



What is the problem?

Introduction

1 The formation of a coalition government changes the political context of the immigration debate as does the admission by prominent Labour politicians that their party did not pay sufficient attention to the issue.

2 However, the essence of the problem remains - namely that government have lost control over our borders during the past fifteen years. This has resulted in immigration on a scale that is placing huge strain on our public services, housing, environment, society and quality of life. This note outlines the problem with references to relevant [Briefing Papers](#).

3 In recent years the focus of attention, particularly by the BBC, has been on migrants from the new Eastern European members of the EU. There has indeed been a massive inflow of nearly one million of whom about half a million are believed to be still in the UK. However, new arrivals are declining and we expect them soon to be counter-balanced by those returning home after spending a few years in Britain. It is not yet clear, however, how the economic crisis in Eastern Europe will affect these flows ([Briefing Paper 4.9](#)). The 2008 immigration figures confirmed that net immigration from these countries had fallen to 20,000 as we predicted ([Briefing Paper 4.8](#)). Provisional figures for 2009 give net migration from the new Eastern European members of the EU as 5,000

4 Asylum is periodically back in the news with hundreds of mainly young men seeking to cross the channel from Calais but the number of asylum claims is small compared to immigration as a whole. They are now running at about 24,000 a year (2009) – only about 10% of net foreign immigration.

5 The recession is likely to reduce immigration but previous experience suggests that this will be only a temporary phenomenon, after the last three recessions immigration resumed its strong upward trend ([Briefing Paper 1.21](#)).

The scale of immigration

6 Foreign immigrants are now arriving at the rate of about ½ million a year - or nearly one a minute. Allowing for those who leave, net foreign immigration reached 330,000 in 2007. It fell to 250,000 in 2008; of this drop of 80,000, nearly 70,000 was due to lower net migration from Eastern Europe. Most of the fall was, therefore, not a result of government policy.

7 Meanwhile British emigration was 87,000 in 2008. This gives a net increase for 2008 of 163,000. Provisional figures for 2009 show that overall net migration rose to 196,000. The increase was largely due to a fall of 23% in British emigration. These current levels of immigration are far higher than at any time in our history ([Briefing Paper 6.1](#)).

The impact of immigration

8 The major impact is on population. The independent Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects that the population of the UK will reach 70 million in 2029 compared to 61.4 today. Nearly all the increase will be in England. 68% will be due to immigration (This is illustrated in the Power Point Presentation accessed from the [Home Page](#). See also <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/pproj1009.pdf>)

9 The latest government household projections show that immigration will account for 39% of all new households in the next 20 years. See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1172133.pdf> pages 7-8.

10 Meanwhile, there are more than 300 primary schools in which over 70% have English as a second language; this is nearly a half million children. In primary and secondary schools, nearly one million children have English as a second language.

Economic benefit

11 Clearly some migrants bring economic benefit to the UK but, taken as a whole, what they add to production is counter balanced by their addition to the population. The only major inquiry ever conducted in the UK was carried out by the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords in 2007/08. In April 2008 they reported that "We have found no evidence for the argument, made by the government, business and many others, that net immigration - immigration minus emigration - generates significant economic benefits for the existing UK population." As regards the contribution of migrants to the Exchequer, they concluded that "The overall fiscal impact of immigration is likely to be small, though this masks significant variations across different immigrant groups." See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldeconaf/82/8202.htm>

12 It is noteworthy that the House of Lords endorsed most of the arguments put forward by Migrationwatch ([Briefing Paper 1.18](#) and [Briefing Paper 1.20](#)).

The components of immigration

13 The three major components are:

a) Economic migration

The present government trebled the number of work permits issued from 43,000 in 1997 to 124,000 in 2008. Dependants are additional. It is too early to assess the impact of the Points Based System for work permits introduced in 2008 but there is no sign of a significant reduction in the number issued.

b) Family reunion

The government changed the rules in June 1997 to permit marriage to be used as a means of immigration. The numbers have since risen by 50% to about 42,000 a year.

c) Asylum

The government have sought to tighten the system and have made a number of improvements. However, they are still not removing as many as are rejected each year so the pool of illegal immigrants continues to grow. Applications are currently running at about 25,000 a year.

Illegal immigration

14 There are three main sources of illegal immigration - those who enter illegally on the back of a truck, visitors and students who overstay their visas, and rejected asylum seekers who the authorities

fail to remove. In the Autumn of 2009 the press reported extensive exploitation of the student visa system, notably on the Indian sub continent. Its weaknesses are described in [Briefing Paper 2.3](#).

15 In June 2005, a government commissioned study gave a central estimate of the number of illegal immigrants of 430,000. Migrationwatch updated this to 475,000 ([Briefing Paper 11.6](#)). In March 2009 a study by the London School of Economics suggested a central estimate of 725,000 of which 518,000 were thought to be in London. Migrationwatch updated this to 1.1 million ([Briefing Paper 11.22](#)). The government continue to be opposed to an amnesty - for good reasons ([Briefing Paper 11.7](#)).

Policy of Previous Government

16 The massive increase in immigration since 1997 was not the result of "globalisation". It was the result of acts and omissions by the previous government. ([Briefing Paper 9.22](#)).

17 The Labour government claimed, correctly, to be introducing the most far-reaching reforms to the immigration system for more than a generation. Unfortunately, they are neither "tough" nor "Australian style". The Australian immigration system starts with a limit and selects within it. The British system has no limits and is not intended to have any. ([Briefing Paper 3.3](#)). Migrationwatch have made proposals for toughening this points based system ([Briefing Paper 3.5](#)).

Conservative policy

18 The Conservatives have called for an annual limit on work permits and the creation of a border police force. The latter is of secondary significance and the former is of limited effect. A low limit on work permits would constrain the competitiveness of key parts of industry while a high limit would have little effect on population growth. More importantly, they undertook in their 2010 manifesto and in their "contract with voters" to bring the level of net immigration down to the "tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands".

Liberal Democrat Policy

19 The Liberal Democrats called for what was, in effect, an amnesty for illegal immigrants and for an immigration system that attracted immigrants to less crowded areas of the UK; there was no mention of limits.

Coalition immigration policy

20 The coalition agreement speaks of an annual limit on non EU economic migration but makes no mention of an overall target range for net immigration. However, at his joint press conference on 20 May 2010 launching the coalition policy document, the Prime Minister said:

"In terms of immigration, what you can see is that there's a cap going to be put in place and, yes, that is with the ambition of getting to levels of net migration that were prevalent in the 80s and 90s, which is tens of thousands not hundreds of thousands."

What should be done?

21 The government should have an explicit and reasoned target range for net immigration, as recommended by the House of Lords, and adjust its immigration policies in line with that broad objective. Secondly, a work permit should not carry with it an almost automatic entitlement to settle. There should be a further points system to select those permitted to settle permanently in the UK. The Labour government accepted the second of these suggestions. But the coalition have not yet pronounced on the point.

22 The broad objective should be to achieve "Balanced Migration" - that is to bring the level of immigration down towards the level of emigration. This is the objective of the Cross Party Group

established in September 2008. A fuller account of their proposals can be found at www.balancedmigration.org.

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