



What is the problem?

Introduction

1. The formation of a coalition government has changed the political context of the immigration debate as has the admission by Ed Miliband in a BBC interview on 19 April 2011 that his party lost peoples' trust over the issue. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson/2011/04/ed_miliband_we.html.

2. However, the essence of the problem remains - namely that governments 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 reference 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 migrants from Eastern Europe; by 2010 the number of people born in Eastern Europe but resident in the UK had risen to 776,000.¹ That said, migration from the whole of the EU accounted for only around 20% of net migration under the Labour government. By far the greatest proportion of net migration comes from countries outside the EU. ([Briefing Paper 4.9](#)).

4. Asylum is periodically back in the news but the number of asylum claims is small compared to immigration as a whole. In 2010, 18,000 asylum claims were made to the Home Office – less than a tenth of net migration.

5. The recession has had a modest impact on migration to the UK for the purposes of work. Work permits have dipped since 2008 but the high unemployment rate in Britain, particularly amongst the age group 16-24s, remains a concern. This reduction in demand for work permits is likely to 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. Under the Labour government, 5.2 million foreign immigrants arrived in the UK while 2 million left. Thus net foreign immigration was 3.2 million while about one million British citizens emigrated in that period. Despite the recession and the introduction of the "tough" new Points Based System, net foreign immigration has remained high and has in fact increased. Net migration for 2010 was 239,000. These current levels of immigration are far higher than at any time in our history. ([Briefing Paper 6.1](#)).

1 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=International+Migration> Annual Population Survey

The impact of immigration

7. 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 2027 compared to 62.3 today. Nearly all of the increase will be in England. 68% will be due to immigration² (This is illustrated in the Power Point Presentation accessed from the [Home Page](#).)

8. The latest government household projections show that immigration will account for 36% of all new households in the next 20 years.³

9. 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. See [Briefing Paper 2.7](#).

Economic benefit

10. 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 Select Committee on Economic Affairs 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>

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

The components of immigration

12. The major components are:

a) Economic migration

The Labour government trebled the number of work permits issued from 43,000 in 1997 to 124,000 in 2008. Dependants are additional. A total of 128,100 work permits were issued in 2009, falling to 113,915 in 2010. This dip in numbers coincides with the economic downturn, which historically affects migration patterns, suggesting that the Points Based System introduced in 2008 has had little success in reducing immigration to the UK. The government has capped work permits but with the exclusion of Intra Company Transfers, the impact of these changes on net migration remains to be seen.

b) Family reunion

The government changed the rules in June 1997 so as, in effect, to permit marriage to be used as a means of immigration. The numbers rose by 50% to more than 40,000 per year between 2005 and 2007. The number of visas granted to spouses has since fallen but remains much higher than in the period prior to the abolition of the Primary Purpose Rule.

c) Asylum

The government have sought to tighten the system and have made a number of improvements. However, they are still not removing all those whose applications and appeals have failed so the pool of illegal immigrants continues to grow. Until last year, applications were running at around 25,000 a year. 2010 saw applications fall to just below 18,000, however removals also fell to below 10,000 having been running at around 12,000

2 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/npp/national-population-projections/2010-based-projections/index.html>

3 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1780763.pdf>, p. 8.

since 2007.

d) Students

Students comprise the largest group of entrants to the UK each year. In 2010 students, student visitors (up to six months) and their dependants totalled about half a million. Genuine students who come to study and return home upon completion of their courses do not contribute to net migration and hence to population increase but others will stay on legally through the marriage or work routes.

Illegal immigration

13. There are three main sources of illegal immigration:

a) Illegal Entrants

Those who clandestinely cross the borders e.g. on the back of a lorry.

b) Visa Overstayers

People who stay on in the UK after their legal leave to remain has expired. These can be visitors, students or those on work visas. In the autumn of 2009 the press reported extensive exploitation of the student visa system, notably on the Indian sub-continent and, in February 2010, the government temporarily suspended applications from posts in China, India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Migration Watch UK has estimated that there are around 32,000 bogus students coming to the UK every year, at a cost to the taxpayer of between £326 million and £493 million. (Briefing Paper 2.10). The weaknesses of the student visa system are described in Briefing Paper 2.3.

c) Failed Asylum Seekers

Those whose claim of asylum has been rejected but who the authorities have failed to remove.

14. In June 2005, a government commissioned study gave a central estimate of the number of illegal immigrants of 430,000. Migration Watch 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 618,000 of which 442,000 were thought to be in London. Migration Watch UK updated the UK estimate 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

15. The massive increase in immigration since 1997 was not the result of "globalisation". It was the result of deliberate acts and omissions by the previous government. (Briefing Paper 9.22). Documents recently released by the Coalition government demonstrate that the Labour government decided not to publish research which they had commissioned which showed some negative effects of immigration. See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/statements/corporate/legacyresearchimmigration>.

16. 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). Migration Watch UK have made proposals for toughening this points based system. (Briefing Paper 3.5).

Coalition Policy

17. 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."

18. The Queen's Speech included the following passage:

"The government has agreed that there should be an annual limit on the number of non-EU economic migrants admitted into the UK to live and work. This is one of the ways we will reduce net migration back to the levels of the 1990s - tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands."

19. The coalition government has implemented an annual cap on some non-EU economic migration as a means of reducing net migration; this cap, which limits the number of people who have a sponsor to come to the UK to work came into force on 6 April 2011.

20. The government has also introduced new measures to tackle the widespread abuse of the student visa system.

What should be done?

21 The House of Lords Economic Committee recommended that the government should have an explicit and reasoned target range for net immigration and adjust its immigration policies in line with that broad objective. This is broadly what they are now seeking to do. Secondly, a work permit should not carry with it an almost automatic entitlement to settle. The Labour government accepted the second of these suggestions. The Home Secretary has declared that she intends to break the link between work and settlement and will bring forward proposals for this purpose.

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.

23. See also "What can be done?" on this web site

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