%; 16%). Labour (43%) and Reform UK (45%) voters are more likely than Liberal Democrat (32%) or Green (24%) voters to correctly estimate the proportion of immigrants in Scotland. Green Party voters are more likely than those who voted for any of the other main political parties to overestimate the percentage of immigrants in Scotland (53%). For example, just 1 in 3 (36%) SNP voters and 2 in 5 Reform (39%) and Conservative (40%) voters sizably overestimate the level of immigration in Scotland.

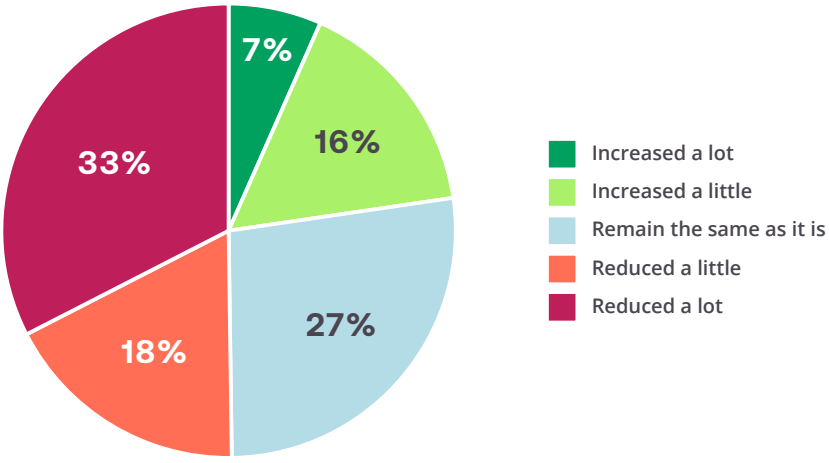
1.2 Preferences for increasing, maintaining or decreasing levels of immigration

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey asks respondents for their views on whether levels of immigration to Scotland should increase, decrease or remain the same. When considering their responses it is worth bearing in mind the inaccuracies in perceived levels of immigration discussed in the previous section.

In 2026 half of all respondents (50%) indicate a preference for the number of immigrants to Scotland to be reduced (either 'a lot' or 'a little'), while, just under 1 in 4 (23%) would prefer to see an increase in the level of immigration to Scotland and just over 1 in 4 (27%) say that they would like immigration levels to remain as they are. Amongst those who would like either an increase or a reduction in levels, we can break our findings down further to see whether they would like a small or a large change in numbers. Amongst those respondents who prefer numbers to be reduced, there is a greater preference for immigration to be reduced 'a lot' (33%) rather than reduced a little (18%). Amongst those in favour of increasing immigration, a larger group of respondents select that immigration should be increased 'a little' (16%) rather than a lot (7%).

Figure 2: Preferred level of immigration (Wave 4, 2026)

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)?



There are clear differences between the preferences of different sub-groups of the population for increasing, decreasing or maintaining current levels of immigration:

Age. More than half (54%) of those aged 55 and over would like to see immigration reduced, compared to just 4 in 10 (43%) of those 16-34. Those aged 16-34 are more likely than those aged 45 and over to select that immigration levels should remain the same (32%; 24%).

Social Grade. Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to think that immigration should be reduced (57%; 45%), while those in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to think that immigration should be increased (27%; 17%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Those in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 1) are more likely than those all other neighbourhoods (SIMD 2-5) to want to see a reduction in immigration (61%; 49%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to desire an increase in immigration (46%; 22%), while those from a white background are more likely than those from a minority ethnic background to desire a reduction in immigration (51%; 24%).

Social Contact. Those who have some social contact with immigrants living in Scotland are more likely than those with no social contact with immigrants to think that immigration should be increased (31%; 14%) or remain the same (31%; 23%). Those with no social contact with immigrants are more likely than those with social contact to desire a reduction in immigration (63%; 39%).

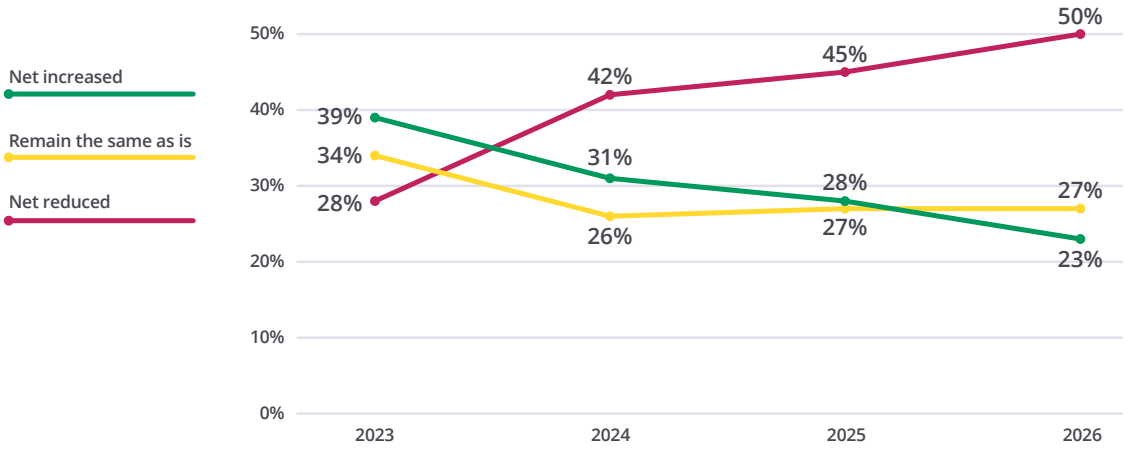
2024 UK General Election Vote. Nearly all (94%) of 2024 Reform UK voters want to see a reduction in the number of immigrations coming to Scotland, as do three-quarters (75%) of Conservative voters and half (52%) of Labour voters. These proportions are significantly higher than the two-fifths (42%) Liberal Democrat voters, a third (35%) of SNP voters and a quarter (27%) of Green Party voters that say the same. SNP (36%) and Green (31%) voters are more likely than those that voted for any other major political party to think that immigration should be increased. For example, just 1 in 5 (22%) Labour voters and under 1 in 10 (7%) Conservative voters desire an increase in immigration.

1.2.1 Changes over time to preferred level of immigration

When we turn to examine the findings across all four waves of the survey we can see that a stark shift in opinions between Waves 1 (2023) and 2 (2024) has been followed by a more gradual but persistent change since Wave 2 (2024) whereby support for a reduction in immigration numbers has grown steadily from 42% in 2024 to 50% in 2026, whilst support for increased numbers has fallen from 31% in 2024 to 23% in 2026.

Figure 3: Changes over time to preferred level of immigration, Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)

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)?



Over the past year, the group of respondents who prefer to see a reduction in levels of immigration has grown by five percentage points from 45% to 50%. The proportion of respondents who would like to see numbers increased has fallen, also by five percentage points, from 28% to 23%, whilst the proportion wishing numbers to remain as they are, has remained steady at 27%.

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

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey goes beyond exploring general preferences regarding levels of immigration, and also asks respondents their preferences for increasing, maintaining or decreasing numbers by specific visa types or reasons for immigration.

Findings in Wave 4 show that there is considerable variation to preferences for increasing or decreasing levels of immigration depending on visa type. However, there is considerably less appetite for reduced numbers when people are asked about specific entry routes than when they are asked a more general question. There are only two routes (dependents accompanying those on study visas (48%) and people seeking asylum (45%)) where the desire for reduced numbers comes close to the 50% who support reduction in numbers overall. For the 5 most popular visa types (the three main work visas, study visas and humanitarian visas) the proportion of respondents desiring a reduction in numbers is below 25%.

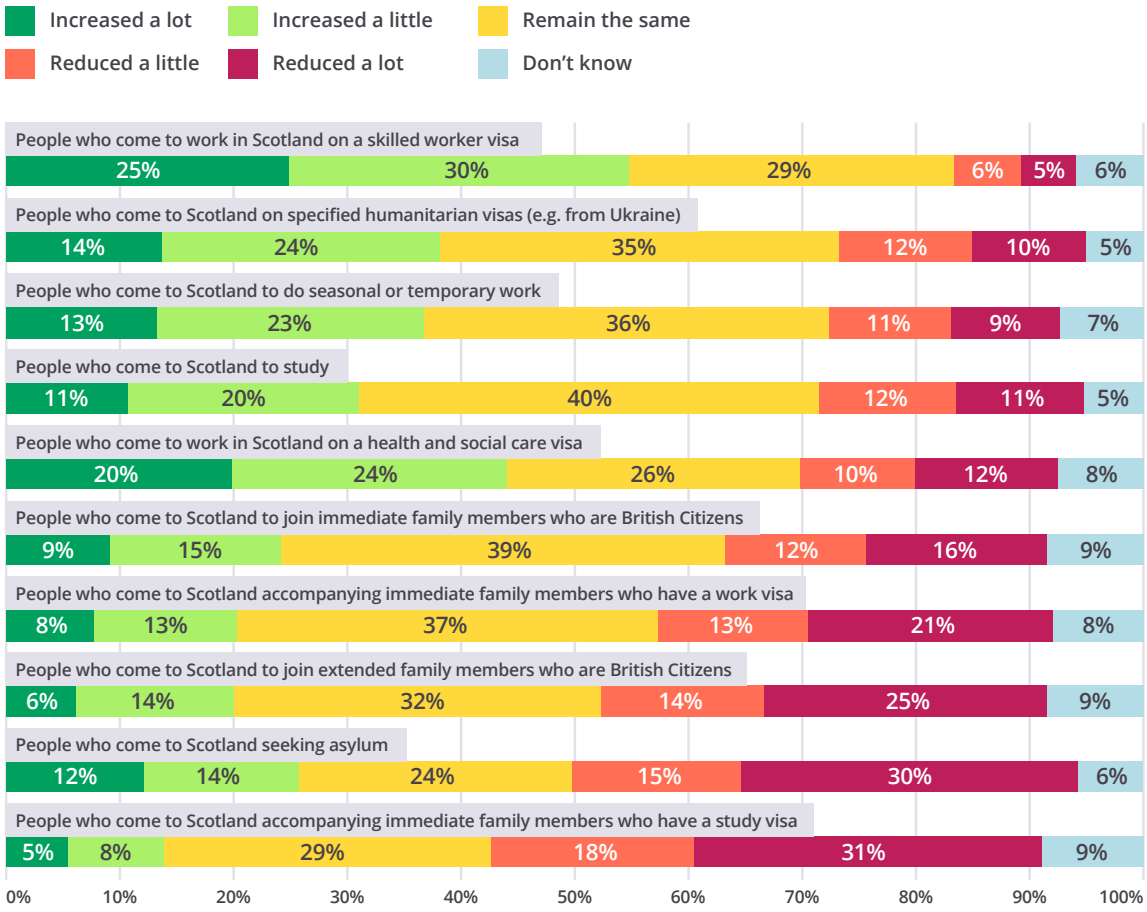
Grouping visa types around broader categories of immigration for work, study, family and humanitarian protection provides further insight into preferences. There is considerable appetite for an increase in numbers arriving on the three main work visa routes. Over half of respondents (55%) think that immigration on the skilled worker visa should be increased, over 2 in 5 (44%) believe immigration on the health and social care visa should be increased, while over 1 in 3 (37%) say the same for seasonal or temporary work visas. Support for reductions in any of these routes is low, around 1 in 5 for the health and social care visa (22%) and the seasonal or temporary work visa (20%) and only 1 in 10 (11%) for the skilled work visa. Support for numbers arriving in Scotland to study is also strong with less than 1 in 4 (23%) desiring a reduction in numbers, whilst 31% would prefer to see an increase and 40% wish levels to remain as they are.

Views on visa routes which allow people to accompany or join family members are generally less favourable, although there is significant variation depending on the type of family in question. Immigration of immediate family members joining British citizens or accompanying someone with a work visa are viewed the most favourably with 63% and 58% respectively supporting numbers to either increase or remain as they are. Immediate family members accompanying someone on a student visa, as well as extended family members arriving to join British citizens garner much less support. Just over 2 in 5 (42%) believe immigration for people accompanying immediate family members with a study visa should either be increased or stay the same, while close to half (48%) think it should be reduced. About half of respondents (52%) believe the number of people immigrating to join extended family members who are British Citizens should either increase or remain the same while 39% believe this type of immigration should be reduced.

Attitudes towards immigration for humanitarian protection also vary considerably depending on the type of protection. There are more favourable views on specified humanitarian visa routes than there are on spontaneous arrivals seeking asylum. Nearly 3 in 4 respondents (73%) would like to see numbers on specified humanitarian visas either increase (38%) or remain the same (35%), whilst only 50% prefer either an increase (26%) or no change (24%) in the number of people arriving to seek asylum.

Figure 4: Preferred level of immigration by visa type, Wave 4 (2026)

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



When we examine the relationship between preferences and respondents' characteristics, we find that social contact and voting behaviour produce a clear pattern of views across all types of immigration, whilst other differences between socio-demographic groups are more mixed or relate only to specific visa types:

Social contact. Across all types of immigration, respondents who have social contact with immigrants living in Scotland are more likely than those who have none to think that immigration should be increased. By the same token those with no social contact are more likely than those who do have social contact with immigrants to think each type of immigration should be reduced. For instance, nearly 2 in 3 (64%) of those with social contact with immigrants think that skilled worker immigration should be increased, compared to under 1 in 2 (46%) of those with no social contact.

2024 General Election Vote. For almost all types of immigration, Reform UK voters are more likely than Conservative, SNP, Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat voters to want to see a reduction in numbers. Furthermore, those that voted Conservative are more likely than SNP, Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat voters to think that immigration should be reduced for most visa types, excluding skilled worker visas, seasonal/temporary work visas or study visas. As an example, 4 in 5 (84%) of Reform voters and 2 in 3 (65%) Conservative voters desire a reduction in asylum visas, compared to around 5 in 10 (46%) Labour voters and 4 in 10 (38%) Liberal Democrat voters, and just 3 in 10 SNP (30%) and Green (27%) voters.

Gender. Men are more likely than women to want to see a reduction in immigration across many visa types, including skilled worker visas (12%; 9%), health and social care visas (26%; 19%), specified humanitarian visas (24%; 20%), asylum seekers (48%; 41%), people who come accompanying immediate family members with a study visa (51%; 46%) and people who come to join extended family members who are British citizens (43%; 36%).

