



Immigration and the EU elections

Summary

1. The Labour manifesto repeats current claims for its existing immigration policy with no additional elements. The Conservatives have included a single (vacuous) paragraph. The Liberal Democrats adopt a pro-European tone but with no serious content.
2. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats state their support for the admission of Turkey to the EU. The Labour manifesto is silent on the point although government policy is in favour.

Introduction

3. This paper summarises and assesses the references to immigration in the manifestos of the three main parties.

Labour

4. There are a number of references. The following is the main passage and is typical:

p.31

Labour knows that we all want strong borders and a fair deal. That is why we are continuing to deliver the biggest changes to our **immigration**, citizenship and border security system for decades. Labour is committed to building on the progress we have made to create a system in which people can have confidence, which protects the security of the United Kingdom and prevents abuse of our laws. In this new world, people need to know that the rules for immigration are fair and that coming to Britain is a privilege, not a right. Labour is strengthening our borders with a single border force to guard our ports and airports. We are introducing ID cards for foreign nationals and we are reinstating electronic border controls to count people in and out of the country.

We have introduced the Australian-style points based system which will make sure we only attract people with the skills our country needs. In response to the economic situation, we have used the flexibility of the points based system to make our criteria more selective, and expect overall numbers of migrants to fall as a result. We have introduced a new fund, paid for by contributions from migrants, to help those local areas which have faced rapid population change. And our Earned Citizenship proposals make clear that we expect newcomers to support themselves, learn English, pay taxes and obey the law. Labour is steadfast in our determination to tackle people trafficking and we will continue to work both at home and with our European partners to end this horrific crime that trades on human misery.

The Tories claim they will set a limit on immigration but they can't, or won't, say at what level their limit will be. They say they want a cap on immigration that only applies to economic migrants from outside the EU – only one in five of the people who come to Britain.

Winning the fight for Britain's future

A single border force to guard our ports and airports, with police like powers for frontline staff. A new Australian-style points based system to ensure only those economic migrants who have the skills our economy needs can come to work in the UK.

The choice: Tory cuts vs. Labour investment

The Tories talk tough on asylum and immigration but vote soft – repeatedly voting against the measures Labour has taken to control Britain's borders, including tougher penalties for those who attempt to smuggle people into the country. And Tory claims to be tough on border security have no credibility while they continue to oppose ID cards which will help control our borders and stop fraudulent access to benefits and public services.

Assessment:

- The major reform of the visa system is true but there is nothing to show that it will be more effective.
- The description of it as “Australian style” is misleading. The Australians start from a limit and select within it. The new British system has no limits and is not intended to have any.
- The reference to a new fund is pure window dressing. The sums to be raised by a surcharge on visas will be trivial compared to the extra costs of immigration.
- The “expectation that numbers will fall” is, at best, optimistic. The government's own estimate is a fall of about 5% in net immigration.
- There is no reference to the UK's population. Ministers have said that they will prevent the population of the UK reaching 70 million

from the present 61 million. That will require a reduction of 75% in net immigration. There is absolutely no sign of measures that might achieve such an aim.

Conservatives

5. The following is the only passage:

p.24

Conservative MEPs will oppose harmonisation of policy on asylum, visas and **immigration** while supporting EU co-operation where it adds value. These sensitive matters are best dealt with as policies for national governments' competence and control. Where the UK has the right to opt-in to initiatives in these areas, we will maintain a close interest in developments and co-operate where we can, but without any presumption that we will participate. We also believe it is of fundamental importance that the UK retains control over her own borders, although this will only benefit British citizens if our borders are properly managed with a proper border protection force.

Assessment:

- This is completely vacuous.

Liberal Democrats

6. The following is the relevant passage:

p.22

Co-operation on Asylum and Immigration

Liberal Democrats do not believe Britain should join the Schengen area of open borders in the foreseeable future. We would maintain and strengthen Britain's borders with a new dedicated UK Border Force to ensure rigorous entry and exit checks. While UK asylum and immigration decisions should remain the responsibility of the UK government, Liberal Democrats believe that the UK should play a more positive role in setting stronger EU policies and common standards to tackle **illegal immigration**, to ensure the asylum system is fair and not abused and to agree a coherent approach to **legal immigration from outside the EU**. This will help Britain as well as the EU to protect its borders while creating an orderly immigration and asylum system in which EU countries fulfil their international refugee obligations and manage migration flows properly.

Assessment:

- Fine words with a predictable pro-European slant but they need a reality check. What is a "coherent approach" to legal immigration from outside the EU when demography and circumstances differ enormously. And how does this square with national control of immigration. No sign of any serious policy for immigration.

Turkish membership

7. A key policy issue is the admission of Turkey to the EU. The Turks would not accept second class membership so admission would inevitably lead to granting Turks free movement of labour, albeit after a transition period. With a population of 80 million and rising this poses a clear risk of substantial migration to the more prosperous countries of the EU. Analysis of the new East European members of the EU shows a strong correlation between a low standard of living and high migration.

8. The positions taken by the three main parties in their manifestos on the admission of Turkey are as follows:

Labour - No mention (although the government position is in favour)

Conservatives - Our MEPs will support the further enlargement of the EU, including to the Ukraine, Belarus, Turkey, Georgia and the countries of the Balkans, if they wish to achieve EU membership, however distant that prospect may be in some cases. (page 24)

Liberal Democrats - The EU is still adapting to its expansion to 27 member states, but Liberal Democrats welcome the prospect of further enlargement in due course and support future membership for Turkey. (page 33).

25 May 2009