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Population Soars in England and Wales, Driven by Migration, Official Figures Reveal

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The population of England and Wales has surged by over 700,000 in the year leading up to June 2024, marking the second-highest annual increase since 1949. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) attributes this sharp rise primarily to international migration, underlining a trend that has persisted for decades.

According to newly published estimates by the ONS, the total population reached approximately 61.8 million in mid-2024, rising from 61.1 million the previous year. Of the 706,881 increase, net migration, calculated as the number of people arriving minus those leaving, accounted for 690,147. Natural change, defined as the difference between births (596,012) and deaths (566,030), contributed just 29,982.

These latest figures confirm that international migration remains the primary driver of population growth in England and Wales since the late 1990s, displacing natural change as the dominant factor. The report shows that 1,142,303 individuals immigrated during the 12 months, while 452,156 emigrated.

The net migration figure has declined from the previous year's 833,696, a shift linked to fewer non-European Union (EU) nationals arriving for work or study, coupled with more foreign students returning home post-graduation. Policy changes introduced earlier in 2024 by the former Conservative government, such as restricting family members of international students and care workers, may have contributed to this decline.

Regionally, natural growth was only observed in London, the South East, the West Midlands, and Eastern England. All other areas saw a natural decrease in population, attributed to lower fertility rates and an ageing demographic. ONS data indicates that women in England and Wales had an average of just 1.44 children between 2022 and 2023, the lowest level on record.

Across the last decade, the East Midlands experienced the most rapid population growth (9.1%), while the North East recorded the slowest (5.7%).

Public discourse continues to reflect unease over the scale of migration. Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, called the figures “disastrous for the quality of life,” warning of overwhelming pressure on public services and threats to social cohesion.

Meanwhile, former Home Secretary Chris Philp said the levels of migration were “far too high” and unsustainable, calling for stricter immigration controls. He stressed the need for robust policies to address housing demand and protect community stability.

The data offers a stark look at demographic trends and underscores the ongoing challenge of balancing economic needs, public services, and population sustainability. With immigration continuing to shape national demographics, policymakers face mounting pressure to deliver effective, long-term solutions.