Social Grade. Those in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to favour an increase in numbers across several immigration routes (skilled worker visa, health and social care visa, seasonal or temporary workers, people who come to Scotland accompanying immediate family members who have a work visa or to join immediate or extended family who are British Citizens). Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to favour a reduction in immigration via health and social care visas (27%; 19%), specified humanitarian visas (24%; 20%), asylum seekers (48%; 42%) and those that come to Scotland to join extended family members who are British citizens (42%; 37%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Those in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 1) are more likely than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 5) to desire a reduction in certain visa types, including humanitarian visas (31%; 22%), seasonal or temporary workers (30%; 22%), and skilled worker visas (16%; 8%).

Age. Those aged 65+ are more likely than those aged 16-34 to want a reduction in most family visa types. Those aged 65+ are more likely than those aged 16-34 to support a reduction in the number of people that come to Scotland accompanying immediate family members with a work visa (40%; 25%) or a student visa (54%; 38%), immediate family members of British Citizens (34%; 18%) or extended family members of British Citizens (44%; 33%). The older age group (65+) is also more likely than the younger (16-34) to wish to see a reduction in the numbers who come seeking asylum (46%; 39%). By contrast, for some other visa types, it is the older age group who are more in favour of increased numbers. Those aged 65+ are more likely than those aged 16-34 to support an increase in seasonal or temporary work visas (41%; 33%), study visas (35%; 28%) and those who come to Scotland accompanying immediate family members who have a work visa (24%; 16%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to prefer increased levels of immigration for seasonal and temporary work (58%; 36%), study (50%; 31%), immediate family accompanying either someone with a work visa (33%; 20%) or accompanying someone with a study visa (25%; 14%), or extended family members coming to join British Citizens (36%; 20%) should be increased.

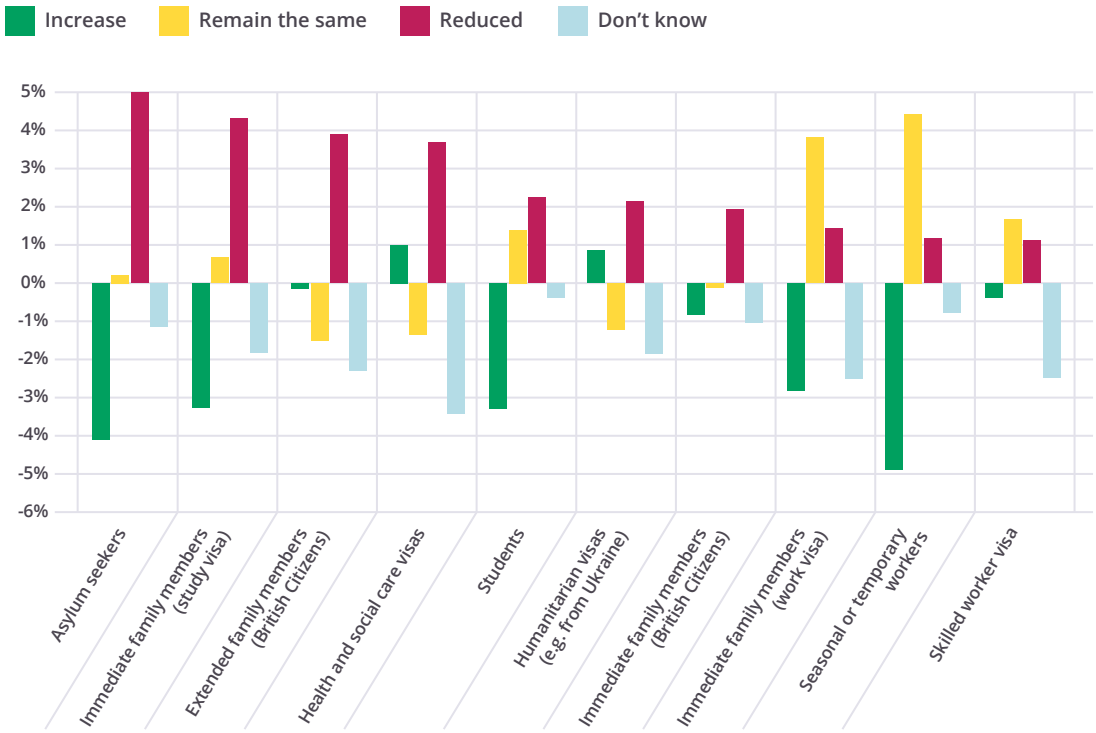
1.3.1 Changes over time to preferred level of immigration by visa type

When considering change across all three waves of the survey since 2024 in which this question has been included, the data show consistently higher levels of support for work- and study-related visas, as well as for specified humanitarian visas. Visas allowing family members to join British Citizens or to accompany immigrants holding work or study visas as well as spontaneous arrivals seeking asylum are consistently viewed less favourably.

There have however been changes in the proportion of respondents who want to see an increase or a reduction in numbers across many visa types. This was seen in our comparison of findings between Waves 2 and 3 (2024-25) reported on in 2025,[9] and can be observed again in a comparison of findings from Wave 3 (2025) and Wave 4 (2026).

Figure 5: Changes over time to preferred level of immigration by visa type, percentage change in responses, Waves 3 and 4 (2025-2026)

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

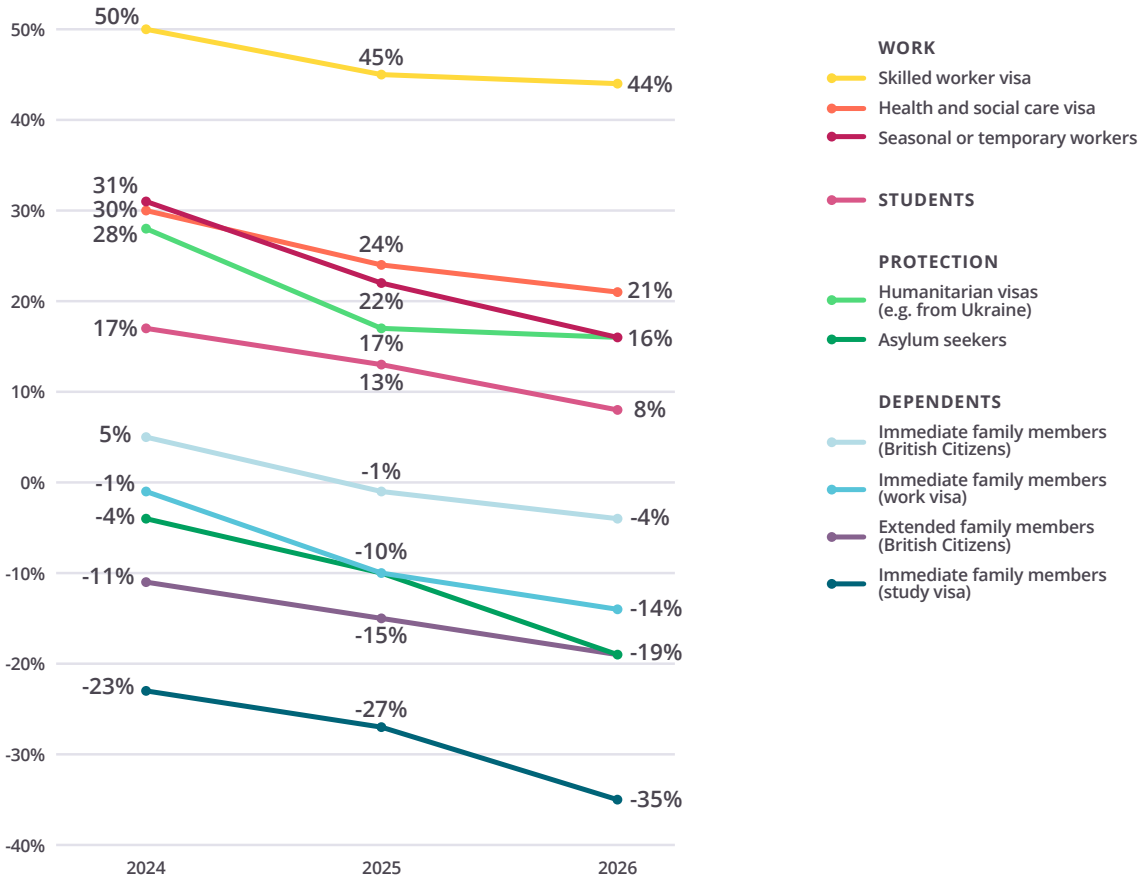


Over the past year, the proportion who want to see a decrease in numbers has risen at least marginally across all of the immigration routes surveyed, and particularly so in relation to asylum seekers, where there is a five percentage point increase, closely followed by family members accompanying someone with a student visa, extended family members of UK citizens, and Health and Social Care visas, all of which have seen a four percentage point increase in the proportion wanting a reduction. At the same time, the biggest declines in support for increased numbers relate to seasonal or temporary workers and asylum seekers. Changes in views on health and social care and humanitarian visas are more divided. Here a 1% increase in support for greater numbers sits alongside a growth in support for reductions in these visas categories of 4% and 2% respectively.

9 Kyambi, S. and Kay, R. (November 2025) **Attitudes to Immigration in Scotland: Changing, complex, contradictory,** Migration Policy Scotland.

In order to understand changes over a longer period we have calculated net support for increase at each Wave of the survey where this question has been included by subtracting the proportion who would prefer to see numbers decrease, from those who would prefer to see them increase. Those respondents who state that they would prefer numbers to stay the same or that they do not know are not included in this calculation.

Figure 6: Change over time to preferred level of immigration by visa type, net increase, Waves 2-4 (2024-2026)



Exploring change in time in this way shows that whilst net increase has fallen across all visa types and consistently across the three Waves of the survey, the hierarchy of preference for different visa types has stayed rather stable. Some of the biggest drops in support for net increase have also been seen at the bottom of this ranking: between Waves 2 (2024) and 4 (2026), support for asylum seekers has fallen by 15 percentage points, whilst support for family members of those on either study visas or work visas has fallen by 12 and 13 percentage points respectively. There have also been significant drops in support for some of the otherwise more popular visa routes, including seasonal and temporary workers (down by 15 percentage points) and humanitarian visas (down by 12 percentage points).

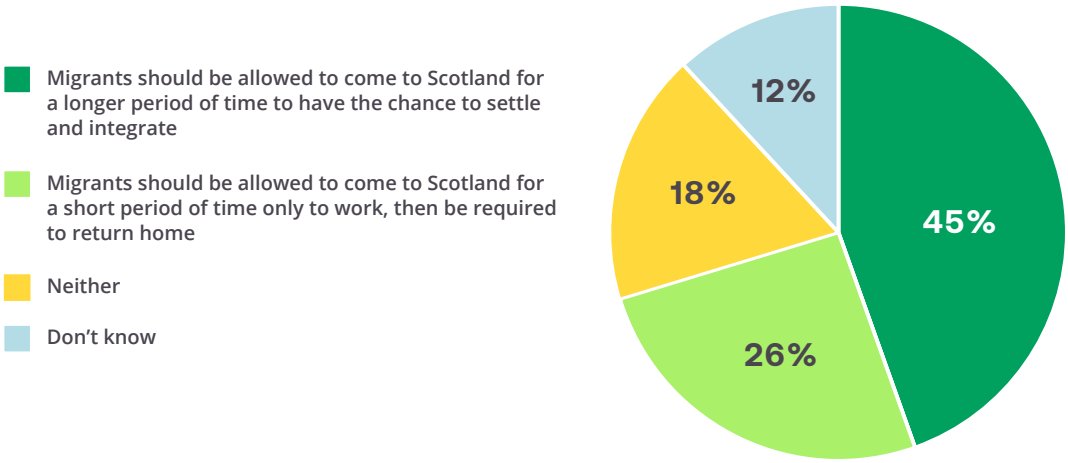
1.4 Preferences for types of immigration by length of stay

Attitudes to immigration also differ with regard to length of stay. For some longer-term immigration with opportunities to settle and integrate is seen as preferable, others view short-term immigration for the purposes of work as the better option. Immigration policies can be more or less restrictive with regards to length of stay and conditions of settlement, and both questions have been raised within UK policy making and public debate over the past year. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey has asked respondents about their preferences regarding length of stay since Wave 1 (2023).

Findings from Wave 4 (2026) show that about half of respondents (45%) prefer longer-term immigration, allowing people to come to Scotland for an extended period of time with the chance to settle and integrate. Meanwhile, just over 1 in 4 (26%) express a preference for short-term immigration, allowing people to come to Scotland for a restricted period of time only to work, and then be required to return home. A sizeable minority, 1 in 5 (18%) select that neither statement comes closest to their preference, whilst 1 in 10 (12%) respond that they don't know.

Figure 7: Preferences by length of stay (Wave 4, 2026)

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



Examining preferences by different socio-demographic groups and characteristics reveals several noteworthy differences:

Gender. Women are more likely than men to say they prefer longer-term immigration with a chance to settle and integrate (47%; 43%) or to respond that they don't know which they prefer (14%; 9%).

Age. The youngest age group (16-34) is most likely, relative to every other age group, to prefer longer-term immigration with the chance for integration. Over half (56%) of 16-34 year-olds select this option, compared to around 2 in 5 (41%) of those aged 35 and above.

Social Grade. Respondents in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to support longer-term immigration (48%; 41%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to prefer longer-term immigration (67%; 45%).

Social Contact. Respondents who have no social contact with immigrants are more likely than those with some degree of social contact to prefer short-term immigration (34%; 19%), while those with social contact are more likely than those without to support longer-term immigration (58%; 33%).

2024 UK General Election Vote. Respondents who voted for right-of-centre political parties in 2024, are more likely than those who voted for centre-left political parties to prefer short-term immigration. Preferences for short-term immigration by party vote were Conservative (47%) Reform UK (41%), compared to Labour (28%), Liberal Democrat (26%), SNP (18%) and Green (2%). Reform UK voters are also more likely than those who voted for any other party to say that they do not prefer either long- or short-term immigration (47%).

