



Home Office

# Statistics relating to COVID-19 and the immigration system, May 2020

Official Statistics

28 May 2020

## Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. The start of restrictions in the UK began on 12 March 2020, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) [advised against all non-essential overseas travel](#) on 17 March 2020, and advised all [British travellers to return to the UK](#) on 23 March 2020, the same day as the UK lockdown measures were announced.

Restrictions were put in place across Europe and other parts of the world in the run up to the UK outbreak, which will also have impacted travel to the UK prior to these dates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the UK immigration system, both in terms of restricting migrant movements to and from the UK and the impact on operational capacity.

The information in this report is designed to give an overview of the key trends affecting the UK immigration system, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK in March and April 2020. This is a one-off release derived from Home Office management information, including some data which has not been designed for statistical purposes. The data are provisional, subject to change and not quality assured to the same standard as regular National Statistics releases, such as the quarterly [Immigration Statistics](#). The report provides a high-level overview of recent trends. The limitations specific to each dataset are provided in the relevant sections below.

More detailed quarterly breakdowns of the data up to the end of March 2020 can be found in [Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2020](#). Data covering April to June 2020, will be published as usual in the August edition of the Home Office [Immigration Statistics](#).

## Passenger arrivals

Data in this section are derived from Advance Passenger Information (API) and Border and Immigration Transaction Data (BITD). These data are not designed for statistical purposes and there are known issues in producing estimates of arrivals from these sources. Neither data source provides an exact count of the number of arrivals. However, the data are being included here to provide an indication of the key trends in passenger arrivals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures.

API data primarily relate to passengers coming to the UK via commercial aviation routes. The data do not include all those arriving by sea or rail routes, by private aircraft or via the [Common Travel Area](#) (CTA).

BITD data relate to those coming to the UK on air, sea, and rail routes, but does not include those coming via the CTA. BITD data are not directly comparable with API data, and as a result numbers of arrivals will differ. For example, a passenger may have multiple interactions with Border Force on arrival, and such individuals will be represented by multiple counts in the BITD data, but may only be captured once in API data. BITD data is used here to give an indication of trends only.

Data on the number of passengers arriving by air are published in the accompanying [air passenger arrivals data tables](#).

- The number of passengers arriving to the UK has fallen sharply since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of arrivals by air fell from 7.1 million in January 2020 to 3.8 million in March 2020. In April 2020, there were only around 112,300 arrivals by air, 99% lower than the number of arrivals by air in April 2019 (API data).
- Since the UK lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020 (in the five weeks up to the 30 April), the majority (58%) of arrivals by air have been British nationals returning to the UK. The remaining 42% will include foreign nationals who are UK residents returning to the UK, dependants of UK residents, and other non-British nationals.
- Although the pandemic had some impact on global travel prior to March 2020, by the end of March all routes to the UK were impacted to some extent, with the reduction in air travel most marked. BITD data show that in April 2020 the number of arrivals at airports was 99% fewer than April 2019. Over the same period, the number of arrivals by sea was 97% fewer and arrivals by rail 98% fewer. Numbers arriving by sea and rail include passengers and freight workers, such as lorry drivers.
- Passengers arriving by air accounted for 87% of all passenger arrivals to the UK in March 2020, however this proportion reduced to 46% in April 2020.

**Table 1: Passengers arriving to the UK by air**

	Air arrivals	Of which: British nationals	% British nationals	% change with same month in 2019
<b>January 2020</b>	7,082,000	2,905,000	41%	+1%
<b>February 2020<sup>1</sup></b>	6,804,900	3,463,400	51%	-2%
<b>March 2020</b>	3,815,300	2,195,800	58%	-51%
<b>April 2020</b>	112,300	63,400	56%	-99%

Source: [Air passenger arrivals data tables](#).

### Notes

1. In order to ensure the February 2020 comparison with the previous year compares the same number of days, arrivals on the 29 February 2020 are excluded from the '% change with the same month in 2019' column but are included in the total number of arrivals for that month.
2. Totals in the table may not equal the sum of individual days as provided in the accompanying air passenger arrivals data. This is due to rounding.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have also published information on the number of [British nationals returned to the UK on government charter flights](#) since the global outbreak of COVID-19 – a total of 30,000 British citizens, most of whom returned in April. The vast majority of these arrivals will be included in the API data.

