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Immigration Figures Due for Release 26 November 2009 Background Briefing

Annual immigration figures for calendar 2008, the last before the election, will be published by the ONS on Thursday 26 November. This Briefing Paper puts them, and Government claims about their immigration policy, into perspective.

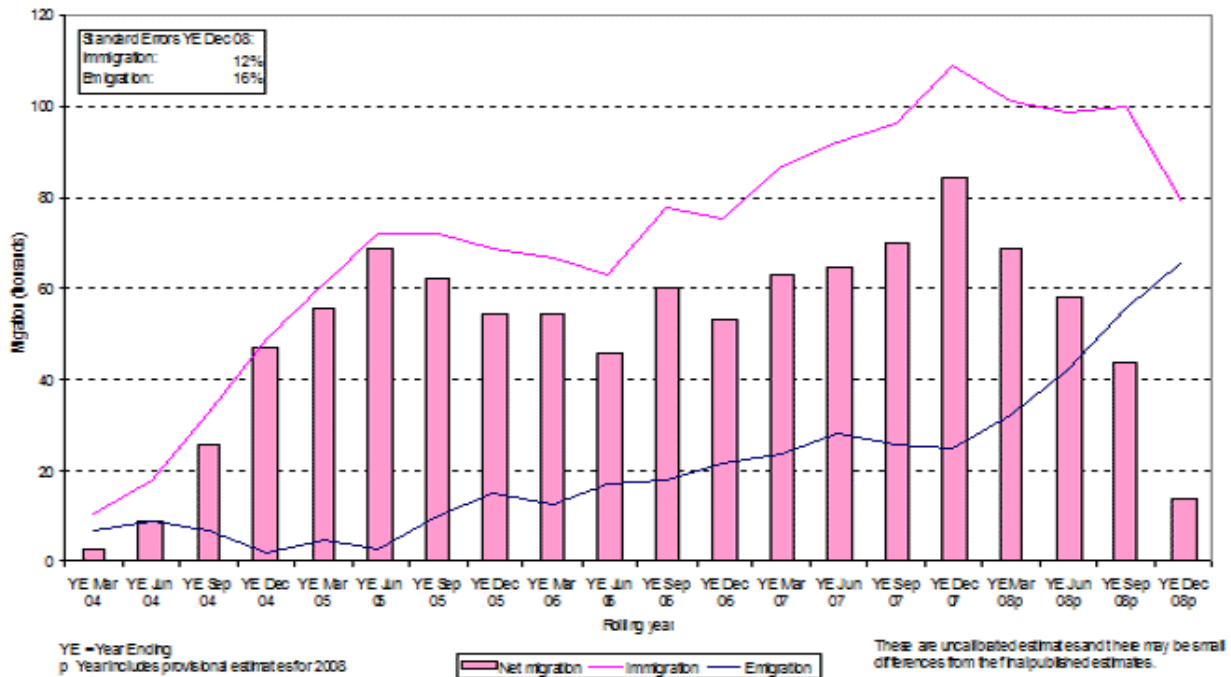
- We expect the net immigration figure to be about 150,000 compared to 237,000 for 2007 –a drop of 37%.
- The reason has very little to do with government policy. 75% of the drop is due to more East Europeans going home.
- Contrary to government claims, the new figures have already been largely factored into the latest ONS population projections which point to a UK population of 70 million in 2029.
- The figures will confirm that we are on track for over 3 million immigrants under Labour –even that is not counting illegal immigrants.

The Government's bogus claims

1 The Minister for Immigration has been claiming that net immigration “has fallen to 45% of the projected increase in population and that is partly the result of the measures taken by the government” [1]. Both halves of that claim are misleading. The Prime Minister, in his speech of 12 November [2], claimed that net immigration was down 44% on “last year”.

