

The Migrant Journey

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Context

The Coalition Government has proposed changes to the way migration to the UK will be managed in order to reduce the level of net migration. The Coalition Agreement stated that:

The Government believes that immigration has enriched our culture and strengthened our economy, but that it must be controlled so that people have confidence in the system. We also recognise that to ensure cohesion and protect our public services, we need to introduce a cap on immigration and reduce the number of non-EU immigrants.

(The Coalition: Our programme for Government, May 2010)

Analysis of the current routes into the UK and the different ways that migrants are able to reach settlement provides evidence about the routes migrants use to enter and remain in the UK, indications of how long they stay and when they leave. This evidence can assist policy makers in considering changes to the immigration system.

The aim of the 'migrant journey' analysis was to provide evidence on:

- the behaviour of migrants entering the UK immigration system in the major non-visit visa routes; and
- the common pathways through the immigration system that result in settlement.

This report presents the initial results of this analysis based on the behaviour of migrants granted leave to enter the UK in 2004 and those granted settlement in 2009.

Approach

This report draws on findings from quantitative analysis of administrative data extracted from UK Border Agency databases. Data on grants of entry clearance (visas) were matched to data on grants of further leave to remain to provide details of all types of leave granted to a migrant from the point they received entry clearance, until they were granted settlement or their last recorded leave expired.¹

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Keywords

migrant	leave to remain
immigration	routes for migration
settlement	
indefinite leave to remain	
entry clearance	
visa	

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The report presents findings relating to the main non-visit visa routes covered by government policy and the Immigration Rules:²

- family;
- work (leading to citizenship);
- work (not leading to citizenship);
- study;
- direct settlement; and
- other routes.

The findings are presented in two ways: a forward view and a backward view. The forward view looks at all migrants granted non-visit visas in 2004 in order to show those individuals' immigration status at the end of each year up to 2009. It also shows patterns in extensions or changes to leave to remain that were made over that period. The backward view focuses on the cohort of migrants granted settlement in 2009, tracing them back through their immigration histories to show their initial route of entry into the UK, the year of entry and any extensions or changes to leave prior to their grant of settlement.

Results

Forward-view analysis³

The analysis of migrants entering the UK in a non-visit visa route in 2004 shows the following.

Family route

The family route comprises migrants entering the UK as a relative of someone who is a British citizen or settled in the UK. These can include: husbands, wives, civil partners, fiancé/es, proposed civil partners, or unmarried or same-sex partners. This category (63,400 cases) made up approximately 12 per cent of all migrants granted non-visit visas in 2004. Table S1 shows the proportion of migrants under the major entry routes who remained in the immigration system after five years. Approximately 63 per cent of migrants who entered the UK via the family route in 2004 were still in the immigration system five years later.

Work (leading to citizenship) route

The work (leading to citizenship) route, comprising mainly highly skilled workers or those with a job offer in a shortage or other occupation (105,880 cases), made up approximately 19 per cent of all migrants granted non-visit visas in 2004. Approximately 40 per cent of migrants in this route were still in the immigration system at the end of 2009. Of those with valid leave at the end of 2009 almost three-quarters had reached settlement, most obtaining this after the five-year qualifying period.

Table S1 Proportion of migrants in 2004 cohort granted non-visit visas under the main entry routes still in the UK after five years

Route	Migrants in 2004 cohort granted non-visit visas	Proportion of migrants still in the UK after five years	Proportion of migrants achieving settlement after five years
Family	63,400	63%	55%
Work (leading to citizenship)	105,880	40%	29%
Work (not leading to citizenship)	94,540	11%	3%
Study	185,600	21%	3%

1 Migrants are expected to leave the UK once their visa expires. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the expiry date of a migrant's last recorded grant of leave indicates the migrant is no longer considered a live case in the UK immigration system.