## About the data

The API data and BITD data provide an indication of the trends of passenger flows, but neither provide a precise count of the number of passenger arrivals in the UK. Estimates of levels and trends from both data sets should be considered indicative.

**API data** uses information from service providers much of which is completed by passengers before they travel. The statistical information is taken from a live data system and records may be updated. Hence, figures for more recent periods in particular may be subject to revision.

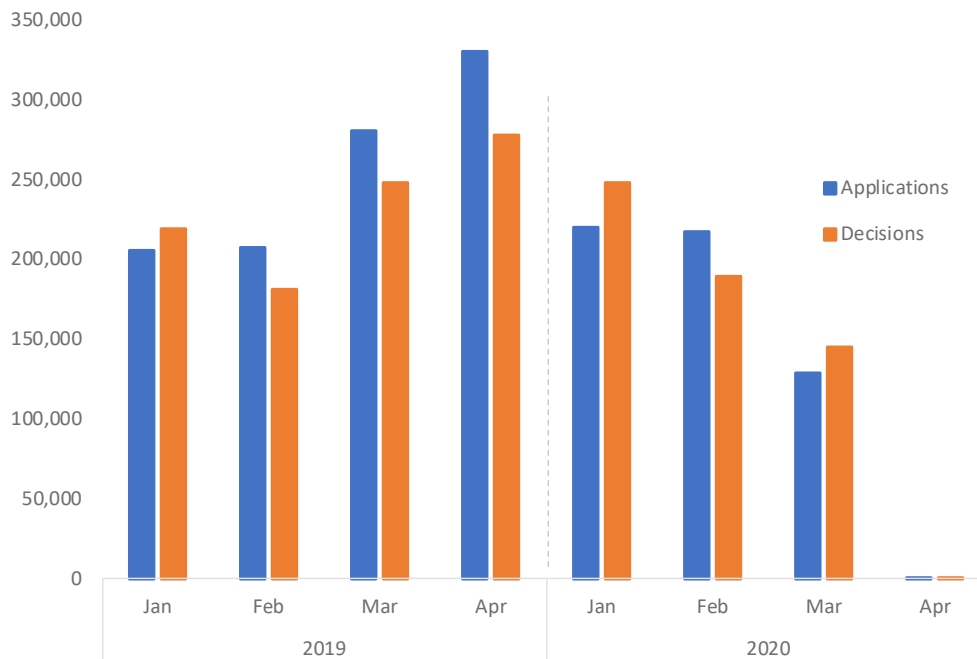
**BITD data** counts Border Force interactions at the UK border. As the system was not designed for statistical purposes, the data should be considered indicative. Some passengers will be counted multiple times in the data where more than one interaction occurred.

## Entry clearance visas

Data in this section relate to the number entry clearance visa applications and decisions on such applications. As the data are taken from a live system, they may differ from that reported in the [Immigration Statistics](#). The data in this release are provisional and subject to change.

- Visa applications, and decisions have fallen across all types of visa since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the beginning of restrictions in the UK. The falls have resulted from visa application centres being closed by the end of March. Since then, very few applications or decisions have been recorded, although some case working continues to take place.
- The total number of visa applications began to fall in March 2020, with around 129,000 applications, less than half the number in March 2019 (281,000). However, falls in applications from Chinese nationals began at the start of 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak in China. In January and February 2020, Chinese nationals accounted for 8% of all visa applications, down from 18% over the same period in 2019. All other nationalities saw significant falls from March 2020, with only around 250 applications recorded in April 2020.
- The number of decisions on visa applications also reduced in March 2020, when there were 145,000 decisions, 42% fewer than in March 2019 (248,000). April saw less than 100 decisions made on visa applications.
- The entry clearance casework IT system requires a caseworker to be physically in the office to conclude an application, and in April there was a reduced physical presence in the office. Additionally, the printing of a vignette was not possible because passports were held in closed visa application centres and could not be returned to customers. Applications have, however, been considered up to the point of a decision where possible.

