

Article

The United Kingdom – A Premier Destination for Intellectual Talent

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Abstract: The growing competition in the world among the nation-states to promote economic prosperity following the innovation-based labour economy reflects the opposition to attain intellectual that occurs through developing intellectual value creation. UK has become a prime destination in the pursuit of highly skilled migrants by utilizing a set of visas to ease the movement of skilled workers into the country in the fields deemed vital by the economy like healthcare sector, ICT sector and the academic sector. In spite of the fact that the economic contributions of these migrants have already been thoroughly investigated and documented, there is scarcely any integrated analysis in existing scholarship as to how targeted migration programmes influence sectoral development and national productivity. The paper critically examines the national policies on intellectual migration in the UK, evaluates the profile of skilled migrant demographically and professionally as well as explaining their economic effects. The results show that migrants especially the non-EU ones occupy the high-skill industries; 62 % of these skilled visa holders work in the healthcare sector. Moreover, the foreign professionals have great impacts on education and entrepreneurs whereby the firms founded by the migrants constitute one of every seven firms in the UK. The study also shows the rubric of visa policy and labour-market adaptation in way that individual tailored pathway involving the Global Talent, High Potential Individual visas helps to attract innovative and academically qualified persons. The above understandings reiterate the centrality of the idea of intellectual migration in economic vitality survival and the necessity in policy-making to acknowledge international credentials coupled with the issue of over qualification so as to utilize most of the migrants.

Keywords: highly skilled migrants, intellectual migration, UK labor market, Skilled Worker visa, STEM fields, innovation, economic growth, migration policy, qualified workforce, labor market integration.

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1. Introduction

The market for highly skilled professionals is one of the most competitive segments of the global labor market. It places the responsibility on highly developed countries to develop attractive and optimal policies for national development.

Countries widely use administrative and economic methods to regulate the migration of highly skilled specialists. Specifically, for donor countries, administrative measures to regulate the migration of highly skilled professionals include imposing strict legal requirements on intermediary firms, restricting the issuance of passports for foreign travel, prohibiting certain categories of individuals from leaving the country, setting mandatory work periods for those who received education at the state's expense, establishing emigration quotas, and enforcing mandatory registration [1].

On the other hand, economic measures to regulate migration include implementing policies that encourage foreign currency remittances, offering tax exemptions and duty benefits for returning migrants, launching programs to create job opportunities for them, selling tax-free securities to migrants, providing loans for returning professionals to purchase or build homes or start businesses, utilizing emigrated scientists as

intermediaries in international technology exchange processes, removing restrictions on direct foreign investments in science, establishing regional alliances and “guest” laboratories, and expanding international cooperation in the scientific field [2].

2. Materials and Methods

This query experiences a combined approach that incorporates theoretical exposition and empirical analysis to shed some light on the relative position of the United Kingdom as one of the leading recipients of intellectual migration. A highly systematic approach of research design was followed that involved an inclusive literature review of the recent studies on migration, policies, and statistical records. The secondary information was obtained through the national bodies like the Office of national statistics in the UK and the migration observatory. Evaluating various visa schemes, education qualification, sectoral employment patterns and income distribution amongst highly skilled migrants used analytical tools; namely, tools of observation, tools of comparison, tools of abstraction, tools of idealization and tools of classification. Empirical stage implied the juxtaposition of longitudinal trends between 2010 and 2023 to identify the patterns of migration, relocating demands with regard to the sectors, and impacts of disruptions caused by the pandemic. A cross-sectional study of the recipients of visas in terms of profession and nation of origin was done to shed light on the structuring trends [3]. In this interdisciplinary context, the researcher measured the socioeconomic outcomes of the highly skilled migrants in the four vital domains, including healthcare, information communication technology, finance, and education by triangulating the qualitative interpretation with the quantitative indicator. At that, the validity and reliability of the resulting combination of methodologies were achieved, thus leading to a complex discussion on the global talent competition and the implications of the latter to the very innovation ecosystem and economic success of host societies [4].

3. Results

The United Kingdom is one of the leading hubs attracting highly skilled migrants. According to data from the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), as of 2021, the country had a population of 67.6 million, including 10 million migrants. Among them, 3.4 million were from the EU, while the remaining 6.4 million came from non-EU countries [5]. Migrants accounted for 16% of the total population, with 9.3% being citizens of non-EU countries. In terms of education levels, 34% of the local population, 38% of all EU-born individuals, and 44% of migrants hold higher education degrees (Table 1).

