



Is immigration a threat to UK security?

1 May, 2024

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Summary

1. The recent influx of migrants from Africa and the Middle East seeking asylum in Europe has triggered a crisis. Governments face the intricate task of reconciling humanitarian law with the impact on their societies, economies and security. This paper finds that substantial inflows, particularly of asylum seekers, can increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks and communal violence:

- Over the course of a decade (2013-2023), there has been a **667% surge** in antisemitic hate incidents.
- **Nearly 80%** of all charges related to terrorism in the UK since 2001 were connected to a group or ideology based outside of the country, i.e., 'international terrorism'.
- The top foreign nationals involved in UK terror-related offenses from 2002 to 2021 were people from **Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Somalia, India, and Sri Lanka**. With the exception of Algeria, all these countries are among the top 20 nationalities engaged in illegal crossings of the English Channel.
- **94%** of those arrested for terrorism-related offences in 2021/22 were men. This statistic is particularly significant given the substantial number of male migrants arriving illegally across the English Channel. Since January 2018, **70% of irregular arrivals have been adult males** aged 18 and over.
- Foreign national offenders (FNOs) constitute **12%** of the total prison population, with a **3% increase** in foreign national offenders compared to the previous year.
- **Albanians**, who illegally crossed the Channel in record numbers until the agreement to return them to Albania was made, are the most prevalent nationality in prison after British nationals.
- Although most immigrants adhere to the law, certain demographics show a **higher propensity for criminal activity**. Academic research into crime rates in Sweden, Denmark and other Nordic nations like Norway and Finland has highlighted this disparity.
- In addition, the security threats posed by immigration **span across many generations**, as shown by the disproportionate number of Muslims being arrested for group localised child sexual exploitation (GLCSE) in the United Kingdom.

Introduction

2. A recent poll by Migration Watch UK found that a majority (52%) identify small boat arrivals as a potential threat to national security.^[1] The arrival of large numbers of migrants, especially from very different social or cultural backgrounds than the receiving states can pose serious challenges to social cohesion.

3. The public's perception is broadly in line with academic research. A number of studies indicate that refugee flows can be linked to heightened risks of interstate wars, civil conflicts, terrorism, communal violence and crime rates.^[2]

4. Migrants are, of course, more than just workers; they are individuals with their own loyalties, rivalries and belief systems. Immigration is not just a shift from one place to another; it is also a shift from one culture to another with repercussions spanning generations.