**Chart 1: Number of entry clearance visa applications and decisions**



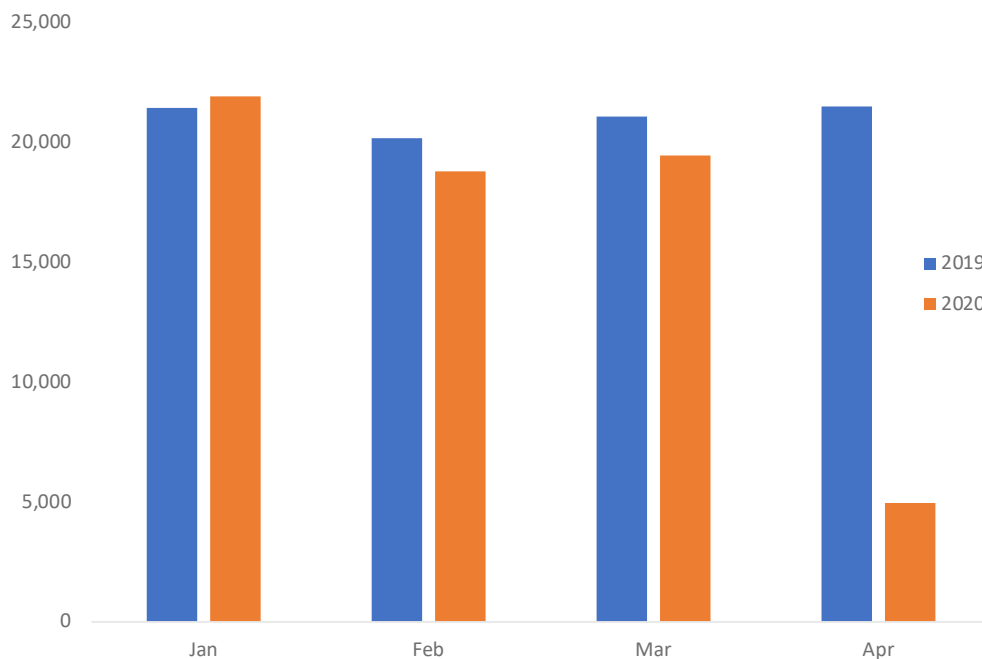
For more information on entry clearance visas, up to the end of March, see the 'Why do people come to the UK?' sections of the [Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2020](#).

## Extensions of leave

Data in this section relate to the number of grants of extensions of leave to remain in the UK. As the data are taken from a live system, they may differ from that reported in the [Immigration Statistics](#). The data in this release are provisional and subject to change.

- Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the beginning of restrictions in the UK, the number of extensions granted has fallen. In April 2020 there were 77% fewer extensions granted than in April 2019. Prior to this, between January and March 2020, there were around 60,000 extensions, down slightly on the 63,000 seen in the same period in 2019.
- The decrease in April was linked to moving the operation from one focused on physical presence in the office to one that can be, to a large extent, delivered through remote working.

**Chart 2: Number of extensions of leave granted in the UK**



- In addition to those granted extensions under existing policies, a separate [policy for those currently unable to return home due to COVID-19](#) was announced on 17 February 2020, which was further extended on 24 March 2020. Up to the end of April, there were nearly 65,000 COVID-19 related extensions granted, mainly to Chinese nationals who were unable to travel home at the end of their current visa.

On the 31 March 2020, the government announced that [NHS frontline workers visas would be extended](#). On 29 April 2020, it was announced that [frontline health and care workers would also receive visa extensions](#). Data on these extensions are not included in this report, while processes are being developed to allow for reporting.

For more information on extensions, up to the end of March, see the [How many people continue their stay in the UK?](#) section of the [Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2020](#).

## EU Settlement Scheme

Since 30 March 2019, EU and EEA nationals who are residents in the UK, along with their non-EEA family members, can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to continue living in the UK. The Home Office publishes regular high level [statistics on the EU Settlement Scheme](#), with more detailed statistics published on a quarterly basis.

- The latest data show that the Home Office received 67,300 applications in April 2020, 46% lower than the previous month, although this continues a downward trend since the UK left the European Union at the end of January 2020. By the end of April the EUSS had received more than 3.5 million applications.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that some of the support services and application routes for the scheme have been temporarily changed in line with Public Health England (PHE) advice, individuals continue to be able to apply using any laptop or mobile device including the [EU Exit ID Document check app](#). The Settlement Resolution Centres have continued to provide support by email and are currently fully operational.
- There were 73,000 applications concluded in April 2020, 51% lower than in March 2020. Applications have continued to be processed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in order to adhere to PHE advice, the Home Office has enacted plans to move to a remote case working model for the EUSS.