Table 1. The share of the highly educated population among locals and migrants in the United Kingdom

Population	Women	Men	Total
EU born	35%	41%	38%
Migrants (non EU)	44%	44%	44%
UK born	33%	35%	34%

Source:Office for national statistics

A large proportion of migrants come from India (9%), Poland (7.8%), Pakistan (6.1%), Romania (5.1%), as well as countries like Ireland and Nigeria [6]. Between 2010 and 2019, 40% of immigrants stated that their primary reason for migration was employment. In the UK, EU migrants, unlike non-EU migrants, tend to work in lower-skilled jobs for lower wages. Specifically, 31% of the local population, 29% of EU migrants, and 37% of non-EU migrants are employed in highly skilled jobs. When analyzing migrants who moved specifically for work, 27% of EU migrants and 51% of non-EU migrants are engaged in highly skilled occupations.

Additionally, among those who migrated for family-related reasons, the share of non-EU migrants is 5% higher than that of EU migrants in both categories. Nearly half (46%) of non-EU migrants who moved for educational purposes work in highly skilled jobs,

highlighting the significant loss of intellectual potential for donor countries due to the "brain drain" phenomenon (Table 2).

The UK has four visa programs aimed at attracting talented professionals, which include:

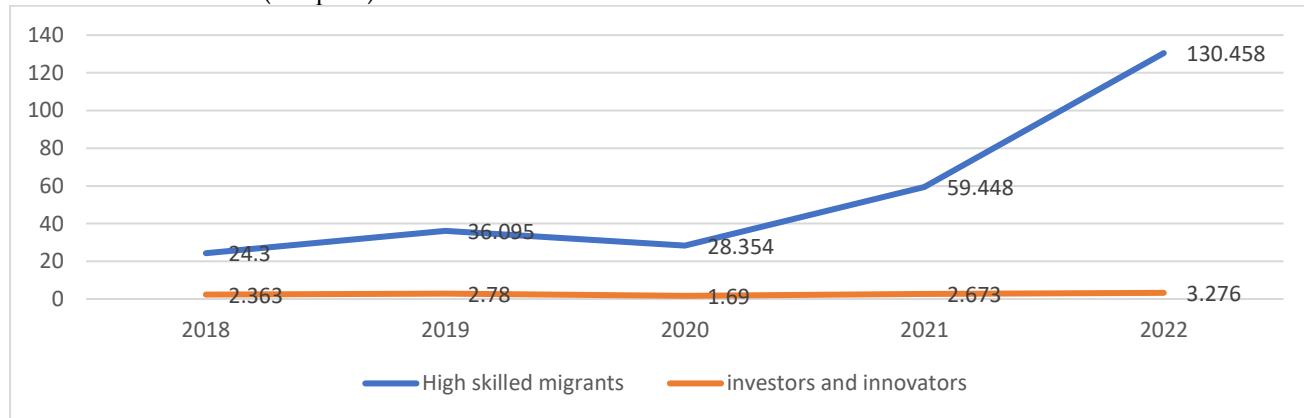
1. **Skilled Worker** – A "Skilled Specialist" who has been offered a job by a UK employer and is eligible to obtain permanent residency.
2. **Innovation Founder** – An "Innovator" who intends to establish an innovative business in the UK.
3. **Global Talent** – A "Global Talent" individual who is a leader in academia, science, culture, or technology and may qualify for permanent residency even without a job offer.
4. **High Potential Individual (High Value)** – A "High Potential Individual" who has graduated from a top global university within the last five years, holds a degree equivalent to a UK qualification, and can enter the country for work without a job offer [7].

Table 2. Top 5 countries granting visas to skilled professionals

Skilled workers(non health system)	Skilled workers in the health system	High skilled workers
Indis-33%	India-32%	India-14%
USA-6%	Zimbabwe-16%	Russia-11%
Philippine-4%	Nigeria-15%	China-10%
SAR-4%	Philippine-11%	Nigeria-10%
France-4%	Gaana-4%	USA-8%

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

The pandemic had a significant impact on non-EU labor migrants in the UK, leading to a 40% decrease in the number of visas issued to them. However, during the pre- and post-pandemic period (2019–2022), the annual number of non-EU labor migrants increased from 137,000 to 241,000, with 130,000 of them being highly skilled migrants [8] (Graph 1).