The limits of integration

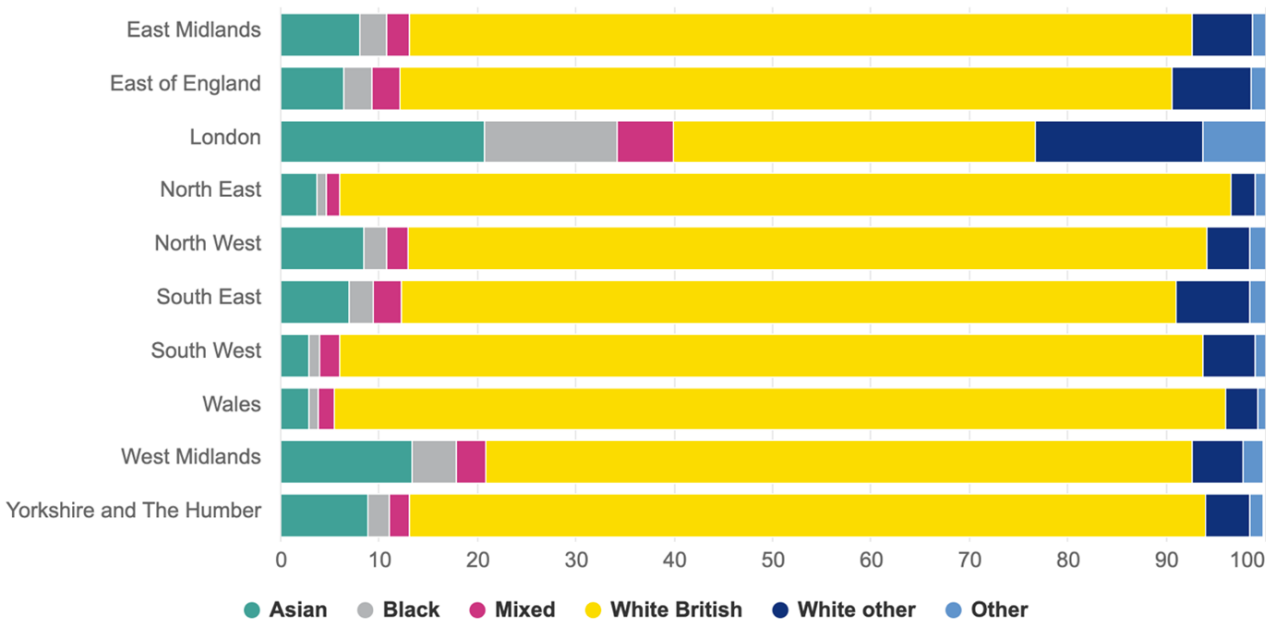
5. The proposed solution to security challenges stemming from immigration is the adoption of an 'integration' strategy. This includes policies like citizenship tests, English language lessons or the promotion of British values. Such an approach may have some positive effects at the margins. However, unless there is also a cap on numbers, it is likely to prove ineffective. The reasons for this are as follows:

6. *Clustering*. First, immigrants and their families tend to live together in a few big cities like London (see Figure 1) - and instead of spreading out evenly to blend in easily, they often group together in neighbourhoods with people from the same background. Once enough people from the same background live in these neighbourhoods, immigrants and their families can set up their own distinct businesses, schools, and places of worship. Such close-knit communities make it harder for social interactions with the broader population to take place thus slowing down the integration process.^[3]

7. *Chain migration*. Second, immigration typically starts 'small' and builds up gradually. It begins with a small initial influx, followed by settlement, and then secondary migration through the reunification of families. These families often serve as 'bridgeheads,' offering

newcomers a built-in social network but potentially reducing the opportunities (and incentives) for integration.^[4]

Figure 1: Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity (%), 2022^[5]



8. *Cultural differences.* Third, a significant number of immigrants from developing countries come from clannish societies with low levels of trust, making them less receptive to integration efforts. These cultural differences stem from traditional family structures and belief systems. For example, a significant portion of British Pakistanis, approximately 60% to 70%, originate from Mirpur, a conservative area in Kashmir. Mirpuris adhere to a traditional ‘biradari’ (brotherhood) system, which is based on a patrilineal model.^[6]

9. *Modern communications.* Moreover, rapid developments in information technology and transport, such as smartphones, social media, affordable flights, and free international phone calls, have allowed migrants to remain close to their country of origin. Such people can be living what might be called ‘transnational lives’, meaning that they are not fixed in any one particular culture although they may have citizenship or a right to residence. These are very significant changes that have taken place over the last 20 years.

10. It follows that there must be a limit to the number of people the UK can accommodate and the pace at which they can be assimilated. In the words of former Labour Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley: “Without integration limitation is inexcusable, without limitation integration is impossible”.

Community relations

11. There are clear signs of a potentially tense situation developing in immigrant communities across Western Europe.^[7] After all, the security risks posed by immigration span across generations, as evident in recent examples of ethnic conflict in places like Malmö, Molenbeek, Rotterdam, Paris and Marseille.

12. In Britain, riots erupted in northern England in 2001. Starting in Oldham in late May they spread to Burnley in June, and Bradford in July. Although each had specific local triggers, they all involved clashes between British-born whites and Pakistanis. The peak of violence unfolded in Bradford on July 7, 2001, as 1,000 young men caused extensive destruction in the Manningham area. The incident left 120 police officers injured.