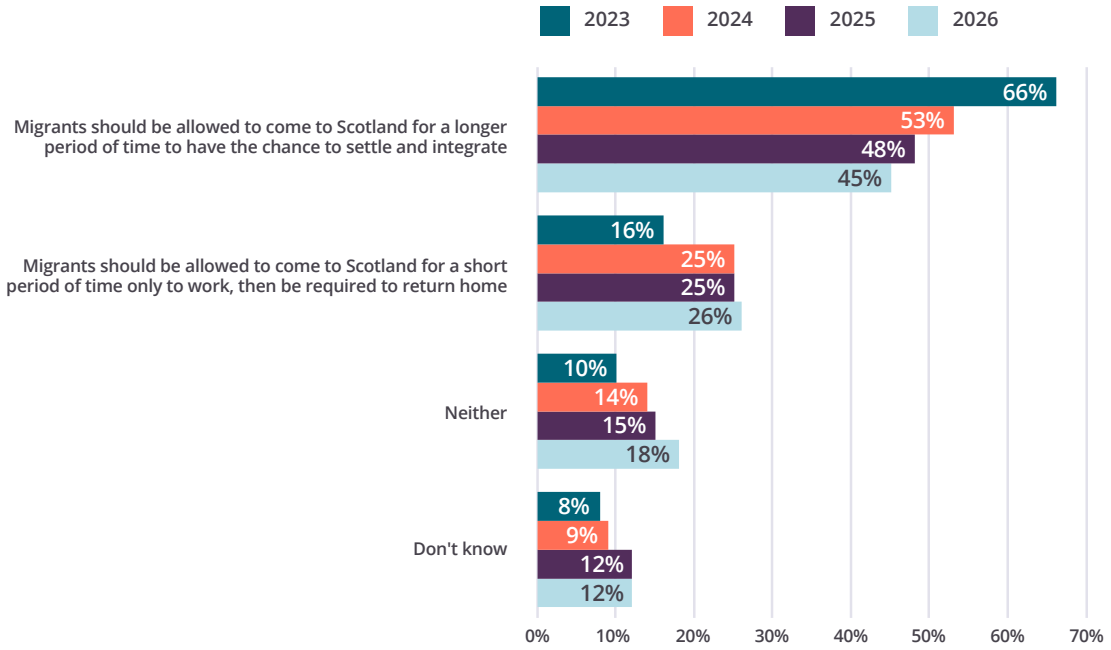
1.4.1 Changes over time to preferences by length of stay

Changes to preferences regarding length of stay between Wave 3 (2025) and Wave 4 (2026) of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey are quite modest. There has been a fall of three percentage points in support for longer-term immigration with opportunities for people to settle and integrate accompanied by an increase of three percentage points in the proportion of respondents who say that neither of these statements comes closest to their view.

Looking over all four waves of the survey, we can see a more substantial and consistent decline in support for longer-term immigration, accompanied by more modest increases both in support for short-term immigration and in the number of respondents who prefer neither statement or don't know.

Figure 8: Changes over time to preferences by length of stay (Waves 1-4, 2023-2026)

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



2. Immigration policy preferences

This chapter includes findings on the Scottish general public's views regarding immigration policy options. The survey questions focus on understanding preferences in relation to four key policy areas: access to the labour market and the role of migrant labour in the economy, support for graduate visas, views on eligibility to access social security and enthusiasm for welcoming programmes which can support migrant integration. Migration Policy Scotland does not take the view that migration policies should be defined by public attitudes alone. However, changes to law and policy are often justified on the basis of being what the public want. Our survey offers evidence about public attitudes in Scotland which allow us to comment on whether policies and proposals in these areas align with public preferences.

2.1 Recruiting from abroad

Reducing net migration is a clear government aim. Changes to UK immigration rules following the May 2025 White Paper[10] **Restoring Control over the UK Immigration System** have extended restrictions on work visa routes to achieve this, ending overseas recruitment of care workers and senior care workers in July 2025. Adjusting employers' ability to recruit from abroad is a common mechanism by which governments seek to control immigration: giving employers greater freedom to recruit overseas can encourage higher levels of immigration, while more restrictive policies can limit it. The changes to the social care visa route account for much of the significant reduction in net migration since 2023. This is in line with public views increasingly favouring a reduction in immigration levels. Yet problematically the reduction in care worker visas and, more generally, restrictions on employers recruiting workers overseas does not align with Scottish views. UK-wide data echoes this general finding that migration for work is more popular than other forms of migration.[11]

The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey provides insight into what the broader Scottish public thinks about recruitment from abroad, and whether this should be balanced by measures to protect British workers. The results from Wave 4 (2026) show that there is strong support overall for employers having the ability to recruit from abroad across various sectors. The strongest support is for recruitment to sectors with critical shortages or where seasonal labour is required. In both cases over 7 in 10 respondents (73% and 71% respectively) agree either strongly or tend to, and only 1 in 5 (19%) disagree either strongly or tend to, that employers should be able to recruit from abroad to fill vacancies. When asked whether employers generally should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies, responses continue to show more agreement than disagreement. However, agreement is lower (53% strongly agree or tend to agree) and disagreement higher (27% strongly disagree or tend to disagree) than it is for specific sectors. There is also very clear disagreement with an overall ban on employers recruiting from abroad. 7 in 10 respondents disagree with this proposition and less than 3 in 20 (14%) agree. Public support for overseas recruitment is echoed by business. The Understanding Business survey found

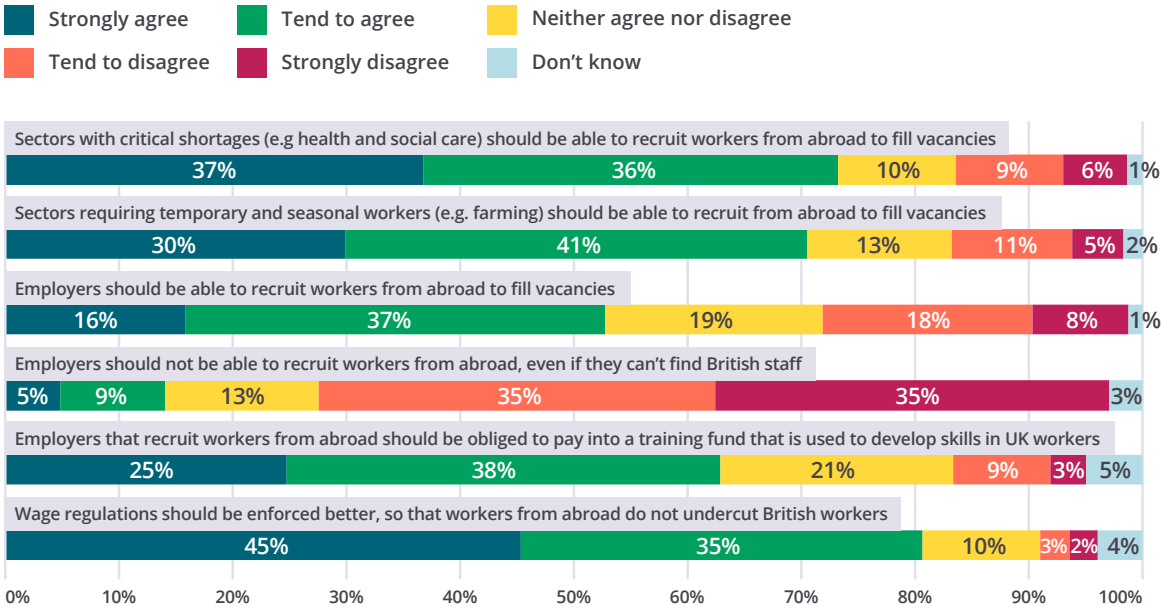
10 Home Office (May 2025) **Restoring Control over the UK Immigration System**, HM Government

11 Katwala, S., Ballinger, S. and Rolfe, H. (November 2025) Noise-and-nuance. What the public really thinks about immigration, British Future, and Katwala, S., Ballinger, S. and Rolfe, H. (May 2026) **After the Fall. Why hasn't falling immigration changed public attitudes?**, British Future.

61% of Scottish business leaders think employers should be able to recruit from abroad for all jobs and 76% believe that sectors with critical shortages should be able to recruit workers from abroad.[12]

Figure 9: Recruiting from abroad (Wave 4, 2026)

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



Balancing this broad agreement with employers' retaining options to recruit from abroad, there is also high agreement - 4 in 5 (81%) - with wage regulation enforcement, so that workers from abroad do not undercut British workers. Furthermore, nearly 2 in 3 (63%) agree that employers who recruit workers from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund that is used to develop skills in UK workers.

Underlying the general opinions outlined above, are some clear differences in attitudes towards recruitment from abroad across different subgroups within the population. Amongst the following groups there are clear cleavages of opinion relevant to each of the statements in this question:

Social Grade. Respondents in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to agree with recruitment from abroad where employers have vacancies in sectors requiring seasonal workers (75%; 65%) or with critical shortages (76%; 69%), as well as in general (57%; 46%). Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to disagree with these statements about recruiting from abroad and to agree that employers that recruit from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund to develop local workers (66%; 60%).

Social Contact. Respondents who have social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do not to agree that employers should be able to recruit from abroad where they have vacancies in sectors with critical shortages (81%; 65%) or in sectors requiring temporary or seasonal workers (81%; 61%) as well as in general (63%; 43%). Those without social contact are more likely than those with social contact to say that employers should not be able to recruit from abroad, even if they can't find British staff

12 Diffley Partnership and 56º North (June 2025) **Understanding Business June 2025.**

(20%; 10%) and that employers who recruit from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund to develop skills in UK workers (68%; 58%).

2024 General Election Vote. Respondents who voted Reform UK in 2024 are more likely than those who voted for any other party to disagree with all of the statements suggesting that employers should be able to recruit from abroad. For example, 7 in 10 (69%) Reform UK voters disagree that employers generally should be able to recruit workers from abroad, while the second highest proportion is just 1 in 3 (32%) of Conservative voters. Half (50%) of 2024 Reform voters agree that employers should not be able to recruit from abroad, even when they cannot find British workers, compared to 1 in 5 (20%) Conservative voters, 1 in 10 Labour (12%), SNP (11%) and Liberal Democrat (10%) voters, and just 1 in 20 (5%) Green voters.

Amongst other subgroups, differences can also be seen but only on a few statements, or in ways which indicate a less clear pattern:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to agree that employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff (17%; 11%) and that employers who recruit from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund to develop skills in UK workers (68%; 58%). Women are more likely than men to agree that all employers (55%; 50%) or those in sectors with critical shortages (75%; 71%) should be able to recruit from abroad.

Age. The oldest age group (65+) is more likely than the youngest age group (16-34) to agree with a mix of positive and negative recruitment from abroad statements, including that sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers should be able to recruit from abroad (75%; 68%), employers should not be able to recruit from abroad in principle (17%; 11%) and wage regulations should be better enforced so that workers from abroad do not undercut British workers (87%; 73%).

Location. Rural residents are more likely than urban respondents to agree that sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers (e.g., farming) should be able to recruit from abroad (77%; 69%).

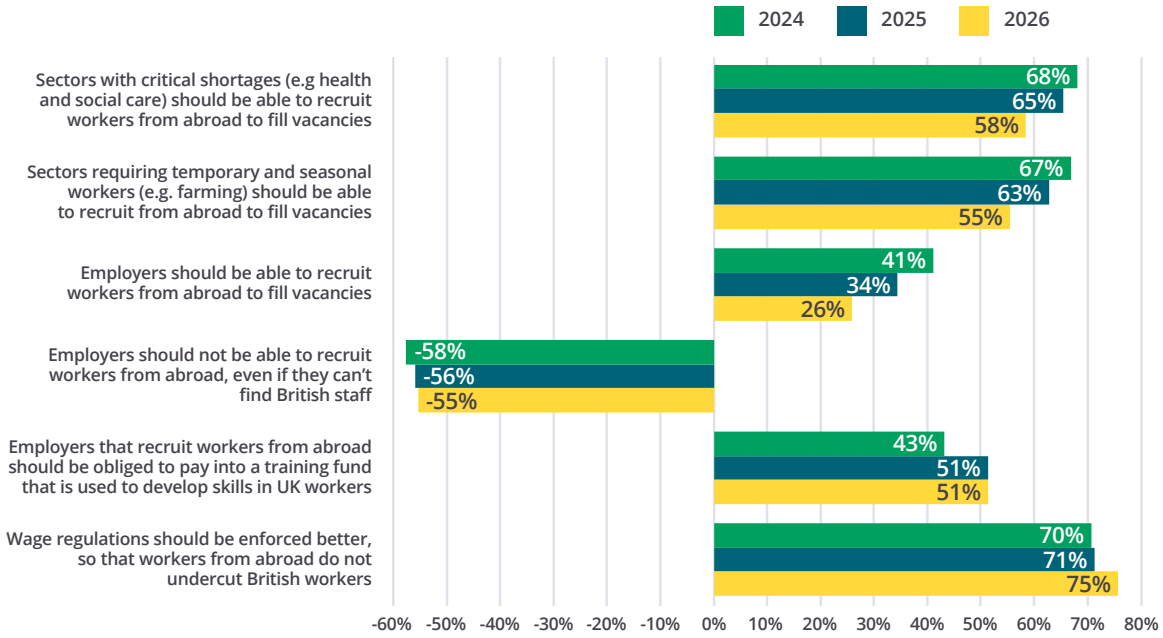
Neighbourhood deprivation. Those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 5) are more likely than those in the most deprived (SIMD 1) to agree that sectors with critical shortages (76%; 67%) and sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers (75%; 62%) should be able to recruit from abroad. Those in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely than those in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) to agree that employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff (18%; 10%).

2.1.1 Changes over time to support for recruitment from abroad

To understand how attitudes towards these statements have changed over time, we have calculated net agreement, subtracting the proportion who disagree from the proportion who agree with each statement over Waves 2 (2024), 3 (2025) and 4 (2026). Decreased net agreement therefore indicates that fewer respondents are agreeing with a statement and/or more are disagreeing.

Figure 10: Changes over time to support for recruitment from abroad, net agreement, Waves 2-4 (2024-2026)

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



There has been a gradual but consistent decrease in support for positive statements about recruiting from abroad, as shown by falling net agreement with these statements since 2024. Net agreement with the statement 'employers should be able to recruit workers from abroad to fill vacancies' has fallen by 15 percentage points since 2024, including a drop of 8 points over the last year. Net support for recruitment from abroad to specific sectors has fallen slightly less steeply, but still consistently. On sectors requiring temporary and seasonal workers, there has been a decrease of 12 percentage points in net agreement with recruitment from abroad since 2024, including a drop of 8 points in the last year. And on sectors with critical shortages there has been a drop of 10 percentage points since 2024, including 7 points in the last year.

Balancing this, there has been only a slight change in general disagreement with the statement 'employers should not be able to recruit workers from abroad, even if they can't find British staff'. On this statement the Scottish public is consistently more likely to disagree than agree and therefore net agreement is negative. This has changed only slightly, by 3 percentage points, since 2024.

Opinions on the need for employers to balance their ability to recruit from abroad with measures to protect the earnings and skills development of British workers have changed only slightly over the three waves of the survey. There is continuous strong net agreement with both statements. On the question of wage regulations to prevent workers from abroad undercutting British workers, net agreement has risen by five percentage points since 2024, including an increase of four percentage points over the last year. Net agreement with the statement that 'employers that recruit workers from abroad should be obliged to pay into a training fund that is used to develop skills in British workers' has increased by eight percentage points since 2024, but all of this change was between Waves 2 (2024) and 3 (2025) of the survey.