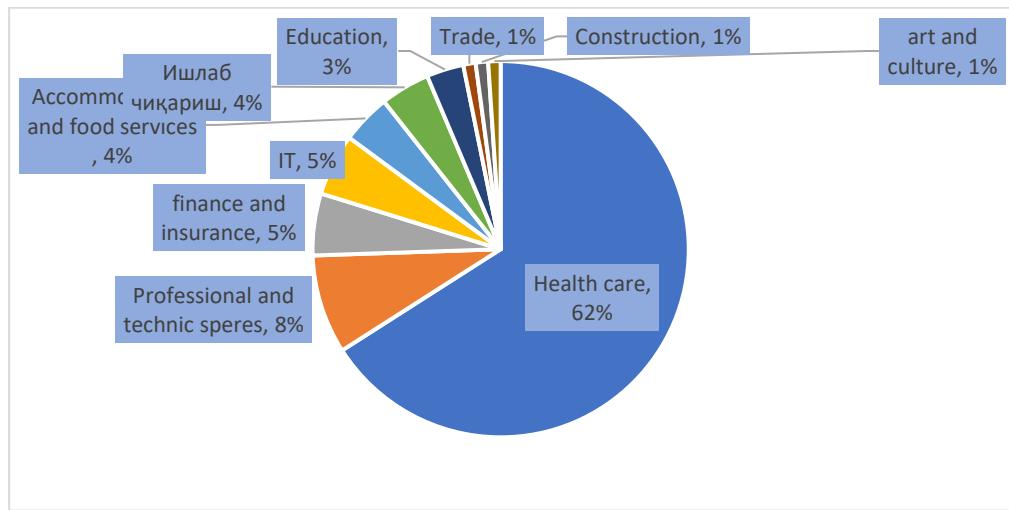


Graph 1. The number of visas issued to highly skilled professionals, innovators, and investors in the United Kingdom from 2018 to 2022.

Source: Home office immigration system statistics

By June 2023, the number of visas issued to highly skilled migrants reached 189,000. Of these:

1. 62% were in the healthcare sector,
2. 8% were in professional and technical fields,
3. 5% were in finance and insurance,
4. 5% were in the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) sector (Graph 2).



Graph 2. Sectors granted the "Skilled Worker" visa in the United Kingdom in 2023

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

For the past decade, the UK's healthcare sector has become increasingly reliant on foreign workers. Of the 62% of Skilled Worker visas allocated to healthcare in 2023:

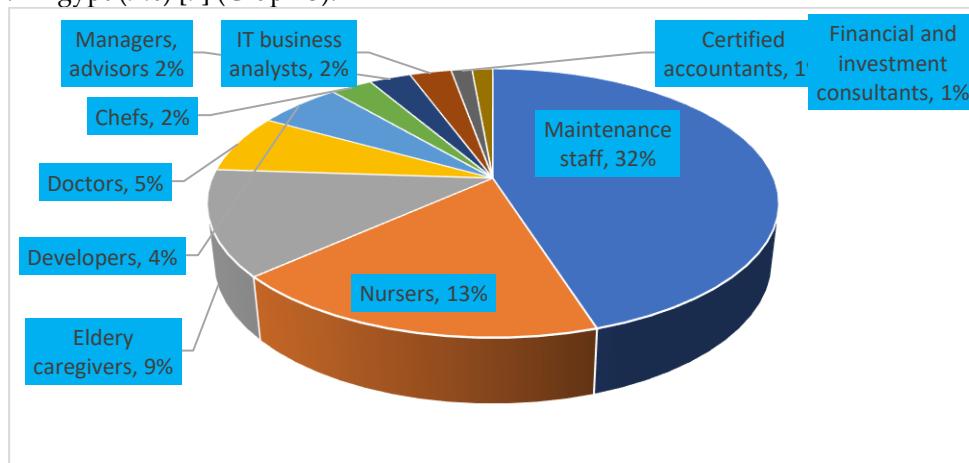
1. 32% were issued for caregiving roles,
2. 13% for nursing,
3. 9% for elderly care,
4. 5% for medical doctors.