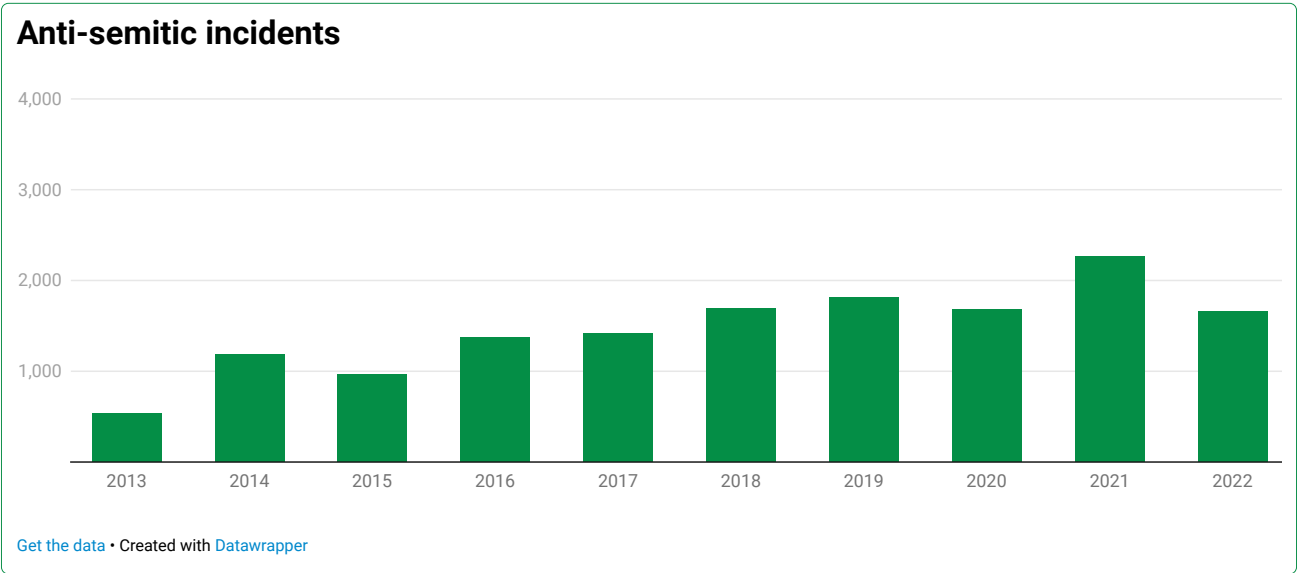
13. More recently, England witnessed religious and ethnic tension between British Muslims and Hindus in Leicester, resulting in rioting, protest marches and ethnic violence between the two populations. The unrest was triggered by a combination of social media disinformation and long-standing rivalries between Hindu and Pakistani nationalists. Fearing for their safety, some British Hindus temporarily moved to different areas, while others avoided going out due to fear of being attacked.^[8]

14. In December of last year, a sectarian conflict unfolded in Camberwell, south London, involving members of the Eritrean diaspora. The altercation led to multiple arrests and left a police officer hospitalised. Though reports on the root cause of the disturbance vary, it seems that individuals aligned with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki clashed with those advocating for his removal from power, intensifying the already volatile situation.

15. Events in one country can indeed influence conflicts in another, particularly when migrants and their children maintain strong ethnic and religious ties. A prominent illustration of this occurred during and after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict in 2023, where pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the UK led to instances of violence and anti-Semitic abuse.^[9] Across various city centres, weekly protests in

support of Palestine were staged, with many participants expressing support for Hamas, chanting war slogans, and advocating for jihad. In 2023, the number of reported antisemitic incidents reached an unprecedented high of 4,103, marking a 667% increase compared to 2013 (535):