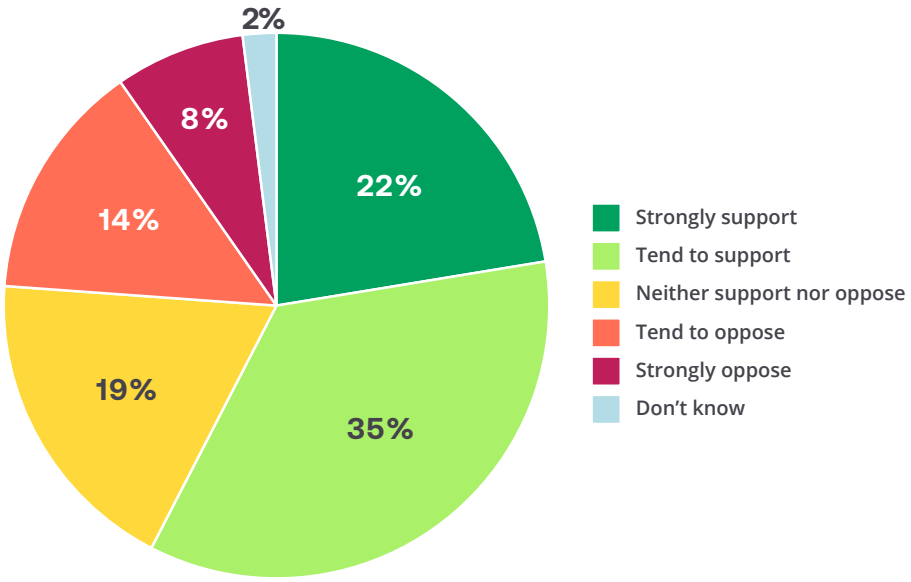
2.2 Graduate visas

A graduate visa route, allowing international students to remain in the UK for a specified period after completing their studies and to take up any job during that period, has been in existence since 2004. Various changes to the legislation have lengthened or shortened the period of stay allowed and altered rules regarding the right to be accompanied by family members. Changes introduced following the May 2025 Immigration White paper have tightened restrictions. For applications submitted on or before 31st December 2026 the standard length of stay permitted is 2 years, this has been reduced to 18 months for applications submitted on or after January 2027.

Wave 4 (2026) of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration survey reminded respondents that, 'currently international students are eligible to apply for a 2-year post-study visa which allows them to work in any job' and asked whether or not they support or oppose this policy. Results show that the majority of the Scottish public continue to support a graduate visa with a 2-year post study period of leave. About 3 in 5 (58%) either strongly support or tend to support the existing graduate visa policy. Only 1 in 5 (22%) are opposed to this policy, while a similar proportion (19%) select that they neither support nor oppose it. Just 2% respond that they don't know.

Figure 11: Support for graduate visa policy, Wave 4 (2026)

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?



Some differences in support and opposition to the graduate visa policy are notable between socio-demographic groups.

Gender. Younger people are more likely than older people to support the policy. Amongst those aged 16-34 and 35-44 the proportions supporting the policy are 68% and 59% respectively, compared to those aged 55-64 and 65+ where the proportions supporting the policy are 52% and 49% respectively.

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 4-5) are more likely than those in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 1) to support the graduate visa policy (61%; 50%).

Social Contact. Those who have social contact with immigrants are very much more likely than those who report no social contact with immigrants to support the policy (71%; 47%). Those with no social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do have social contact with immigrants to oppose the policy (30%; 15%) or to neither support nor oppose the policy (22%; 13%).

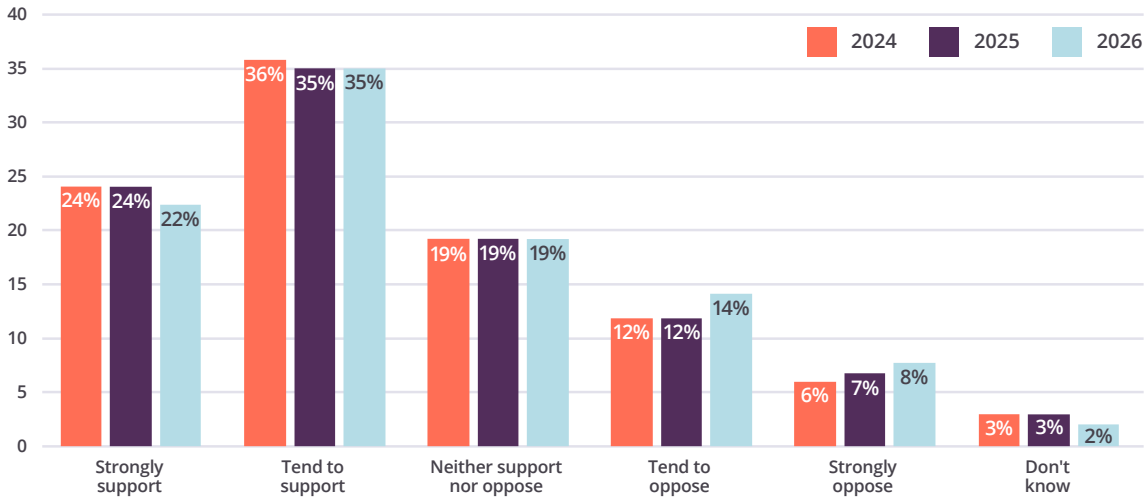
2024 General Election Vote. Voting behaviour also reveals substantial differences. 6 in 10 (58%) 2024 Reform UK voters are more likely than voters for all other parties to oppose the policy with 6 in 10 (58%) expressing opposition, followed by Conservative voters at 1 in 3 (32%). Those who voted for the Greens (87%) or SNP (72%) are more likely to support the graduate visa policy than those that voted for all other parties, with Labour voters following at (55%).

2.2.1 Changes over time to support for graduate visas

Support for the graduate visa policy has remained very stable over the three waves of the survey where this question has been included. Since Wave 2 (2024) there has been a small increase of four percentage points in the proportion that oppose (either 'tend to' or 'strongly) the graduate visa. The proportion that supports the graduate visa policy has fallen by 3 percentage points over the same period.

Figure 12: Changes over time in support for graduate visas, Waves 2-4 (2024-2026)

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?



2.3 Eligibility for social benefits

Changes to settlement are a key focus of the May 2025 White Paper proposals. These aim to make it more difficult to qualify for indefinite leave and extend the time period before settlement beyond five years. Following a consultation on earned settlement rules the language requirement has been raised with further announcements expected in Autumn 2026.[13] A report by the Home Affairs Select Committee on the proposed reforms makes evident that one driver of this extension to the settlement period is the potential strain on

13 Home Office (November 2025) **A Fairer Pathway to Settlement**, HM Government

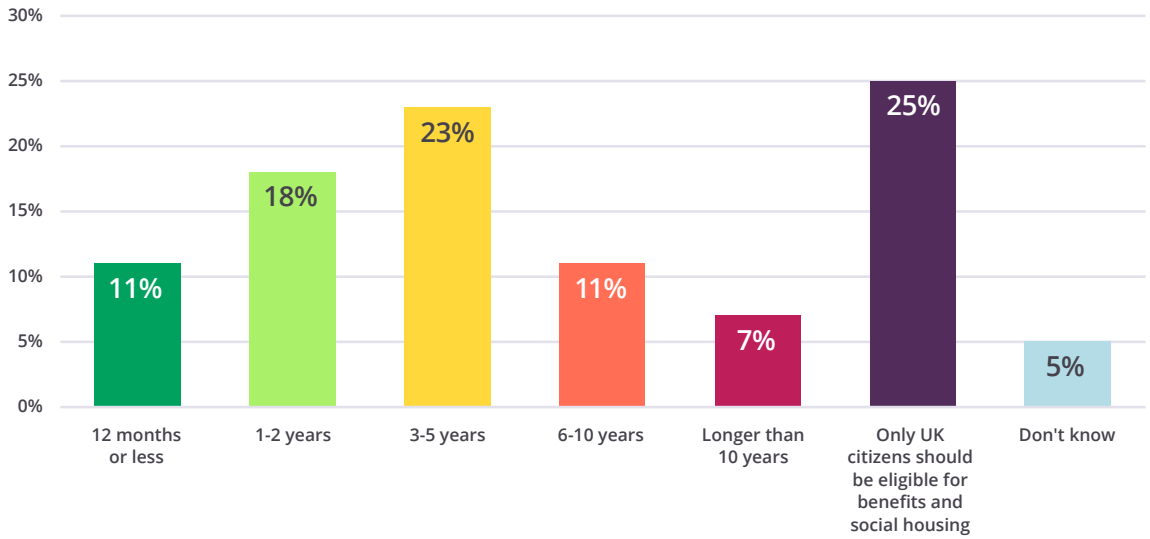
the public purse of the high number of care workers and their families becoming eligible to access public funds within the next few years.[14]

It is a long-standing policy of successive UK governments to restrict most immigrants access to social security through a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition that applies to visa holders until settlement (indefinite leave to remain) has been granted. The same applies to those with irregular immigration status. The rationale is that people arriving should be able to support themselves and their families financially, to avoid a burden on taxpayers. Many organisations and individuals working with immigrants have expressed concerns that the impacts of NRPF exacerbate inequality, hardship and poverty. The transition to a new immigration system post-Brexit has seen a higher proportion of immigrants arriving through visa routes where access to public funds is generally restricted. The recent changes and proposals seek to extend the period of time immigrants remain ineligible for social benefits. Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration data provides insight on how well this aligns with the Scottish public's views.

Since Wave 2 (2024) The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey has asked respondents about the length of time for which immigrants, excluding asylum seekers and refugees, should work and pay taxes in the UK before they are eligible for benefits and social housing. Results from Wave 4 (2026) show that a majority of respondents (52%) believe that working immigrants should become eligible for these benefits within five years or less. Within this group of respondents, more believe it should take 2 years or less (29%) than that it should take 3-5 years for immigrants to be eligible (23%). In contrast, 1 in 5 respondents (18%) believe that immigrants should have to work and pay taxes for six years or longer before becoming eligible for benefits and social housing and a sizable minority of 1 in 4 (25%) report that eligibility for such social benefits should be reserved to UK citizens only. This perspective that broadly supports access to social benefits within 5 years is echoed in UK-wide data which contrasts with the UK Government's proposed direction of travel on this issue. The 2024 British Social Attitudes survey found 65% respondents believe immigrants should be able to claim welfare benefits and British citizenship after 3 years of which 27% thought this should be immediate.[15]

Figure 13: Eligibility for social benefits, Wave 4 (2026)

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?



14 Home Affairs Committee (March 2026) **Earned Settlement: Examining the Government's proposed reforms,** House of Commons

15 Curtice, J. and Scholes, A. (September 2024) **British Social Attitudes 41. National Identity,** National Centre for Social Research.

Notable differences in opinions on eligibility for social benefits between socio-demographic groups of respondents include:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to think that only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing (28%; 23%).

Age. Younger people, aged 16-34 are more likely than older people, aged 55 and over, to think that immigrants should be eligible for benefits and social housing within 2 years or less (36%; 25%), while those aged 55 and over, are more likely than those aged 16-34 to think that immigrants should have to work and pay taxes for at least six years before becoming eligible for benefits and social housing (22%; 11%).

Social Grade. Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to think that only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing (28%; 23%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. People living in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely than those living in any other area (SIMD2-5) to say that benefits and social housing should only be available to UK citizens (36%; 24%).

Social Contact. Those who have social contact with immigrants in Scotland are more likely than those who do not have social contact to say that immigrants should become eligible for benefits after working and paying taxes for 12 months or less (17%; 5%). Those without social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do have social contact to say that only UK citizens should have access to benefits and social housing (35%; 18%).

2024 General Election Vote. 6 in 10 (58%) Reform UK voters say that benefits and social housing should only be available to UK citizens. This is a far higher percentage than seen among than voters for any other major party, with those who didn't vote at all coming next at 37% and Conservative voters at 28%. In contrast, more than a third of Green Party voters (35%) say that eligibility for benefits should start at 12 months or sooner. This is followed by those who didn't vote at all (13%) and SNP voters (12%).

2.3.1 Changes over time to support for eligibility for social benefits

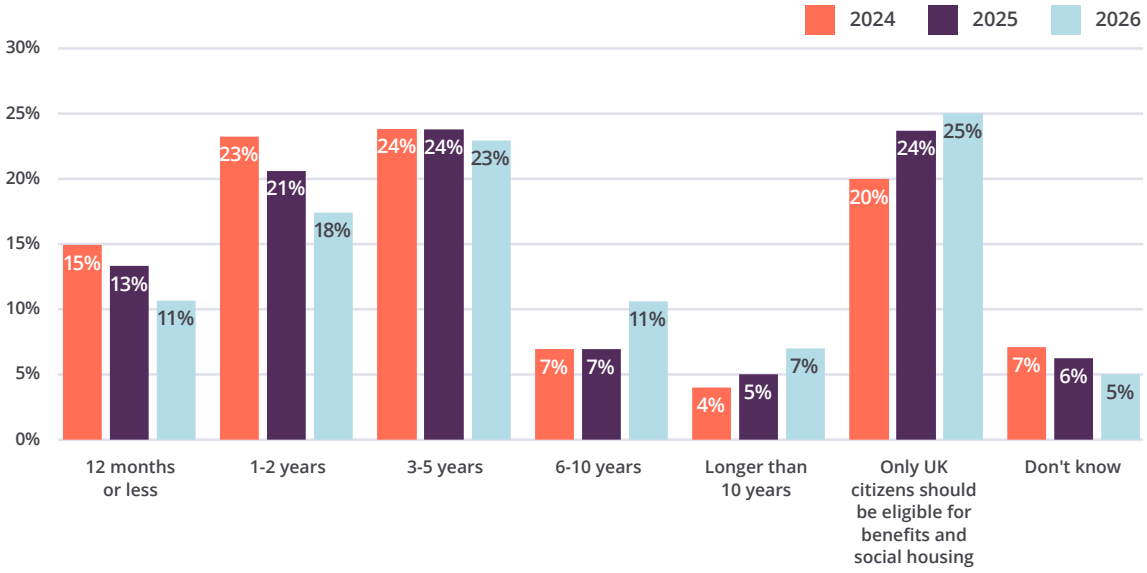
Comparing the three waves of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey over which this question has been asked, we can see a decline in support for earlier eligibility to social benefits and increasing numbers who feel either that immigrants should wait six years or longer, or that eligibility should be reserved only for people with UK citizenship.

Since Wave 2 (2024), the proportion of respondents who believe eligibility should begin within two years has fallen by 9 percentage points from 38% to 29%. Most of this fall (6 percentage points) has occurred between Waves 3 (2025) and 4 (2026). The proportion of respondents saying eligibility should begin within 3-5 years has remained stable at around 1 in 4 over all three waves of the survey.