As of 2023, the UK had 1,124,000 job vacancies, with 208,000 of them in the healthcare sector.

Even during 2013–2019, when the UK continued to attract a large number of EU healthcare professionals, 90% of newly registered doctors were from non-EU countries.

The majority of doctors working under the Skilled Worker visa scheme come from:

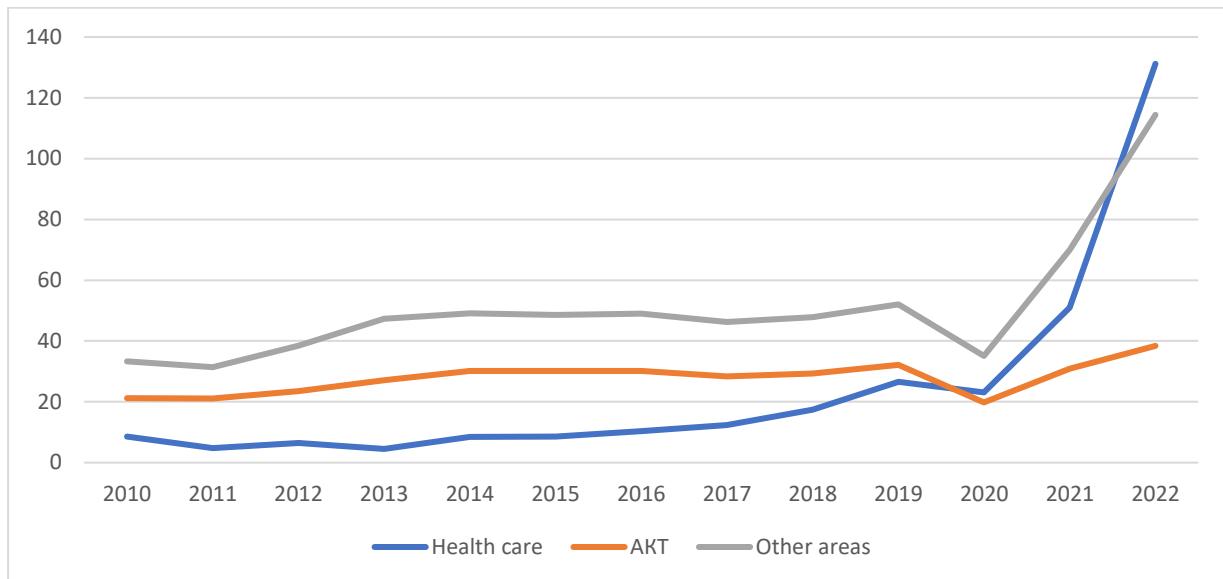
1. India (20%)
2. Nigeria (15%)
3. Pakistan (12%)
4. Egypt (9%) [9] (Graph 3).



Graph 3. Distribution of occupations with the "Skilled Worker" visa in the United Kingdom in 2023, %

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

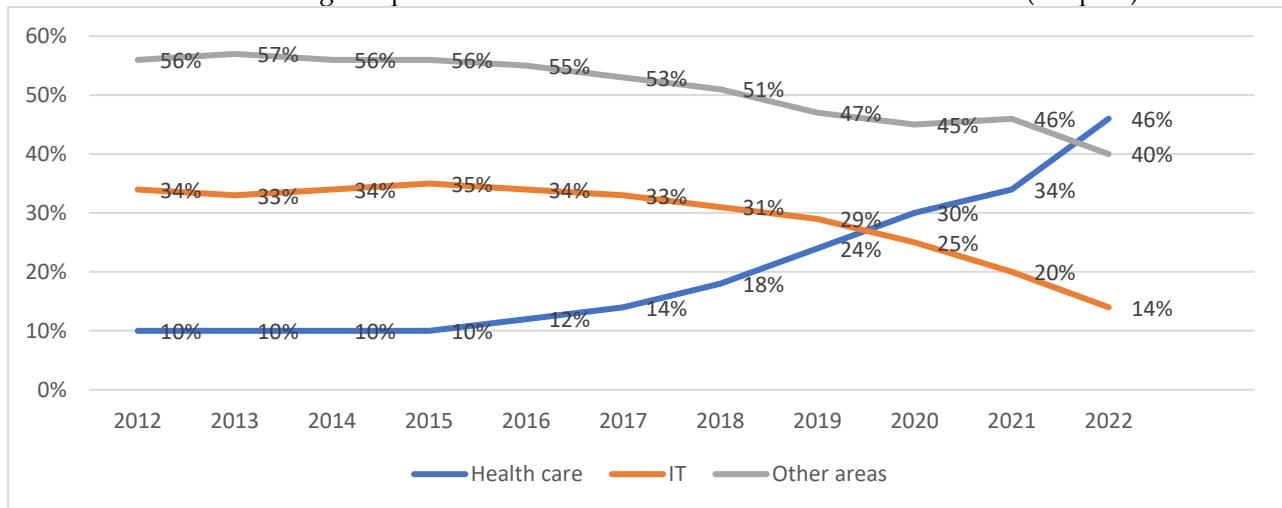
At this point, it can be observed that the number of skilled professionals obtaining visas in the healthcare sector is steadily increasing compared to those in ICT and other fields. As of 2023, 56% of international students who converted their study visas to work visas secured jobs in healthcare caregiving, 3% in medicine, 1% in nursing, 3% in ICT, 2% in accounting, and 1% each in education, business, and finance [10] (Graph 4).