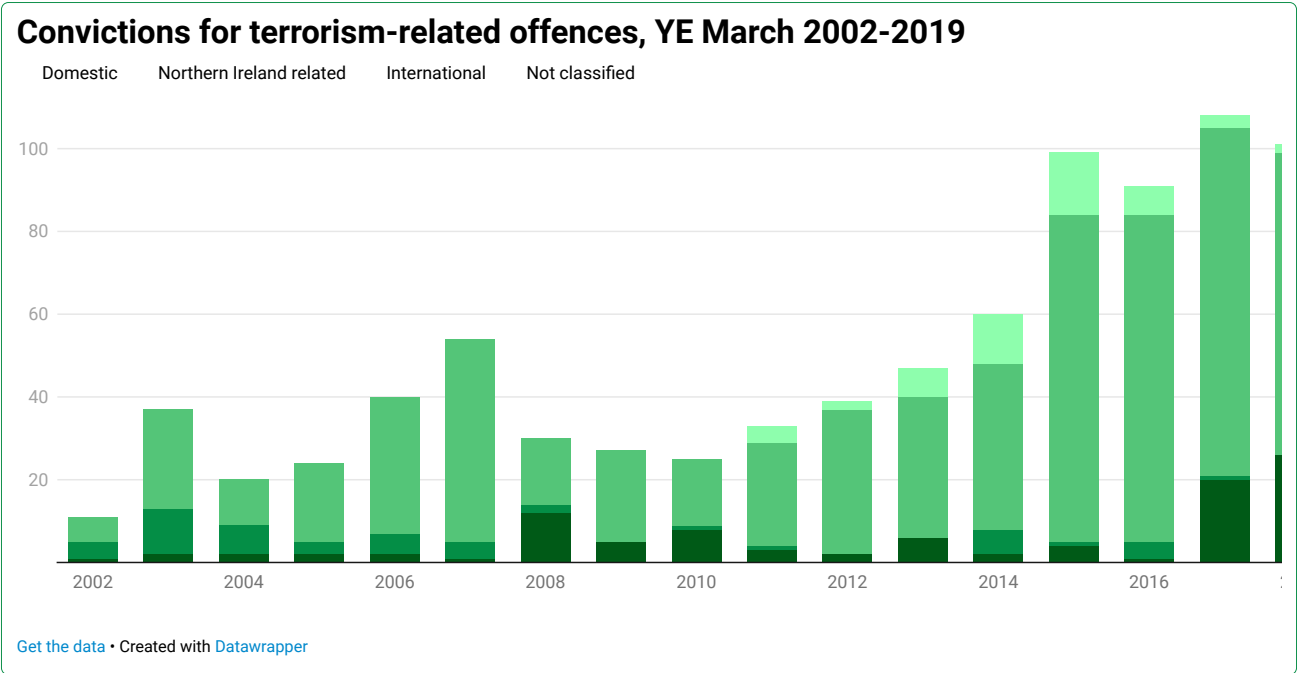
Figure 2: Antisemitic incidents recorded by the Community Security Trust, 2013-2023^[10]



Terrorism

16. One of the most significant security threats that the UK currently faces is the risk of a terrorist attack. Recent examples include the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013 and the Islamist-inspired bombing of Manchester Arena in 2017. Nearly 80% of charges related to terrorism since September 11, 2001, have been classified as connected to international terrorism. This classification refers to terrorist activity in the UK linked to, or motivated by, a terrorist organisation based outside of the country:

Figure 3: Convictions for terrorism-related offences, YE March 2002-2019^[11]



17. Apart from the UK, the leading nationalities involved in UK terror-related offences from 2002 to 2021 were people from Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Somalia, India, and Sri Lanka, as shown is in Table 1. With the exception of Algeria, all of these countries are among the top 20 nationalities engaged in illegal crossings of the English Channel, as highlighted in bold in Table 2.