**Chart 3: Number of EUSS applications and conclusions**



More information on the [impact of COVID-19 on the EUSS](#) can be found on Gov.uk.

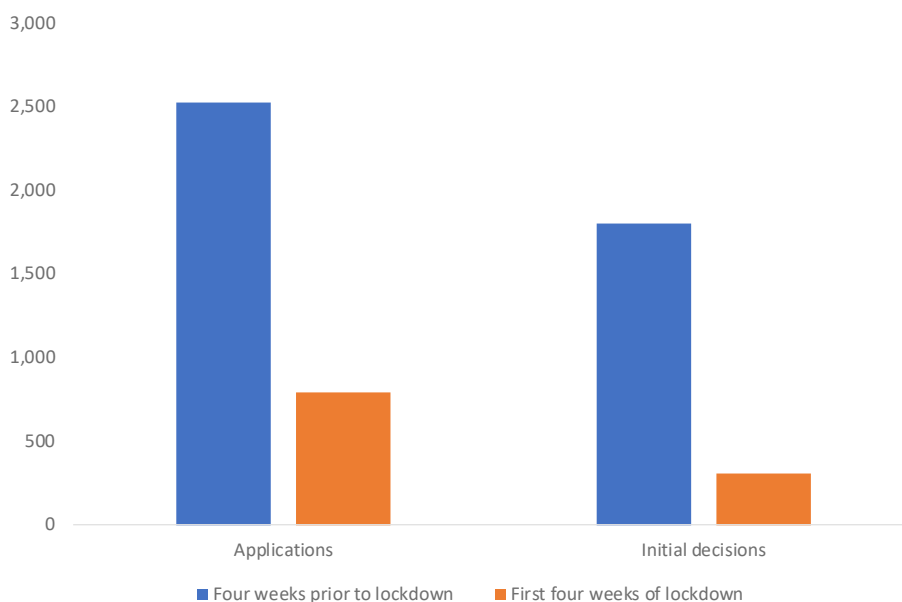
## Asylum and resettlement

Data in this section relate to the number of asylum applications and initial decisions on such applications. To allow for comparisons to be made between the period immediately prior to, and the period immediately following the beginning of the lockdown, comparisons are made between the four weeks prior to the UK lockdown being announced on 23 March 2020, and the first four weeks of the UK lockdown. As the data are taken from a live system, they may differ from that reported in the [Immigration Statistics](#). The data in this release are provisional and subject to change.

### Asylum applications and initial decisions

- Asylum applications, and initial decisions have both fallen sharply since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of restrictions in the UK. The UK has continued to accept asylum applications throughout the pandemic. However, restrictions in the UK, across Europe and the rest of the world are likely to have limited the ability of some migrants, who may have gone on to claim asylum in the UK, from doing so.
- Although there had been a general upward trend in the number of asylum applications since mid-2018, the number of applications fell sharply in the UK following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the four weeks prior to lockdown, there were around 2,500 applications, however in the first four weeks of lockdown there were less than 800, a fall of 69%.
- There were around 300 initial decisions made on asylum applications in the first four weeks of lockdown. This was around one sixth of the number in the four weeks prior to lockdown. Interviews with asylum applicants and most asylum decision making was stopped shortly after the UK lockdown was announced, to ensure measures could be put in place to allow case working to safely continue in line with Public Health England (PHE) advice. Additionally, staff absence linked to the COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on caseworking capacity and therefore the number of decisions. Following the implementation of measures to allow for safe working, decision making has since resumed, although face-to-face interviews have not. Asylum Operations are currently considering implementing a remote interviewing process, to allow applications to continue to be considered.

**Chart 4: Number of asylum applications and initial decisions**



#### Notes

1. Initial decisions do not include withdrawn applications



## Resettlement

Due to COVID-19 related restrictions on movements both overseas and in the UK, it is not currently possible to undertake any resettlement activity. As a result, there have been no refugees resettled in the UK since 12 March 2020, following the outbreak of COVID-19. All refugee resettlement arrivals to the UK planned prior to the current crisis have now been cancelled.