Graph 4. Number of Skilled Worker visa holders in the United Kingdom, 2010–2022

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

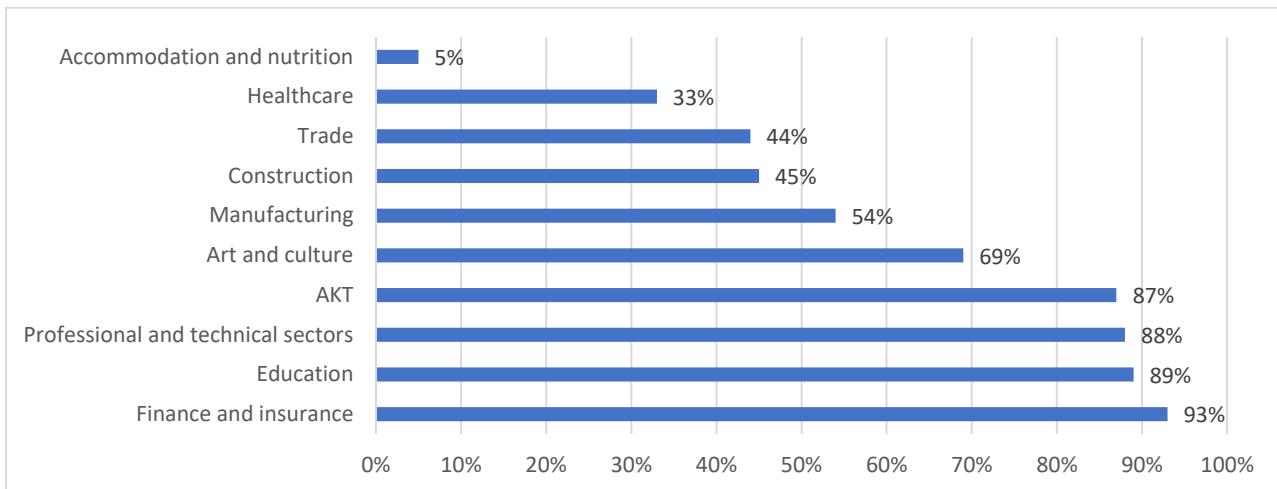
Although the number of visas issued in the ICT sector is increasing, its share is declining compared to other sectors such as healthcare and tourism (Graph 5).



Graph 5. Share of Skilled Worker visa holders by sector in the United Kingdom, 2010–2022