Table 1: Top 10 nationalities of terrorism-related arrests, YE March 2002-2021^[12]

Nationality	Arrests
Great Britain	3,139
Algeria	194
Iraq	180
Pakistan	171
Iran	99
Afghanistan	94
Turkey	86
Somalia	84
India	63
Sri Lanka	59

Table 2: Demographics of small boat migrants, 2018 to September 2023^[13]

Nationality	Total detections	Male	Female	17 and under	18 to 24	25 to 39	40 and over
Iran	20601	89%	11%	16%	27%	47%	10%
Afghanistan	15934	95%	5%	24%	41%	32%	3%
Iraq	14884	78%	21%	23%	29%	41%	7%
Albania	14419	88%	12%	13%	38%	40%	8%
Syria	8025	94%	6%	14%	41%	38%	7%
Eritrea	7803	75%	25%	15%	33%	49%	3%
Sudan	5247	97%	3%	18%	39%	39%	3%
Turkey	3707	89%	11%	15%	38%	37%	10%
Vietnam	3180	80%	20%	7%	36%	50%	7%
Egypt	2399	99%	1%	10%	37%	44%	10%
India	2008	97%	2%	1%	33%	51%	15%
Ethiopia	1406	76%	24%	18%	29%	49%	4%
Kuwait	1155	76%	24%	27%	13%	41%	19%
Georgia	773	86%	14%	4%	10%	59%	27%
Yemen	626	95%	5%	6%	23%	62%	10%
Somalia	620	91%	9%	13%	40%	45%	3%
Pakistan	601	99%	1%	3%	27%	57%	13%
Sri Lanka	537	97%	3%	1%	20%	62%	17%

18. In 2021/22, 94% of individuals arrested for terrorism-related offenses were male.^[14] This statistic is particularly significant given the substantial number of male migrants arriving illegally across the English Channel. As shown in Table 2, males comprised 78% from Iraq, 99% from Pakistan, 89% from Iran, 95% from Afghanistan, 89% from Turkey, 91% from Somalia, 97% from India, and 97% from Sri Lanka. Since January 2018, **70% of irregular arrivals have been adult males** aged 18 and over.^[15]

19. The security challenges linked to refugee inflows extend beyond the UK and have global implications. Through analysis of official data sources, Daniel Milton and his team employed statistical models to explore the relationship between refugee movements and terrorism. What they found is that when there is a movement of refugees, it tends to increase the likelihood of terrorism in the country where the refugees relocate.^[16]

Crime

20. In the UK, opposition to immigrants from different nationalities strongly correlates with the log of immigrant arrest rates.^[17] According to data produced by Home Office, there were 10,422 foreign nationals in custody on 31 March, 2024, constituting **12% of the total prison population**.^[18] This represents a **3% increase** in the number of foreign national offenders (FNOs) compared to 31 March, 2023.^[19]