Resettlement arrivals are due to restart as soon as conditions allow and will be dependent on several factors, including:

- restarting of flights from refugee hosting countries,
- lifting of restrictions imposed by the governments of those countries, and in the UK,
- the ability of international partners (UNHCR and IOM) to operate,
- reopening of the UK's visa application centres.

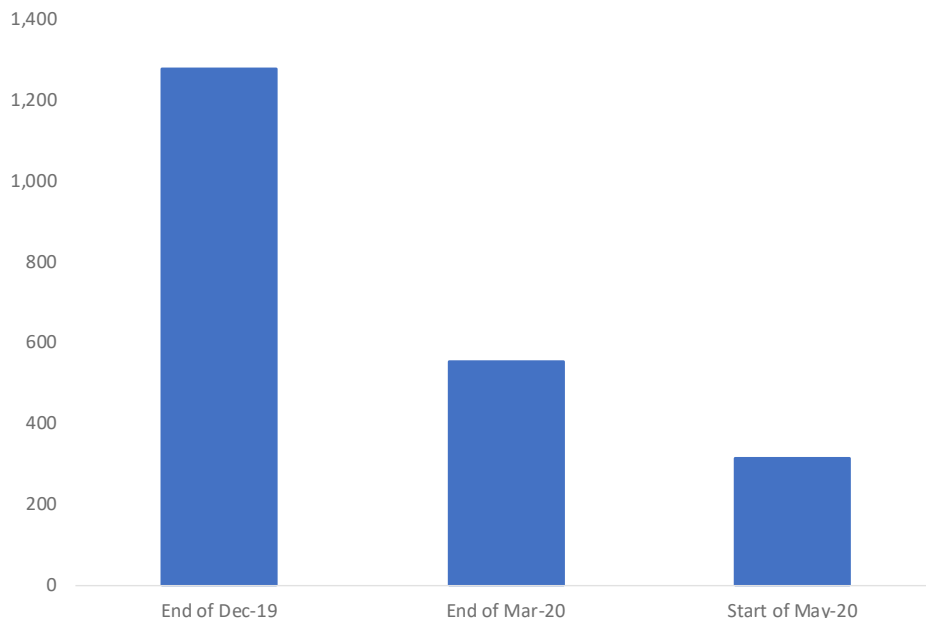
For more information on asylum and resettlement, up to the end of March, see the [How many people do we grant asylum or protection to?](#) section of the [Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2020](#).

## Immigration detention

Data in this section relate to people detained under immigration powers in Immigration removal centres (IRCs), Short-term holding facilities (STHF) and Pre-departure accommodation (PDAs). As the data are taken from a live system, they may differ from that reported in the [Immigration Statistics](#). The data in this release are provisional and subject to change.

- The number of people in the detention estate has fallen since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of restrictions in the UK. At the start of May 2020, there were 313 people detained in the detention estate – 97% of whom were foreign national offenders (FNOs). This compares to 1,278 at the end of December 2019 and 555 at the end of March 2020. The number of people detained under immigration powers in prisons has remained relatively stable. The latest [Immigration Statistics](#) show there were 340 people detained under immigration powers in prison at the end of March 2020, similar to the 359 detained at the end of December 2019.
- The fall in the number in detention resulted from both an initial increase in numbers leaving detention immediately following the outbreak in the UK, as well as falls in numbers entering detention.
- Since the UK lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020 (up to the 30 April 2020), 295 people have entered detention, 231 of which were clandestine entrants held by UKVI for processing before being dispersed through appropriate routes. Those being held for processing spend very short periods of time at a short-term holding facility and can only be held for a maximum of seven days. This does not include those who were transferred to the detention estate from prison.
- As the circumstances of an individual’s case change, including those resulting from flight restrictions, the suitability of detention is reviewed and release on immigration bail may become the most appropriate option.

**Chart 5: Number of people detained under immigration powers in the detention estate**



### Notes

1. Does not include those detained under immigration powers in prisons.

For more information on detention, up to the end of March, see the [How many people are detained or returned?](#) section of the [Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2020](#)



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