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

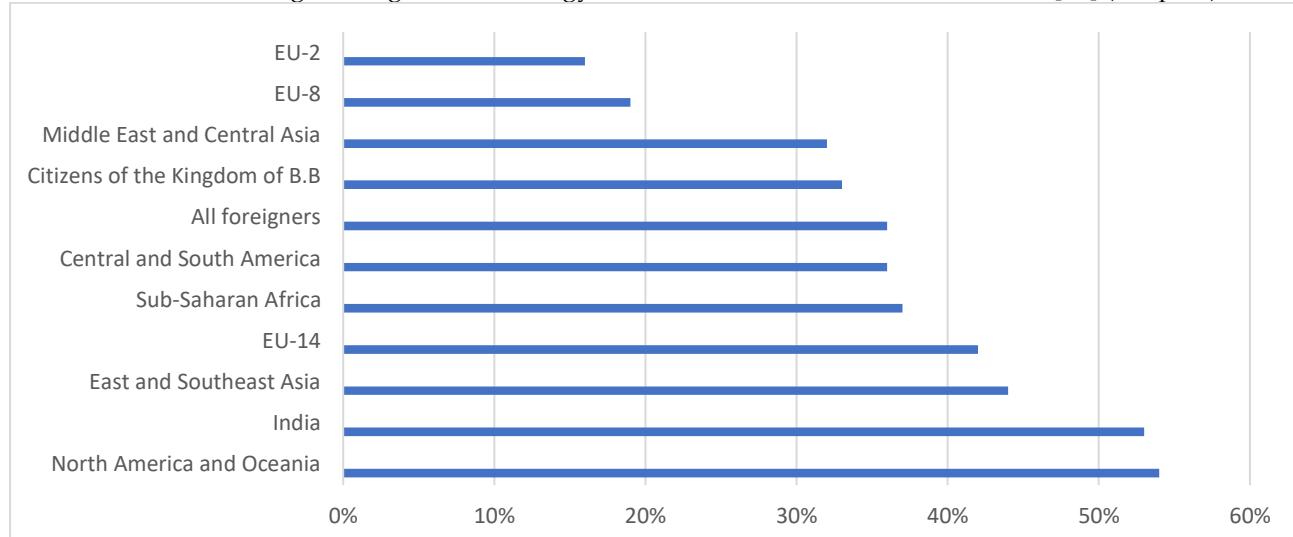
Nevertheless, the share of highly educated individuals among Skilled Worker visa holders remains high in certain sectors: ICT (87%), professional and technical (88%), education (89%), and finance and insurance (93%) (Graph 6).



Graph 6. Share of higher education in the United Kingdom in 2023 in the fields where the "Skilled Worker" visa is issued, %

Source: Migration observatory analyses of Home Office immigration statistics

Highly skilled workers classified under the "High Potential Individual" category make up 33% of the local population and 36% of all foreign nationals. More than half of migrants from North America, Oceania, and India, as well as nearly half of those from South and Southeast Asia, are highly skilled. In contrast, over 80% of migrants from EU-2 and EU-8 countries have low skill levels. Non-EU migrants are predominantly employed in high-skilled jobs in ICT, engineering, management, science, education, trade, and textiles, whereas EU migrants are more concentrated in low-skilled jobs in manufacturing, construction, and driving. Focusing on the education sector, 32% of university faculty members in the UK are foreign nationals. Their share rises to 48% in engineering and technology education and 39% in natural sciences [11] (Graph 7).



Graph 7. Share of highly skilled workers in the UK

Source: Migration observatory analysis of the annual Population survey 2022

In the UK, the average salary of non-EU migrants is higher than that of the local population. Specifically:

1. The average salary is £32,000 for the local population, £31,200 for EU nationals, and £35,000 for migrants.
2. Migrants from North America and Oceania, who have a high proportion of highly skilled workers, earn an average of £44,000.
3. The average salary for Indian migrants is £39,000, while for EU-14 migrants, it is £38,300.

When analyzing high earners:

1. Local residents and EU nationals have an average high salary of £45,000.
2. Among EU-14 nationals, this figure rises to £54,000.
3. Among all non-EU migrants, the high salary average is £52,000.

Migrants from North America, Oceania, and India reach the highest average earnings at £60,000. In 2023, 61% of international students who graduated from university and switched from a student visa to a skilled worker visa earned an income exceeding £31,000 [12] (Table 3).