Correspondingly, the proportion of respondents who believe that it should take six years or longer for immigrants to be eligible for benefits and social housing has increased by 7 percentage points since 2024, with almost all of this a rise (6 percentage points) occurring between Waves 3 (2025) and 4 (2026). There has also been an increase in the proportion of respondents who believe that only UK citizens should be eligible for benefits and social housing, however here the largest increase (4 percentage points) took place between Waves 2 (2024) and 3 (2025) with only an additional 1 point increase in the past year.

Figure 14: Changes over time to support for eligibility for social benefits, Waves 2-4 (2024-26)

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?



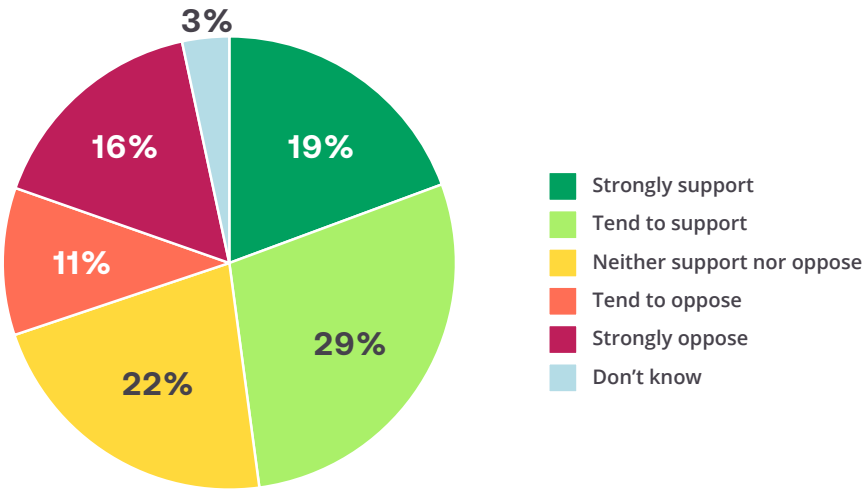
2.4 Welcoming programmes

Welcoming hubs and programmes that seek to foster social links between settled residents and newly arrived migrants as well as support new arrivals to find their feet, have been a way in which governments at different levels have sought to promote migrant integration and social cohesion. These initiatives rose to particular prominence as new humanitarian routes emerged for Ukrainians and Hong Kongers in 2022. They also featured as part of refugee resettlement and sponsorship programmes. Rising tensions and anti-immigrant hostility have seen government focus and rhetoric shift more towards safeguarding communities, yet the broader underpinning effort to welcome immigrants and support their integration remains relevant.

Since Wave 2 (2024) the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration survey has asked how supportive respondents are of welcoming programmes for newly arrived migrants, with no reference to particular groups or routes. Results from Wave 4 (2026) show that around half of respondents (48%) either strongly support or tend to support welcoming programmes as a policy idea. A much smaller proportion of 1 in 4 (27%) are opposed whilst 1 in 5 (22%) neither support nor oppose the programme.

Figure 15: Support for welcoming programmes, Wave 4 (2026)

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?



Support and opposition for the introduction of welcoming programmes in Scotland varies substantially across a range of demographics:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to oppose the idea of welcoming programmes (33%; 21%), while women are more likely than men either to support (50%; 45%) or neither to support nor oppose (24%; 20%) the introduction of such programmes.

Age. Those aged 16-34 are more likely than those aged 35 and over to support a welcoming programme (58%; 44%).

Social Grade. Respondents in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to support the introduction of welcoming programmes (50%; 45%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are much more likely than those from a white background to support the introduction of welcoming programmes (72%; 47%), while those from a white background are more likely than those from a minority ethnic background to oppose this idea (27%; 9%).

Social Contact. 6 in 10 (61%) of those who have social contact with immigrants living in Scotland support a welcoming programme, significantly higher than the 1 in 3 (36%) of those who do not have social contact who say the same. Those with no social contact are more likely than those who have social contact to neither support nor oppose this programme (26%; 18%) or to oppose it outright (36%; 19%).

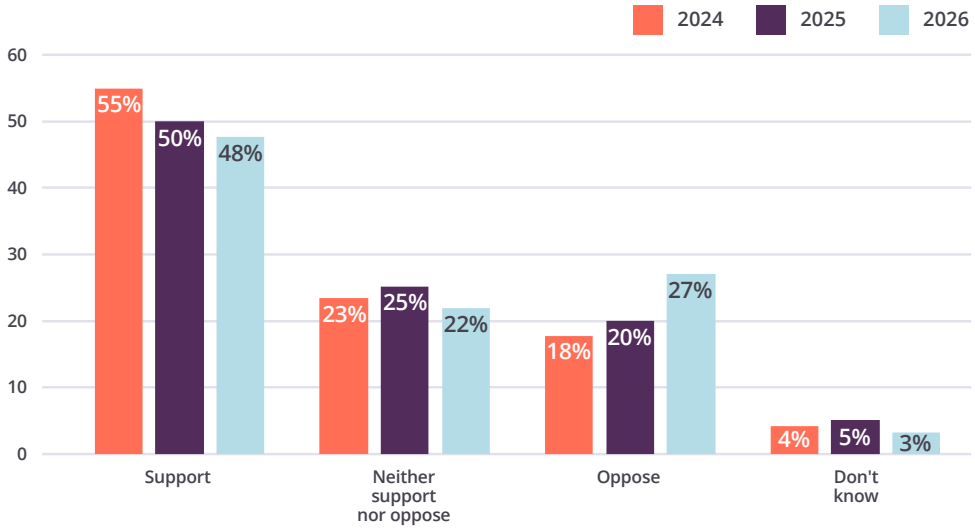
2024 General Election Vote. Nearly 8 in 10 (77%) Reform UK voters oppose a welcoming programme, compared to half (47%) of Conservative voters, a third (33%) of Green voters, a quarter (26%) of Labour voters, and under a fifth of Liberal Democrat (19%) and SNP (15%) voters. Conversely, at 3 in 5 (62%) those that voted for the SNP are more likely to support this programme than voters of most other major political parties.

2.4.1 Changes over time to support for welcoming programmes

Over the three waves of the survey that we have asked this question, support for welcoming programmes has fallen by 7 percentage points, with most of this drop (5 percentage points) occurring between Waves 2 (2024) and 3 (2025). Opposition to the idea of welcoming programmes has risen by 9 percentage points since 2024 with most of this increase (7 percentage points) occurring between Waves 3 (2025) and 4 (2026).

Figure 16: Changes over time to support for welcoming programmes, Waves 2-4 (2024-2026)

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?



3. Impacts of immigration for Scotland and local areas

Much of the preceding analysis in this report explores attitudes towards and preferences regarding how immigration to Scotland should be managed. It is also important to understand how the public perceives the impacts of immigration, in its current form. This is particularly salient at a time when claims making about impacts, on both side of a highly polarised public and political debate, has potential to mask more nuanced and differentiated views. In this chapter we present findings on how the general public views the impacts of immigration for Scotland and for the local areas in which respondents live. We discuss both perceptions of the overall impact of immigration on Scotland and local areas and perceptions of impacts on specific economic, demographic, social and cultural phenomena.

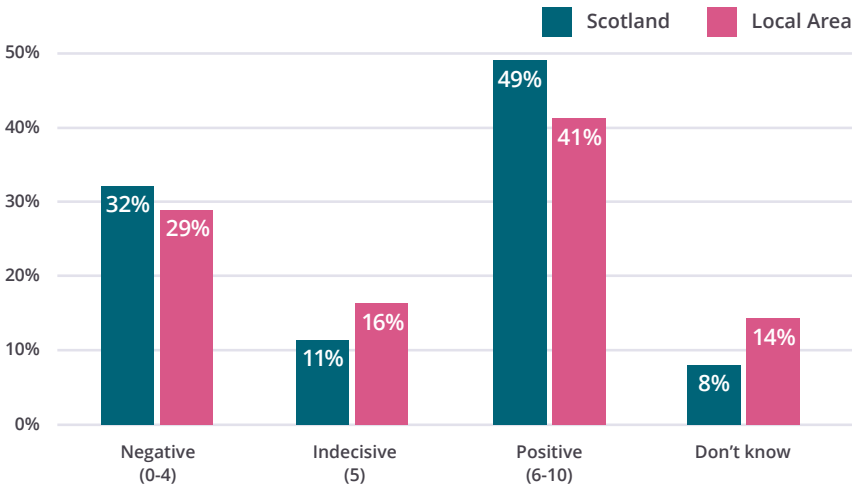
3.1 Overall impacts on Scotland and local areas

Respondents were asked to indicate their views on the impact of immigration on Scotland and on their local area using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is very negative and 10 is very positive. Almost half (49%) report that immigration has had a positive (6-10) impact on Scotland, whilst 3 in 10 (32%) view the impact of immigration on Scotland as negative (0-4). A further 11% are neutral (5), and a smaller proportion (8%) don't know.

Survey respondents are also asked about the impact of immigration in the area where they live and the view here is somewhat less clearly divided. The proportions indicating both positive (41%) and negative (29%) perceived impacts are somewhat lower for the local area level, than for the national level, whilst proportions who perceive impacts in their local area as neutral (16%) or respond that they don't know (14%) are higher than for impacts on Scotland.

Figure 17: Perceived impacts of immigration on Scotland and local area, Wave 4 (2026)

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



People's perceptions of the impact of immigration on both Scotland and the local area differ between socio-demographic groups as follows:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to say that immigration has a negative impact on both Scotland (35%; 28%) and their local area (33%; 26%).

Age. The youngest age group (16-34) is more likely than those in all age groups over 35, to express positive views on the impact of immigration on Scotland as a whole (57%; 46%) and in their local areas (49%; 37%). Older age groups (45 and over) are more likely than the youngest age group (16-34) to express negative views on the impact of immigration on Scotland (35%; 28%) and their local area (33%; 23%).

Social Grade. Those in the lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than those in the higher social grades (ABC1) to say that immigration has a negative impact on Scotland (35%; 29%). Those in the higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in the lower social grades (C2DE) to say view impacts as positive for both Scotland (54%; 43%) and their local area (43%; 37%).

Location. Those residing in rural areas of Scotland are slightly more likely than those residing in urban areas to say that the impact of immigration on Scotland is negative (36%; 31%). At the local level, rural residents are slightly more likely than urban to say that they don't know what the impacts of immigration are on the area where they live (19%; 13%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Those in the most deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 1) are more likely than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 5) to think migration has had a negative impact on Scotland (40%; 33%) and on their local area (39%; 32%).

Social Contact. Those who have social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do not to say that the impact of migration on Scotland (63%; 37%) and their local area (58%; 25%) is positive. Those who do not have any social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do to view impacts as negative for both Scotland (43%; 23%) and their local area (41%; 20%).

2024 General Election Vote. More than 8 in 10 (83%) Reform UK voters see migration's impact on Scotland as negative, while 3 in 4 (73%) say the impact on their local area is negative. These represent significantly higher rates of negativity compared to voters of every other major party; Conservative voters follow behind at a distance, with 2 in 5 reporting that the impact of immigration is negative on Scotland (43%) and on their local area (39%). Meanwhile, those that voted for Green or SNP are more likely than those that voted for every other major political party to say the impact of immigration is positive on Scotland (70%; 67%) and on their local area (61%; 54%). They are followed by Labour voters of whom just over half report that impacts are positive for Scotland (52%) and 2 in 5 of whom report impacts as positive for their local area (41%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to report that the impact of immigration is positive on Scotland (77%; 49%) and on their local area (63%; 40%), while those from a white background are more likely than those from a minority ethnic background to view the impacts as negative on Scotland (32%; 9%) and on their local area (30%; 9%).

3.1.1 Changes over time to overall impacts for Scotland and local areas

Questions asking respondents to score perceived impacts of immigration for Scotland and for their local area have been part of the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey since Wave 1 (2023). However, a change in the wording of the question since Wave 2 (2024) to allow respondents a 'don't know' option, makes comparisons across the three most recent waves the most reliable.

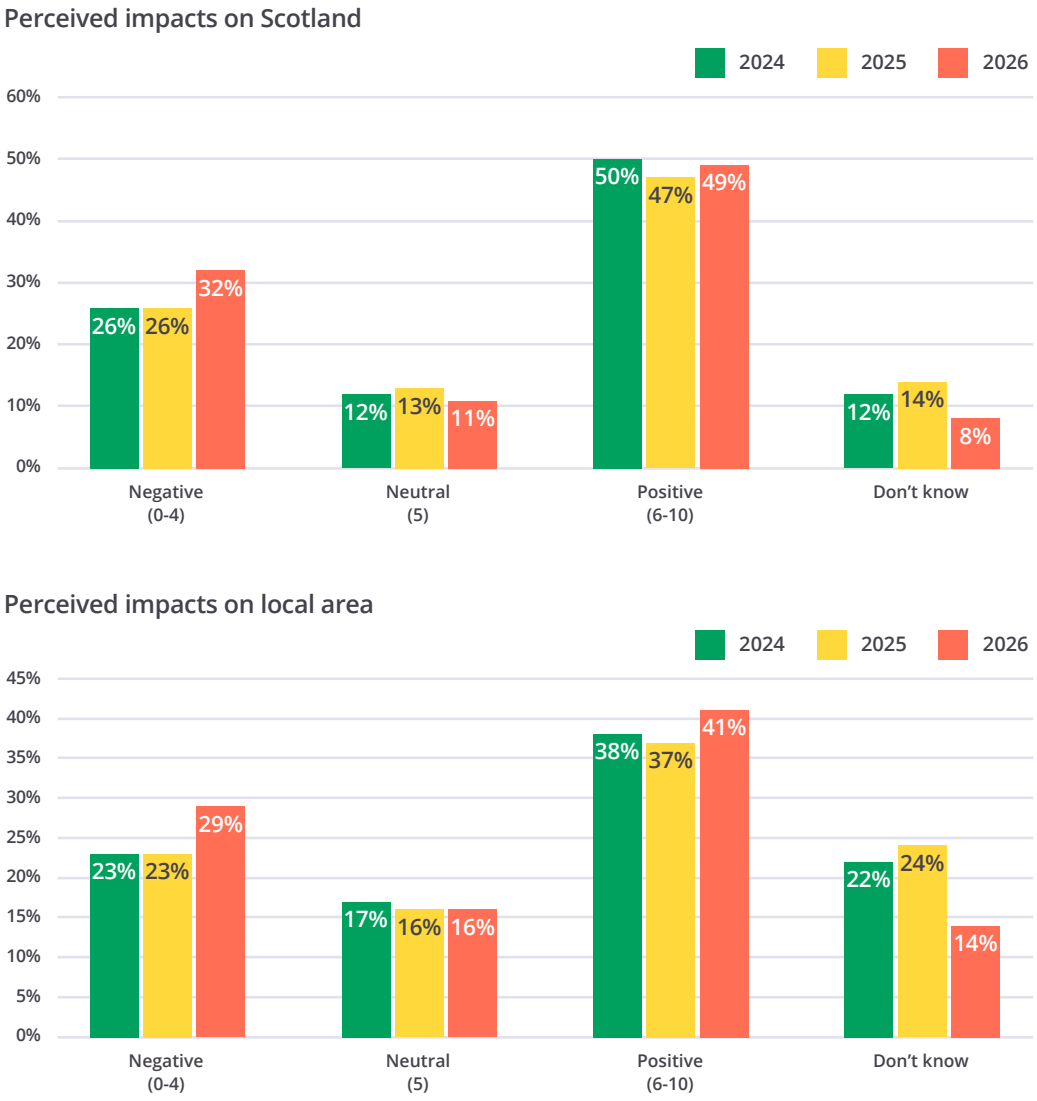
A look at how the average score (excluding don't knows) has changed since Wave 1 (2023) suggests a steady decline in positivity about the impacts of immigration for both Scotland and local areas over the four waves of the survey.