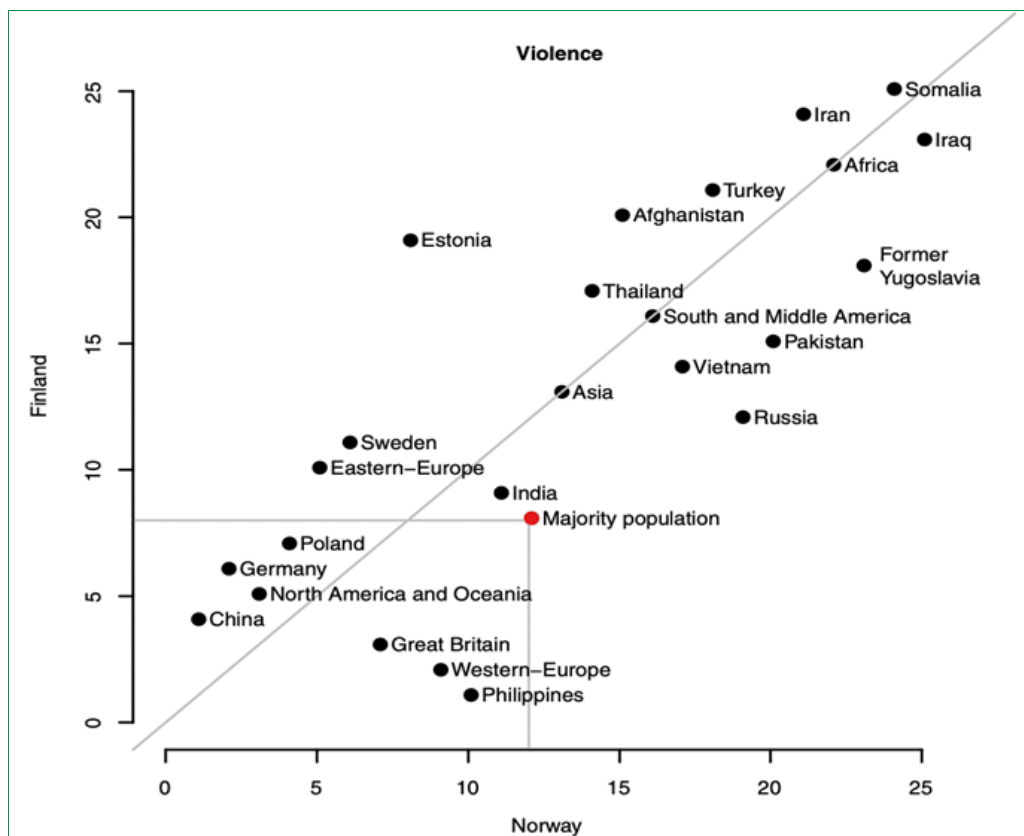
21. The most prevalent nationality in prison after British nationals are Albanians (12% of the FNO prison population), who have illegally crossed the Channel in record numbers and often come to the UK to join criminal gangs. Indeed, members of Albanian criminal gang Hellbanianz, in East London, are notorious for flaunting their wealth and weaponry on social media.

22. On the other hand, aggregate-level studies examining the link between crime and immigration have produced mixed results.^[20] For instance, Brian Bell and colleagues found that the late-1990s immigration wave, mainly comprising asylum seekers, led to a modest but significant increase in property crime but no change in violent crime.^[21] Meanwhile, the post-2004 immigration wave, primarily composed of Eastern European labour migrants, resulted in a slight reduction in property crime with no change in violent crime.

23. An inherent limitation across these studies is the failure to **disaggregate** immigrants based on their specific nationalities or countries of origin. This disaggregation is vital because immigrants from diverse national backgrounds may demonstrate varying inclinations towards criminal behaviour within their host nations.^[22] Hence, former immigration minister Robert Jenrick has advocated for the annual publication of crime rates pertaining to migrants from each nation residing in England and Wales.

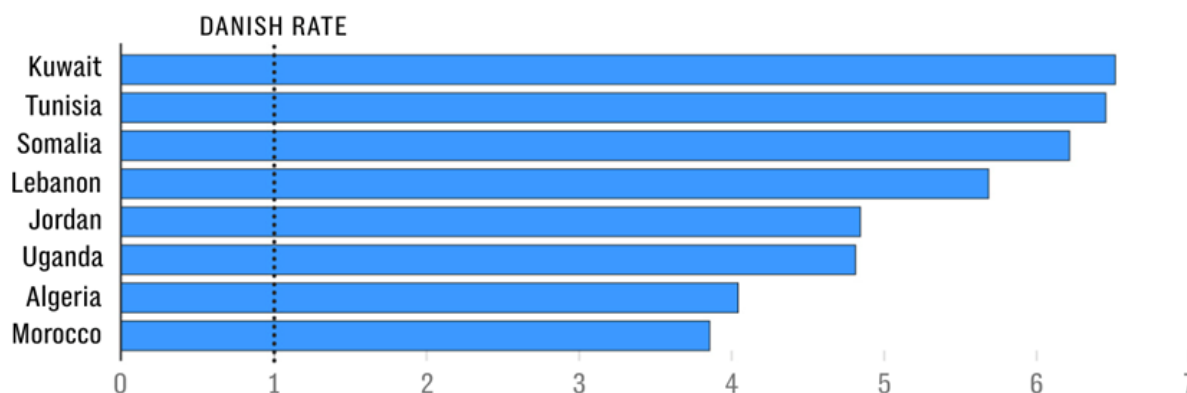
24. While most immigrants follow the law, some demographic groups are **more likely** to engage in criminal activities. Studies using administrative data from Finland and Norway highlight similarities in crime rates among different migrant groups.^[23] For example, immigrants from Africa and Iran have similar rates of larceny in both countries, while Somalis and Iraqis have comparable rates of violent crime. Interestingly, migrants from the Philippines and China have lower crime rates despite earning less than average. This suggests that factors beyond income and employment play a role. Figure 1 depicts the ranking of violence-related crime rates among different migrant groups in Norway and Finland (from lowest to highest), taking into account the size of each group:

Figure 4: Relative order of crime rates for violence by immigrant groups in Finland (2010-11) and Norway (2008-09) (Source of graph - Skardhamar et al. (2014))^[24]



25. It is notable that the Danish government collects information on crimes committed by foreign-born nationals, allowing researchers to create rankings that show which countries have higher conviction rates compared to Danish nationals. Citizens from Japan, the US, Australia, Austria, Argentina, and India have half the conviction rates of Danes, while over 40 countries have higher rates for violent crimes. These nationalities include Kuwaitis, Tunisians, Somalis, Lebanese, Jordanians, Ugandans, Algerians, and Moroccans:

Figure 5: Highest violent crime conviction rates in Denmark from 2010-2021 (expressed in multiples of the Danish conviction rate) (Source of graph - Telegraph)^[25]



26. Whatever the causal mechanisms behind immigrant crime, it appears plausible that similar processes are at play across the UK and elsewhere in Europe. A case in point is the incidence of sexual assaults committed by foreign-born nationals against women in Sweden between the years 2000 and 2015 (47.8%).^[26] As a percentage of all convicted rapists born outside of Sweden, **34.5%** were foreign-born nationals from the Middle East and North Africa, and **19.1%** were foreign-born nationals from sub-Saharan Africa.

Intergenerational consequences of migration

27. It is also noteworthy that crime rates can surge among second- and third-generation immigrants, as seen in cases like the Rotherham rape scandal. The Jay report in August 2014 concluded that an estimated 1,400 children had been sexually abused in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013, primarily by British-Pakistani men.^[27] These crimes were described by researcher Angie Heal as the “biggest child protection scandal in UK history”.

28. Since 2011, groups of mainly British-Pakistani men have been prosecuted for organised sex-grooming crimes against hundreds of girls in Rochdale, Oxford, Telford, Leeds, Birmingham, Norwich, Burnley, High Wycombe, Leicester, Dewsbury, Middlesbrough, Peterborough, Bristol, Halifax, and Newcastle. A regression analysis^[28] revealed that both the Muslim and Pakistani proportions of the local population significantly contribute to the level of group localised child sexual exploitation (GLCSE). This translates to approximately 1 in 2200 of the male Muslim population (aged 16+) being arrested for these crimes (**83% of those prosecuted for GLCSE**). However, the proportion of the local population of Pakistani origin is more powerful in explaining the level of GLCSE than the Muslim proportion, since most of the defendants are of Pakistani origin.

Conclusion

29. Large numbers of immigrants, particularly asylum seekers from troubled and unstable poorer countries, has the potential to contribute to the spread of intercommunal tensions within the host country. Most immigrants abide by the law, even if certain groups appear to exhibit a disproportionate involvement in crime. In the longer-term overall immigration numbers need to be reduced if there is to be successful integration in our society.

Footnotes

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