Table 3. Annual Average Earnings of Workers in the United Kingdom, GBP

Countries	25% of earnings	50% of earning	75% of earnings
North America and Oceania	30.000	44.000	61.000
India	25.000	39.000	60.000
EU-14	27.000	38.300	54.000
South and Southeast Asia	24.500	38.000	52.000
Non-EU countries	24.000	35.000	52.000
Total migrants	24.000	33.000	51.000
Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia	24.000	34.000	48.000
Central and South America	24.000	35.000	47.000
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.000	33.600	48.00
United Kingdom	23.000	32.000	45.000
EU	23.400	31.200	45.000
Pakistan and other South Asian countries	21.000	28.200	43.000
EU-8		27.000	39.000
EU-2		27.500	36.400

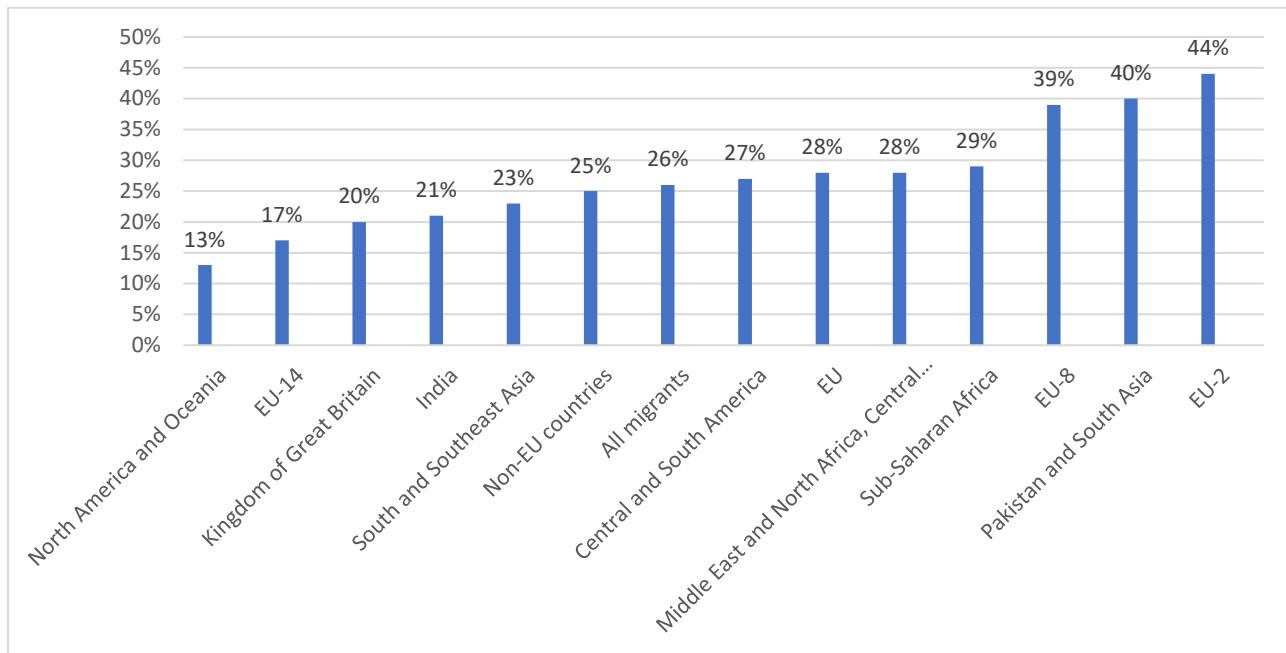
Source: Migration observatory analysis of the annual Population survey 2022

At the same time, cases of overqualification where highly skilled migrants engage in jobs below their education level are quite common. The "overqualification" rate indicates the proportion of university-educated individuals working in medium- or low-skilled jobs. Among locals, as well as migrants from North America, Oceania, EU-14 countries, and India, this rate remains relatively low at up to 20%. However, for migrants from EU-8 (44%), EU-2 (39%), Pakistan, and South Asian countries (40%), the overqualification rate is significantly higher.

This can be attributed to factors such as employers not recognizing foreign qualifications, a lack of required skills for the UK job market, and insufficient job search information available to migrants [13]. Additionally, among former international students transitioning from a student visa to a work visa, cases of overqualification are frequently observed. Many opt for jobs below their qualification level to secure employment quickly and extend their stay in the UK.

This trend benefits employers, as they often prefer hiring former international students who have already adapted to the UK's work and living conditions over foreign specialists recruited directly from abroad, who may struggle with integration.

Moreover, former international students who have already undergone the adaptation process are generally less likely to bring their family members to the UK. This aligns with the government's policies aimed at limiting dependent migration, making these graduates a more attractive workforce for both employers and policymakers (Graph 8).