Figure 18: Changes in perceived impacts on Scotland and local areas (average mean scores), Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)

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

However, a closer examination of how responses have changed, including the selection of don't know, since Wave 2 (2024) presents a somewhat different picture.

Figure 19: Changes in perceptions of impacts as positive, negative or neutral local areas, Waves 2-4 (2024-2026)

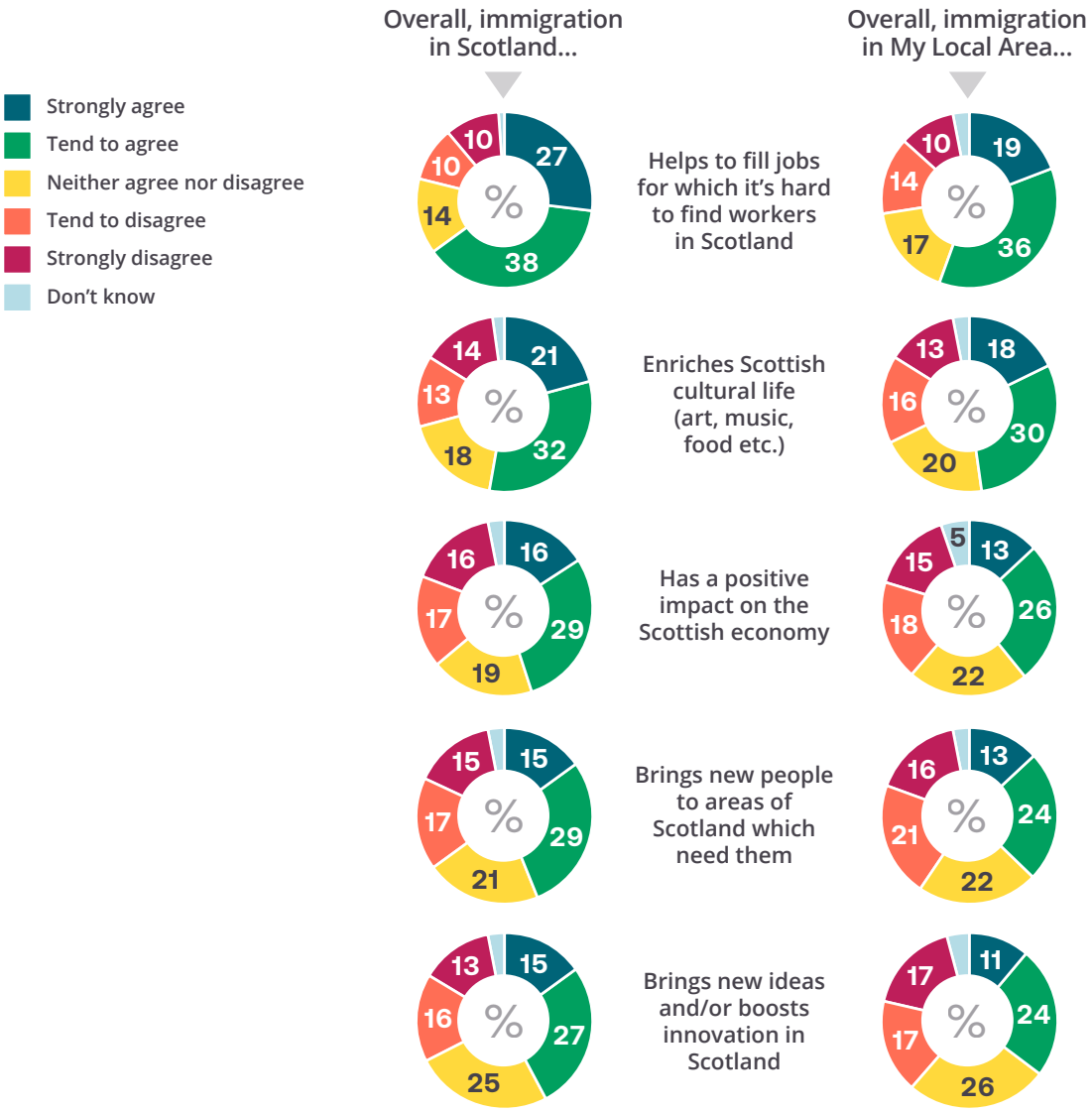


With the data presented in this way it becomes clear that rather than simply shifting towards negative, perceptions of the impacts of immigration are becoming both more certain and more polarised at both national and local levels. With respect to perceived impacts on Scotland, there has been an increase of 6 percentage points between Waves 2 (2024) and 4 (2026) in the proportion of respondents viewing impacts as negative. This is accompanied by a dip and then recovery in the proportion of respondents viewing these impacts positively, whilst the proportion of respondents who say that they don't know has fallen by 4 percentage points. At the local level the shift is more stark. Where nearly one in four (25%) respondents in Waves 2 (2024) and 3 (2025) reported that they did not know how to score impacts of immigration in their local area, this has fallen to 3 in 20 (14%) in Wave 4 (2026). The proportion viewing impacts negatively has grown by 6 percentage points across the three waves from 23 % at Waves 2 (2024) and 3 (2025), to 29% at Wave 4 (2026), but so too has the proportion viewing impacts positively, albeit by a more modest 3 percentage points from 38% at Wave 2 (2024) to 41% at Wave 4 (2026).

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

Another way to explore perceived impacts of immigration is to ask about specific economic, demographic, social and cultural phenomena where immigration is often perceived to produce change. In the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey, respondents are presented with 10 statements (5 positive and 5 negative) about issues where immigration is often considered to produce an impact, and asked whether or not they agree or disagree, and how strongly. These statements are repeated for both Scotland and the respondents' local area.

Figure 20: Levels of agreement and disagreement with positive impacts of immigration at national and local level, Wave 4 (2026)

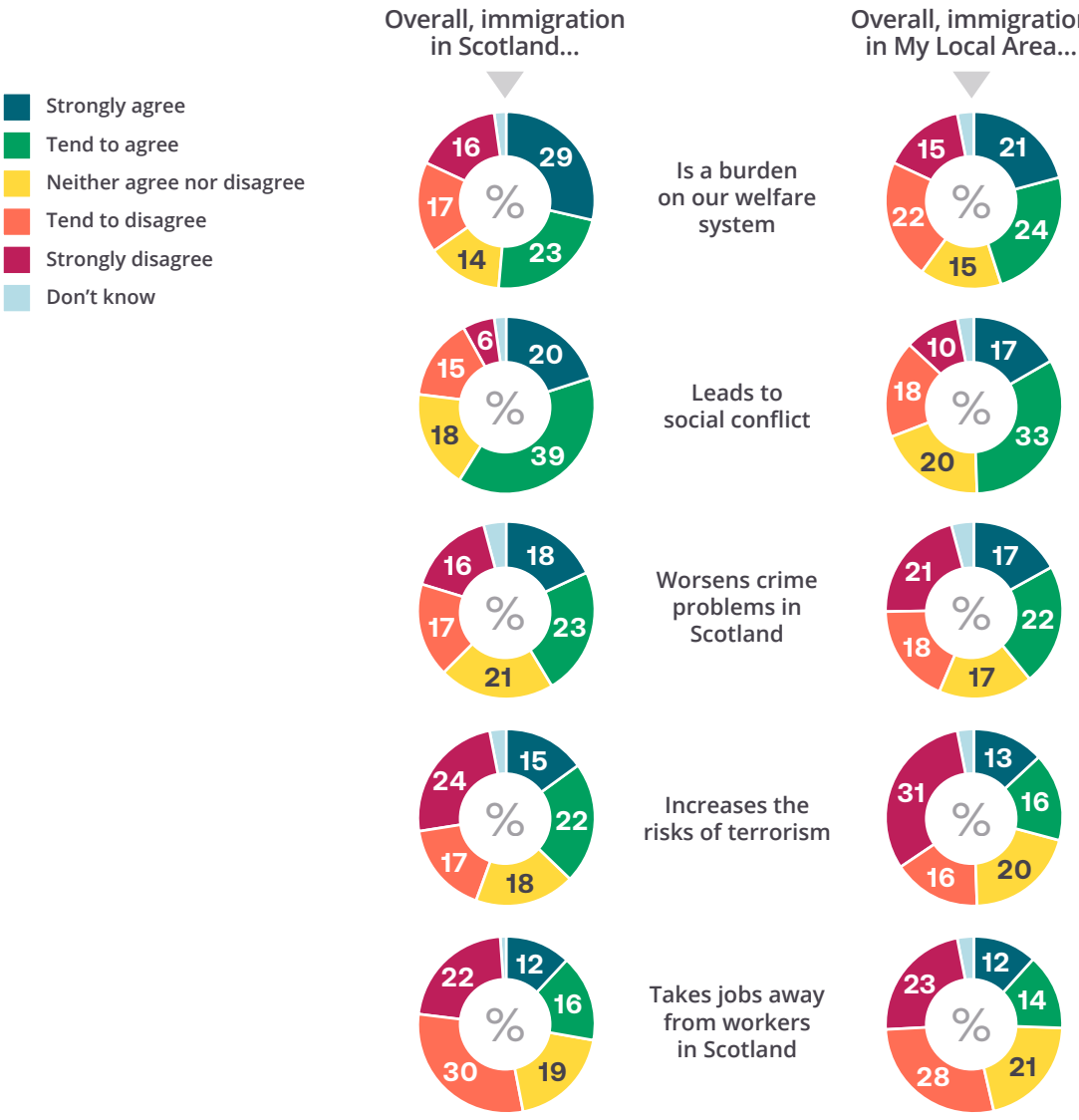


On impacts of immigration on Scotland, respondents are more likely to agree than to disagree with each of the five positive statements. Strongest levels of agreement (and lowest disagreement) are with the propositions that immigration 'helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find workers in Scotland' (65% agree; 20% disagree) and 'enriches Scottish cultural life' (54% agree; 26% disagree). On each of the remaining three statements agreement is between

43% and 45% and disagreement between 29% and 33%. On all statements apart from 'helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find workers in Scotland' a sizeable minority of between 22% and 28% say either that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement or that they don't know.

When asked about impacts of immigration in the area where they live, respondents' views are more mixed, with a more even spread of agreement, disagreement and neutral responses for most statements. The only statements where agreement is clearly stronger than disagreements are that immigration 'helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find local workers' (55% agree, 24% disagree) and 'enriches local cultural life' (48% agree; 29% disagree). On all other statements there is an almost even split. For all statements between 20% and 30% of respondents say either that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement or that they don't know.

Figure 21: Levels of agreement and disagreement with negative impacts of immigration at national and local level, Wave 4 (2026)



When respondents are presented with negative statements on specific impacts of immigration, there is more variety in patterns of response than was seen for the positive statements. Statements that immigration 'leads to social conflict' and 'is a burden on welfare resources' attract the most agreement (59% and 52% respectively for Scotland; 50% and

45% respectively at local level). Whilst statements that immigration 'takes jobs away from workers' or 'increases the risks of terrorism' produce the most disagreement (52% and 41% respectively for Scotland; 51% and47% respectively at local level). There are more evenly split views on whether immigration 'worsens crime problems'. At the national level 41% agree and 33% disagree with this statement, whilst at local level there 39% agree and 39% disagree.

When examining differences between socio-demographic groups or by other respondent characteristics, we various patterns of difference for statements at both national and local levels:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to disagree with a number of positively-framed statements at both national and local levels, including that immigration has a positive impact on the Scottish economy (37%; 30%) and the economy of their local area (36%; 30%); brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in Scotland (35%; 24%) and to their local area (41%; 28%); enriches Scottish cultural life (33%; 21%) and local cultural life (35%; 24%); and brings new people to areas of Scotland which need them (38%; 27%).

Age. The youngest cohort (aged 16-34) expresses more positive views than older respondents regarding the impacts that immigration has on both Scotland and their local area. For example, over half (54%) of 16-34 year-olds agree that immigration has a positive impact on the Scottish economy, compared to 2 in 5 (41%) of those aged 65 and above. The youngest respondents (16-34) are also more likely than the oldest ones (65 and older) to agree that immigration has a positive impact on the local economy (50%; 33%); brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in Scotland (54%; 35%) and in their local area (44%; 30%); enriches Scottish cultural life (66%; 46%) and local cultural life (62%; 38%); and helps to fill jobs for which it's hard to find workers in Scotland (76%; 60%).

Social Grade. Respondents in the lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely than respondents in the higher social grads (ABC1) to agree with a number of negative statements including that immigration is a burden on our welfare system (56%; 49%); takes jobs away from workers in Scotland (34%; 23%); worsens crime problems in Scotland (49%; 36%); and increases the risks of terrorism for Scotland (42%; 34%). A similar relationship is seen across most of these statements when applied to local areas.

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Respondents living in the most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD 1) are more likely than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 5) to express negative views. For example, those in SIMD 1 more frequently agree that immigration worsens crime problems in Scotland (52%; 41%), as well as local crime problems (49%; 38%), and takes jobs away from local workers (37%; 27%). These same respondents are more likely to disagree that immigration helps to fill jobs for which it is hard to find local workers (34%; 24%) and brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in Scotland (37%; 28%).