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3 This section reports key findings from analysis of the four main routes of entry to the UK. These routes made up 82 per cent of migrants granted non-visit visas to the UK in 2004. The remaining 18 per cent comprised migrants granted visas in the EU & EEA route and the Other route.

Work (not leading to citizenship) route

The work (not leading to citizenship) route (94,540 cases) made up approximately 17 per cent of all migrants granted non-visit visas in 2004. The majority of migrants who entered the UK in this route appeared to stay in the UK for a relatively short period of time. After two years, 84 per cent no longer had valid leave to remain in the UK. By the end of 2009 just over ten per cent still had valid leave, the majority having moved into the work (leading to citizenship) route. Approximately three per cent of migrants who entered the UK in this route had obtained settlement by the end of 2009.

Study route⁴

In 2004, approximately 185,600 non-visit visas were issued to migrants coming to the UK to study. Migrants in this route made up 34 per cent of all those issued non-visit visas in 2004. After two years, 59 per cent of the migrants who entered the UK on a student visa were no longer in the immigration system. At the end of five years almost 80 per cent no longer had valid leave to remain. Those who remained in the UK tended to have moved into the work (leading to citizenship) route, were still students, or changed into the family route (for marriage). Very few of these students (3%) had reached settlement after five years in the UK.

Backward-view analysis

The largest proportion of those granted settlement in 2009 had entered the UK via the work (leading to citizenship) route and the family route. The migrants in the 2009 cohort who entered the UK through a route that did not lead to citizenship tended to move directly into one of the immigration categories with a route to settlement before applying for permanent status.

Approximately 34 per cent of those granted settlement in 2009 came to the UK via the family route. Approximately 32 per cent reached settlement after entering the UK in the work (leading to citizenship) route, 13 per cent started their journey in the study route, with a further 15 per cent entering the UK in a direct settlement route. Those who entered the UK in the study route switched to the work (leading to citizenship) route or the family route before achieving settlement; more students switched to the work (leading to citizenship) route than the family route. Migrants who entered the UK via the work (not leading to citizenship) route, (around 4% of the total settlement grants in 2009), tended to switch into the family route (mainly for marriage) before achieving settlement.

Analysis of the 2009 cohort by year of entry and initial entry route suggests that most of the migrants receiving settlement in 2009 via the family and work (leading to citizenship) routes applied for settlement immediately after the qualifying period. A small proportion of migrants (15%) who achieved settlement in 2009 had initially entered through the settlement route. This group comprises migrants granted indefinite leave to enter before they came to the UK, and a number of migrants (already living in the UK) whose first recorded grant of leave to remain was settlement. The latter group are likely to have entered the UK before current databases were in place; therefore their initial visa record could not be identified.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis of migrants entering the immigration system in 2004 and those granted settlement in 2009 has highlighted some important points for government and policy makers to consider.

Those who entered the UK under the family route tended to stay in the immigration system. After the two-year qualifying period for the family route most of those still in the system had applied for and been granted settlement. There was also evidence that migrants who entered the UK through the work (leading to citizenship) route tended to apply for settlement immediately after the end of their five-year qualifying period. Few migrants in the student and work (not leading to citizenship) routes had been granted settlement after five years in the immigration system. The vast majority of migrants in these groups were no longer in the immigration system after five years.

The backward-view analysis also confirms the results from the forward-view analysis. The majority of migrants granted settlement in 2009 entered the UK via either a family route or a work (leading to citizenship) route, and did not move through any other immigration categories. Unsurprisingly, migrants who entered the UK via the temporary work (not leading to citizenship) route tended to switch into one other route if they later applied for settlement, primarily the family route indicating marriage or the establishment of a civil partnership.

Student visas do not normally have a direct route to settlement, and therefore those who initially arrived as students and achieved settlement had switched into another category – generally either through employment or marriage. A greater proportion of these migrants switched into the work (leading to citizenship) route than the family route, despite the latter route providing a faster path to settlement.

⁴ The study route includes migrants granted leave to enter as a student. This does not include student visitor visa categories.