Graph 8. "Overqualification" Indicator by Country in the United Kingdom

Source: Migration observatory analysis

Between 2019 and 2022, the fastest-growing visa category among non-EU applicants was the student visa. This visa, which serves as a key source for potential highly skilled migration, saw a 42% increase, rising from 284,000 to 600,000 holders. During the same period:

1. Work visas increased by 27%
2. Skilled worker visas grew by 24%

This highlights the significant role of the student visa route in shaping the UK's future high-skilled labor market [14].

4. Discussion

In the United Kingdom, highly skilled migrants also include innovators who establish and run innovative businesses. While 16% of the UK population consists of foreign-born residents, they play a significant role in the startup ecosystem. 39% of the country's fastest-growing startups have at least one migrant founder. 14% of these startups are solely founded by migrants. 25% have both British and migrant co-founders. Entrepreneurship rates: 10.4% of UK-born residents run their own businesses. 17.2% of migrants have established their own enterprises. This means that one in every seven companies in the UK is founded by a migrant entrepreneur [15]. Highly skilled professionals in the "Global Talent" category play a crucial role in the United Kingdom's economy and innovation landscape.

1. 40% of Nobel Prize winners in the UK are migrants, highlighting their contributions to science, research, and innovation.
2. As the global economy rapidly evolves, the demand for highly skilled migrants continues to rise.
3. Migrants with modern knowledge, skills, and experience are driving economic growth and fostering innovation across various sectors.

Given their growing importance, it is essential to recognize the role of highly skilled migrants in shaping the UK's economic and social development.

Between 2004 and 2022, 60% of the UK's population growth was driven by net migration. Looking ahead, projections suggest that between 2021 and 2046, the UK's population will grow from 67 million to 77 million, with 92% of this increase attributed to net migration. Research indicates that a 1% rise in the number of highly skilled migrants

leads to a 0.4–0.5% increase in productivity, underlining their crucial role in the country's economic growth.

International graduates on a "Graduate" visa contribute £588 million through taxes, visa fees, and immigration health surcharges. Meanwhile, the public expenditure on these graduates and their family members amounts to £518 million. As a result, the net fiscal benefit of international graduates working in the UK stands at £70 million. On an individual level, a bachelor's graduate on a Graduate visa generates a net fiscal benefit of £1,200, while a postgraduate contributes £4,400.

Currently, 14% of jobs in the UK are created by companies with a revenue of at least £1 million, founded by nearly half a million people from 155 countries. Additionally, 9 out of 10 UK companies valued at over \$1 billion have at least one founder who is either a migrant or a child of a migrant.

The analysis of the United States and the United Kingdom's policies aimed at attracting and retaining highly skilled individuals worldwide highlights the crucial importance of intellectual migration for recipient countries.

The experiences of the U.S. and the UK demonstrate that, amid increasing global competition for talent, creating an open and supportive environment for highly skilled migrants is essential. This approach enables recipient countries to achieve key objectives such as economic growth, social development, and fostering innovation.

5. Conclusion

Leading education, technical skills, and substantial experience make intellectual migrants the backbone of various industries and sectors in major recipient countries like the U.S. Their expertise and contributions are invaluable in the growth and development of fields ranging from science, education, and healthcare to technology and finance, as well as in maintaining the global competitiveness of enterprises.

In an era of rapidly advancing technologies and increasing demand, intellectual migrants working in industries facing a shortage of highly skilled professionals ensure the continuity of essential services and the successful implementation of critical projects. In this regard, amid the ongoing digitalization worldwide, leading economies like the U.S. are experiencing a growing need for highly skilled professionals in the field of information technology, including software developers, cybersecurity experts, database specialists, artificial intelligence engineers, cloud engineers and architects, and business analysts. Highly skilled labor migrants actively contributing to high-value sectors such as ICT and R&D help boost GDP and national prosperity by fostering an efficient production cycle.

However, at the same time, the planned migration policies in the "Big Four" countries, which aim to restrict international students a crucial source of intellectual migration potential could lead to a decline in the influx of highly skilled professionals into competitive and high-performing sectors. This, in turn, may give rise to the "brain drain" issue in countries that have traditionally attracted intellectual talent, highlighting the importance of considering international cooperation in maintaining competitiveness and efficiency.

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