Social Contact. Across all local and national statements, respondents who have social contact with immigrants are more likely than those who do not, to agree with statements of positive impacts and to disagree with negative ones. For example, over 3 in 5 of those who have any degree of social contact with immigrants agree that immigration enriches Scottish (69%) and local cultural life (63%), compared to 1 in 3 of those with no social contact (38%; 34%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are generally more likely than those from a white background to agree with positive statements and disagree with negative statements about immigration impacts at both local and national levels. Those from a white background are more likely than those from a minority ethnic background to agree with negative statements and disagree with positive ones. The largest difference for national level impacts is seen in agreement that immigration leads to social conflict for

Scotland, where 3 in 5 (60%) white respondents agree, compared to just 3 in 10 (29%) of those from a minority ethnic background. For local level impacts the largest difference is in agreement with the statement that immigration brings new ideas and/or boosts innovation in the local area. Here 2 in 3 (66%) of those from a minority ethnic background agree, compared to 1 in 3 (35%) of those from a white background.

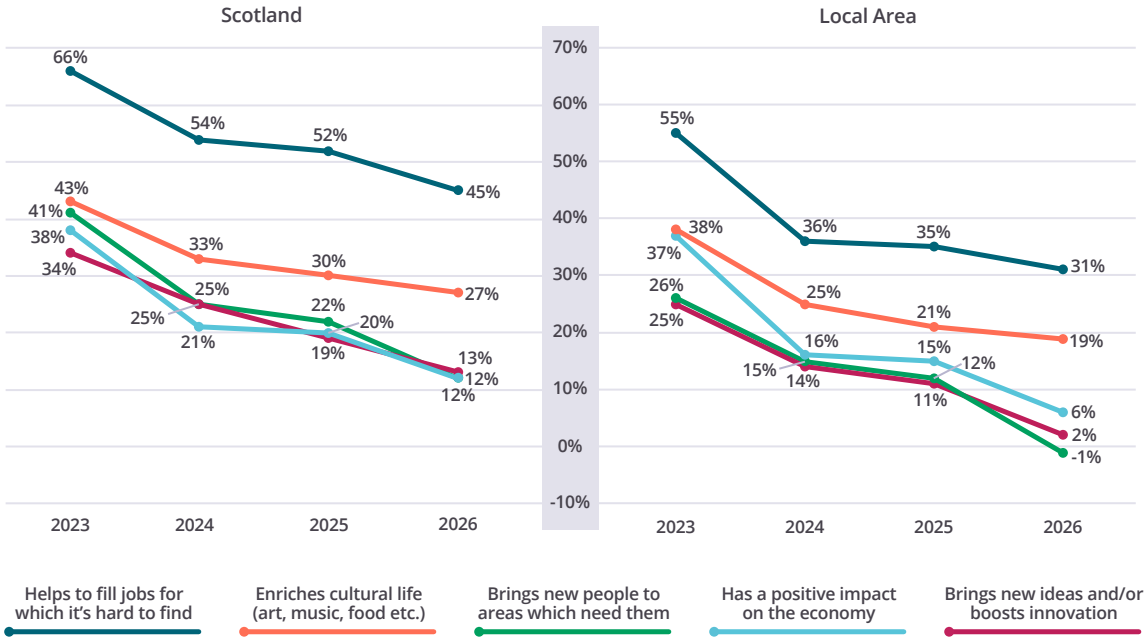
2024 General Election Vote. Across all statements for Scotland and local areas, 2024 Reform UK voters are more likely than those who voted for nearly every other political party to disagree with positively framed statements and agree with negatively framed ones. For example, nearly all (96%) Reform UK voters agree that immigration leads to social conflict in Scotland, compared to Conservative (78%), Liberal Democrats (63%), Labour (59%), SNP (45%) and Green (38%) voters.

3.2.1 Changes over time to perceptions of economic, demographic, social and cultural impacts

To examine changing perceptions regarding specific impacts of immigration whether for Scotland or for local areas, we calculated the net agreement for each impact statement across the 4 waves of the survey. Net agreement is calculated by subtracting the proportion of respondents that disagree from the proportion that agree. Where net agreement is positive, there is more agreement than disagreement, where it is negative there is more disagreement than agreement.

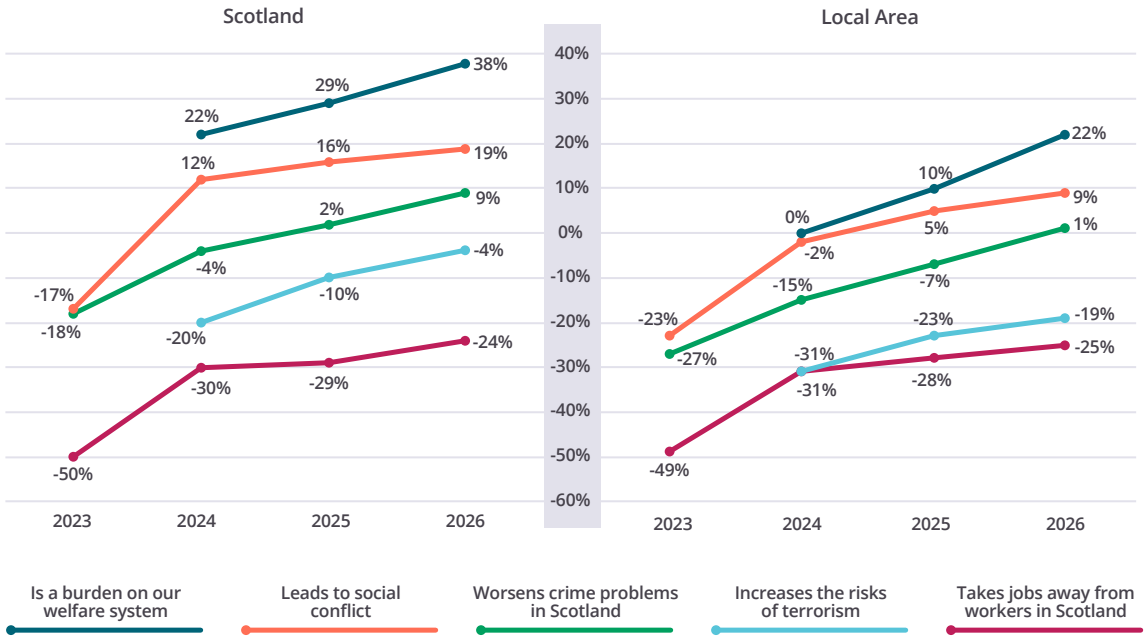
Looking across the four waves of the survey since 2023, net agreement has fallen quite considerably for all positive impacts of immigration at both the national and local levels. With the exception of a local impact of bringing new people to areas which need them, all net agreement scores remain positive, meaning there is still more agreement than disagreement, but the gap between these is closing. Whilst some of the more marked drops in net agreement seen between Waves 1 and 2 appeared to have steadied between Waves 2 and 3, there have been renewed steeper falls for a number of impacts between Waves 3 and 4. These include statements of positive impact on the economy and on bringing new people to areas which need them.

Figure 22: Changes to net agreement with positive impact statements at Scotland and local area level, Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)



On negative impacts of immigration, by contrast, levels of net agreement has been increasing over the four waves of the survey. Here we see that a number of statements at both Scotland and local area levels where previously net agreement was negative, meaning respondents were more likely to disagree than agree with the proposition, this has now become positive. Most marked of these is the statement that immigration is a burden on Scotland's welfare system where net agreement has grown by 36 percentage points since Wave 1 (2023) from -17% to 19%.

Figure 23: Changes to net agreement with negative impact statements at Scotland and local area level, Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)



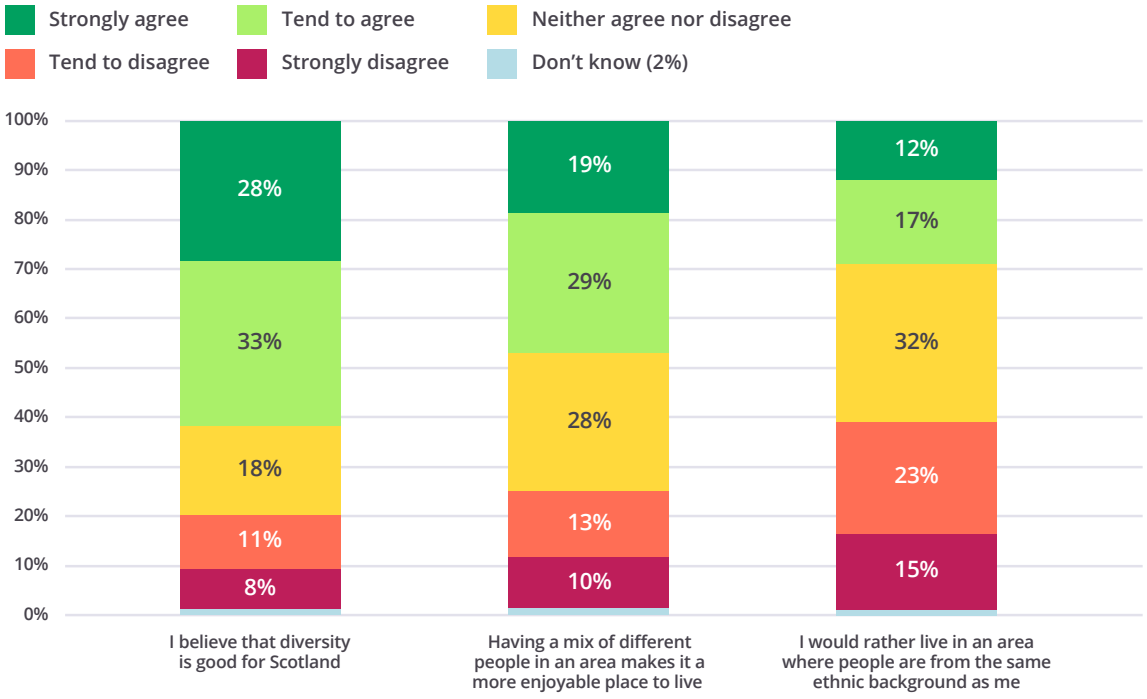
4. Attitudes towards diversity

Around the turn of the 21st century Scotland changed from being a country of net emigration to one of net immigration. Since then, Scotland's immigrant population has more than tripled from 3% in 2000 to 10% in the 2022. Although this increase in its foreign-born population is mainly concentrated in urban areas, particularly Scotland's larger cities, it changes previously low levels of ethnic and national diversity in most parts of the country.

In this section we explore the Scottish publics' perceptions of diversity. The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration survey asks respondents whether they believe that diversity is 'good for Scotland', whether they think that a mix of people makes an area 'a more enjoyable place to live' and conversely whether or not they would prefer to live in an ethnically homogenous area. This set of questions allows us to explore views on diversity in the abstract and through more concrete situations as well as in relation to diversity statements framed positively and negatively.

Figure 24: Attitudes to diversity, Wave 4 (2026)

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



Overall, the general public in Scotland have positive attitudes towards diversity. A clear majority (62%) agree that diversity is good for Scotland and almost half (47%) agree that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live (47%). Only 1 in 5 (19%) disagree (either 'strongly' or 'tend to') that diversity is good for Scotland, and 1 in 4 (28%) disagree that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live. Where diversity is framed more negatively, by asking respondents whether they would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background, we find that the largest group of 2 in 5 (38%) compared to 1 in 3(29%) who agree with this statement, and 1 in 3 (32%) who neither agree nor disagree.

There are some significant differences between subgroups of the population with regard to views on diversity:

Gender. Men are more likely than women to agree that they would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as them (36%; 22%) and more likely to disagree that diversity is good for Scotland (25%; 13%) or that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live (31%; 17%). Women, in contrast, are more likely than men to agree with the two positive diversity statements and to disagree with the negative one.

Age. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) of the youngest age group (16-34) agree that having a mix of people makes an area more enjoyable to live in, compared to half (47%) of those aged 45-54 and a third (36%) of those aged 65 and above. Similarly, three-quarters (72%) of those aged 16-34 agree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to 6 in 10 (63%) of those aged 45-54 and half (52%) of those aged 65 and above.

Social Grade. Those in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower social grades (C2DE) to agree with positive diversity statements and disagree with the negative statement. For example, 2 in 3 (66%) of those in ABC1 agree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to over 1 in 2 (56%) of those in grades C2DE. Those in lower social grades (C2DE) are also more likely than those in higher social grades (ABC1) to disagree with the two positive diversity statements and agree with the negative one.

Location. Urban respondents are more likely than those living in rural areas to agree that diversity is good for Scotland (64%; 54%). Meanwhile, rural residents are more likely than their urban counterparts to agree that they would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as them (37%; 27%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. Respondents living in the least deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD 5) are more likely than those living in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) to agree that diversity is good for Scotland (SIMD 1) (64%; 54%).

Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to agree with positive diversity statements, including that diversity is good for Scotland (77%; 61%) and that having a mix of different people in an area makes it a more enjoyable place to live (70%; 47%).

Social Contact. Three-quarters (76%) of those who have any degree of social contact with immigrants agree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to half (47%) of those without social contact. Those who have social contact with immigrants are also more likely than those who do not to agree that having a mix of different people makes an area a more enjoyable place to live (64%; 31%) and to disagree that they would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as themselves (50%; 27%).

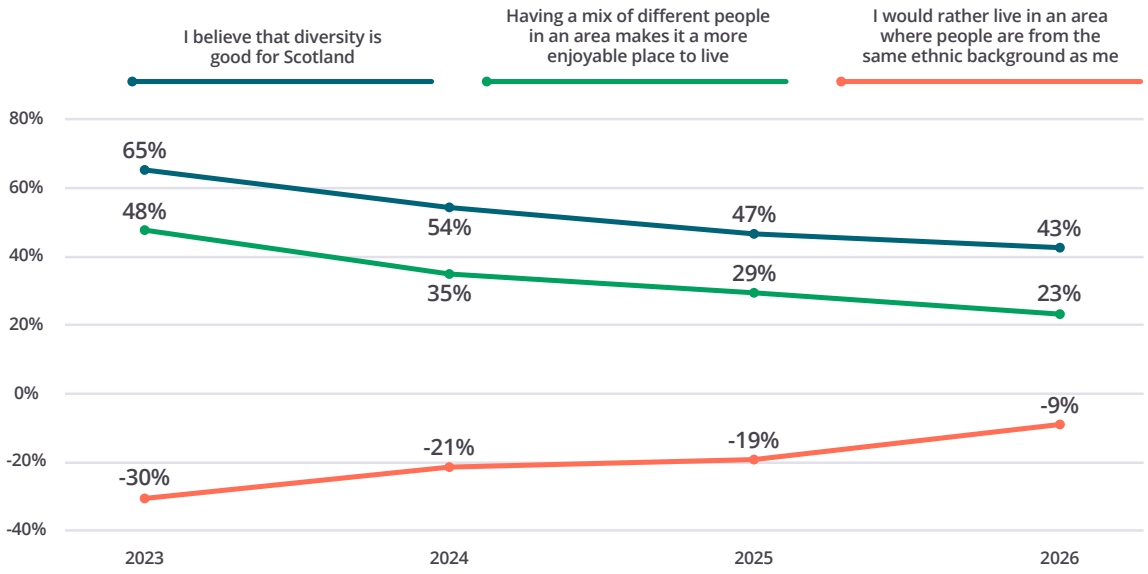
2024 General Election Vote. Those who voted either Reform UK or Conservative at the 2024 general election are more likely than those that voted for all other major political parties to disagree with the two positive diversity statements and to agree with the negative statement. Conversely, those that voted for the Green Party are more likely than those that voted for other major parties to hold positive diversity views, agreeing with the two positive statements and disagreeing with the negative one. For example, 63% of Reform voters disagree that diversity is good for Scotland, compared to 34% of Conservative voters, 16% Labour voters, 13% Liberal Democrat voters, 9% SNP voters and just 2% of Green voters.

4.1 Changes over time to attitudes to diversity

Looking at change over time, there continues to be a steady decline in net agreement (agreement minus disagreement) for the two positive diversity statements and an increase in net agreement for the negative diversity statement. The largest of these changes since the Wave 3 (2025) is a 10 percentage point increase in net agreement that 'I would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as me', while there is also a notable six percentage point decrease in net agreement that 'having a mix of different people in an areas makes it a more enjoyable place to live'. On all three statements the changes since Wave 1 (2023) are considerable at over 20 percentage points.

Figure 25: Changes over time to net agreement with diversity statements, Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)

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



5. Experiences of immigration

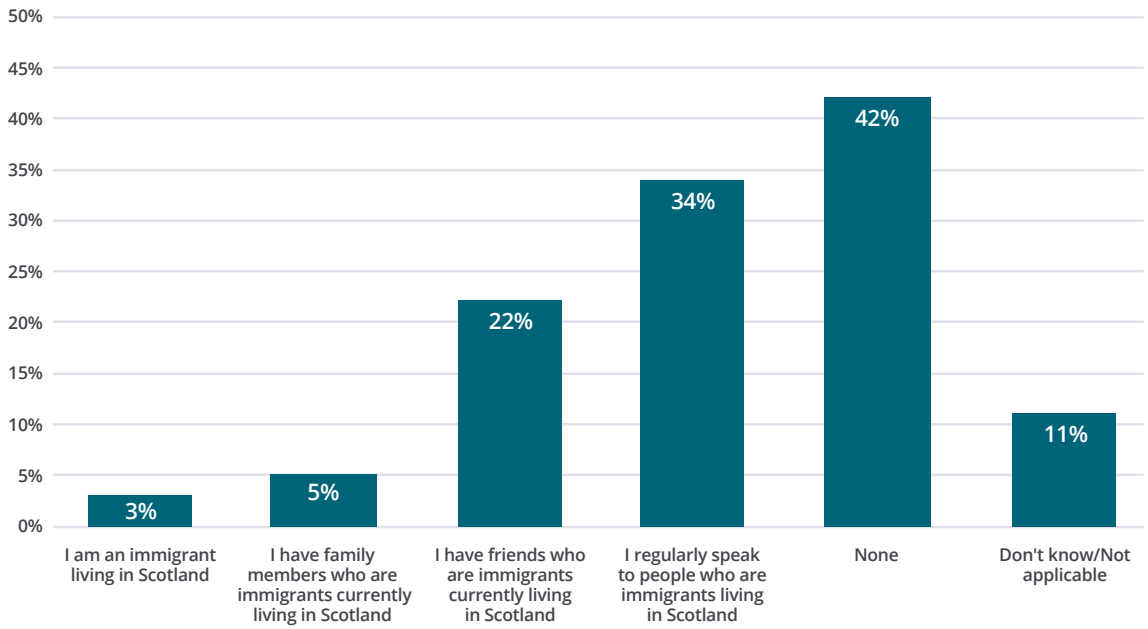
The Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration Survey includes a question asking respondents about the extent of their social contact with immigrants living in Scotland. Gathering this data helps us to understand the contexts within which different attitudes are formed. The findings presented throughout this report show there is a significant and strong relationship between differences in social contact and differences in attitudes on almost every question asked. It is not possible to ascertain from this kind of quantitative data whether that relationship is causal, and if so, in which direction. In other words, we cannot say whether people with certain attitudes are more likely to seek or avoid social contact with immigrants or vice versa, whether having more or less contact facilitates the development of particular attitudes. Nonetheless, it is useful to know that there is a relationship between the two.

Data from Wave 4 (2026) of the survey show that around half (47%) of Scottish residents report that they have at least one experience of immigration from a list of options including being an immigrant themselves, having friends or family who are immigrants in Scotland or regularly speaking to immigrants in Scotland. Respondents are able to select as many options as apply to them, so the more detailed categories overlap. Over 1 in 3 (34%) report that they regularly speak to people who are immigrants living in Scotland; 1 in 5 (22%) have friends who are immigrants currently living in Scotland; 1 in 20 or less report that they have family members who are immigrants in Scotland (5%) or that they are themselves an immigrant living in Scotland (3%).

Conversely, 2 in 5 (42%) Scottish residents report that they have no social contact with immigrants and 1 in 10 (11%) that they do not know.

Figure 26: Levels of social contact with immigrants, Wave 4 (2026)

Which of the following statements applies best to you?



There are significant differences in social contact between different socio-demographic groups:

Age. The youngest age group (16-34) are more likely than those aged 55+ to report at least one form of social contact with immigrants (55%; 40%). Younger respondents (16-54) are more likely than those aged 55 and over to have friends who are immigrants currently living in Scotland (27%; 15%), and all those aged 16-64 are more likely than those aged 65 and above to regularly speak to people who are immigrants in Scotland (37%; 26%). Conversely, the oldest group of respondents, those aged 65 and over are more likely than the youngest group, aged 16-34, to select that they have no social contact with immigrants in Scotland (16-34) (50%; 36%).

Social Grade. Those in higher social grades (ABC1) are more likely than those in lower grades (C2DE) to report at least one form of social contact (49%; 45%) or to report that they regularly speak to people who are immigrants living in Scotland (36%; 31%).

Neighbourhood Deprivation. The least deprived neighbourhoods (SIMD 5) are more likely than all other neighbourhoods (SIMD 1-4) to report no social contact with immigrants (49%; 40%).

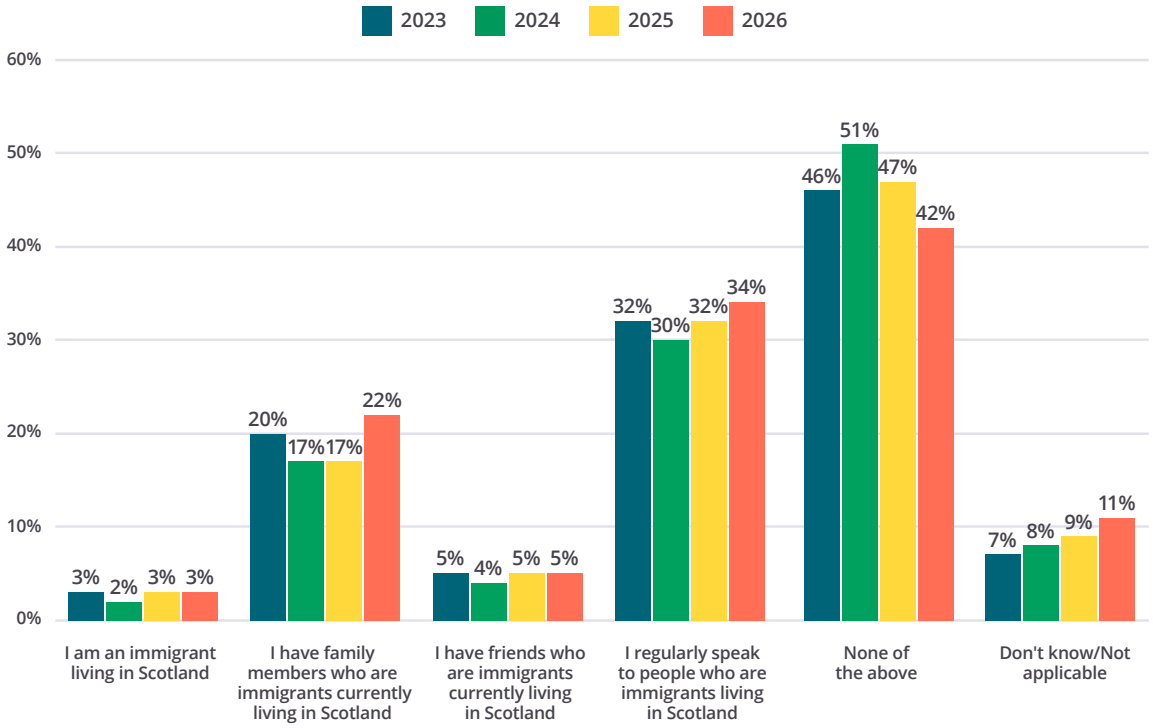
Ethnicity. Those from a minority ethnic background are more likely than those from a white background to report at least one form of social contact with immigrants (80%; 46%), to report that they are an immigrant living Scotland (35%; 2%) or that they have family members who are immigrants currently living in Scotland (27%; 5%).

2024 General Election Vote. More than 4 in 10 (44%) respondents who voted for the Green Party in 2024 have friends who are immigrants living in Scotland, significantly higher than voters of all other political parties. More than half of Reform UK (55%) and Conservative voters (51%), and 4 in 10 (44%) Labour voters select that they have no social contact with immigrants, compared to 3 in 10 Liberal Democrat voters (31%) and Green voters (29%).

5.1 Changes over time to experiences of immigration

In broad terms the proportions of respondents reporting different levels of social contact with immigrants living in Scotland have remained similar over the four Waves of the survey to date. However, there is a slight but steady decline in the number of respondents reporting no social contact, as well as an increase in those reporting friendships with immigrants. When we compare the findings of Wave 4 (2026) with those from Wave 3 (2025) we find that the proportion of respondents who report having friends who are immigrants has risen by 5 percentage points, while the proportion of respondents who report no social contact at all has fallen by five percentage points. The proportion of respondents to the survey who are immigrants or have family members who are immigrants has remained the same over the four waves.

Figure 27: Changes over time to levels of social contact with immigrants, Waves 1-4 (2023-2026)



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Appendix A – Survey Questions

In this appendix we lay out the questions included in the Migration Policy Scotland Attitudes to Immigration survey 2006, Topline data for those questions covered in this report can be found at **https://migrationpolicyscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Topline-results-2026.pdf**, including data from previous years where available.

Please note data from questions 12, 14, 15 and 16 are not discussed in this report and not included in the published topline results.

QUESTION 1

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

QUESTION 2

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.

QUESTION 3

On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on ...?

- Scotland
- Your local area

QUESTION 4

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 ...
- 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 risk of terrorism

1) Strongly agree
2) Tend to agree
3) Neither agree nor disagree
4) Tend to disagree
5) Strongly disagree
6) Don't Know

QUESTION 5

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 ...
- 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 which needs them
- Leads to social conflict
- Increases the risk of terrorism

1) Strongly agree
2) Tend to agree
3) Neither agree nor disagree
4) Tend to disagree
5) Strongly disagree
6) Don't Know

QUESTION 6

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

- 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

1) Increased a lot
2) Increased a little
3) Remain the same
4) Reduced a little
5) Reduced a lot

QUESTION 7

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

QUESTION 8

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?

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

QUESTION 9

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?

1) 12 months or less
2) 1-2 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

QUESTION 10

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

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

1) Strongly agree
2) Tend to agree
3) Neither agree nor disagree
4) Tend to disagree
5) Strongly disagree
6) Don't Know

QUESTION 11

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?

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

QUESTION 12

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

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

QUESTION 13

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

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

QUESTION 14

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. How frequently do you interact with immigrants in Scotland in the following spaces?

- On social media (e.g. WhatsApp group, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
- At your home or their home
- At work, college or university
- At your child's creche, nursery or school
- At a sports or social club/organisation
- At a place of worship
- In commercial settings (e.g. cafes, pubs, shops, hairdressers, beauty salon)
- In public or community settings (e.g. community centres, youth clubs, libraries, leisure centres)
- At organised events (e.g. festivals, street markets, concerts or other performances)
- In public spaces other than those already listed (e.g. in a park, on the street, on the bus)

1) Daily
2) Weekly
3) Monthly
4) At least once a year
5) Less than once a year
6) Never
7) I don't visit these places
8) Don't know

QUESTION 15

And thinking about your interactions with immigrants in Scotland in these spaces, how positive or negative are these generally? Please answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Extremely negative' and 10 means 'Extremely positive'

QUESTION 16

Thinking about the successful integration of immigrants into Scottish society, which of the following statements is closest to your personal view:

1) Integration is a two-way process where immigrants and Scottish society are both responsible
2) Immigrants themselves are mostly responsible
3) Scottish society is mostly responsible
4) Don't know

QUESTION 17

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?

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 of the above
6) Don't know / Not Applicable

QUESTION 18

At the 2024 UK General Election, which party did you vote for?

1) Conservative
2) Labour
3) Liberal Democrats
4) Green Party
5) The Brexit Party
6) Reform UK
7) The Scottish National Party
8) A different party (Please specify)
9) Don't remember
10) Didn't vote
11) Prefer not to say

Technical details:

2026
- The survey was designed by Migration Policy Scotland and Diffley Partnership
- Invitations were issued online using the ScotPulse panel
- Results are based on a survey of 2,161 respondents
- Fieldwork was conducted between 1st – 4th February 2026
- Results are weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender

2025
- The survey was designed by Migration Policy Scotland and Diffley Partnership
- Invitations were issued online using the ScotPulse panel
- Results are based on a survey of 2,194 respondents
- Fieldwork was conducted between 4th – 10th February 2025
- Results are weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender

2024
- The survey was designed by Migration Policy Scotland and Diffley Partnership
- Invitations were issued online using the ScotPulse panel
- Results are based on a survey of 2,305 respondents
- Fieldwork was conducted between 1st – 5th February 2024
- Results are weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender

2023
- The survey was designed by Migration Policy Scotland and Diffley Partnership
- Invitations were issued online using the ScotPulse panel
- Results are based on a survey of 1,162 respondents
- Fieldwork was conducted between 17th – 19th January 2023
- Results are weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender

Attitudes to Immigration in Scotland: Growing polarisation, hardening views

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