2 The immigration figures for calendar 2008 have not yet been issued (they are due to be published on 26 November). The Prime Minister is confusing the immigration figures with those from the International Passenger Survey (IPS) issued in August [3]. These figures show a net inflow of 118,000 for calendar 2008 - a 44% fall on the 2007 IPS total of 209,000. However, most of this drop of 91,000 was due to a reduction of 70,000 in net immigration from the A8 as a larger number of EU citizens from Eastern Europe left the UK. This is illustrated in the graph published by the ONS. In other words, 76% of the reduction was due to flows over which the government have no control and to which, of course, the much vaunted Points Based System does not apply. The net inflow of passengers from outside the EEA was down by only 13%.

International Passenger Survey estimates of long-term international migration
A8 Citizens



3 It is also important to note that the IPS numbers have to be adjusted for asylum seekers, visitor switchers, flows from Ireland etc. According to the ONS [4], this usually involves an addition of about 35,000 a year –thus the immigration figure to be published on 26 November is likely to be approximately 150,000.

The weak Points Based System

4 As for the claim that the reduction in net immigration from 237,000 in 2007 to an expected 150,000 in 2008 is a success for government policy, the Government’s own assessment is that, if the Points Based System had been fully operational in 2008, it would have reduced immigration by only 20,000 [5]. As noted above, 70,000 (76 %) of the fall was due to a fall in net migration from the EU which is not subject to the PBS and over which the government has no control.

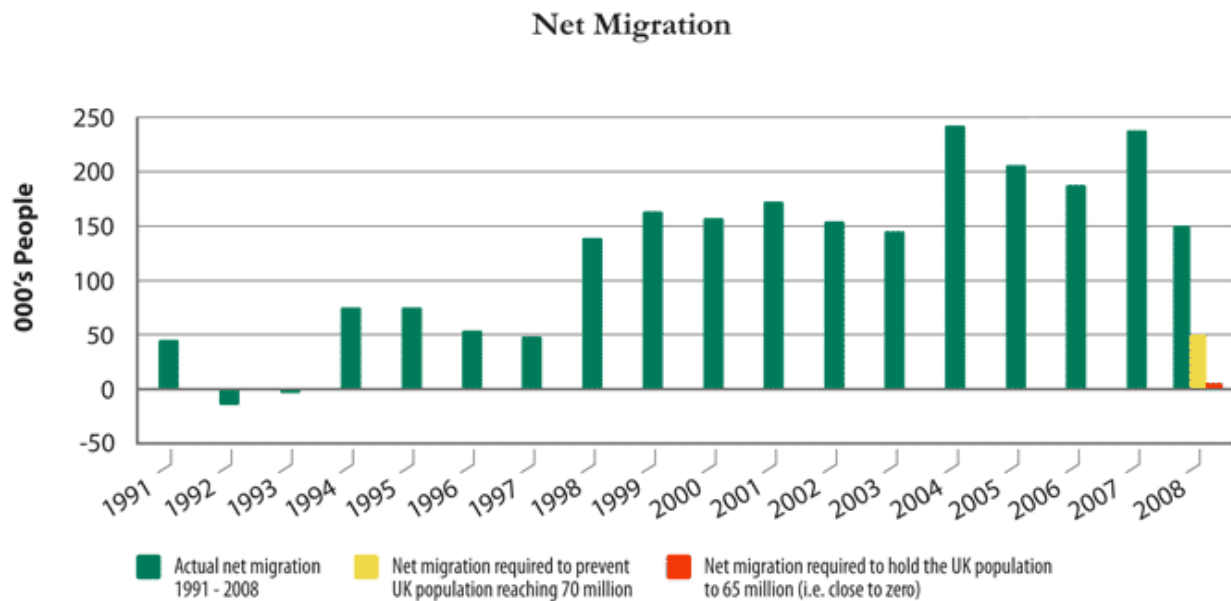
The population will still hit 70 million, according to Government figures

5 Crucially, the long term assumption for immigration in the population projections published on 24 October 2009[6] was 180,000. In other words, if the total net immigration figure for 2008 is 150,000, this would be 83% of the immigration figure used in the population projections, not 45% as the Minister claimed.

6 The population projections have already taken account of the lower provisional IPS figure for 2008. Furthermore, the ONS operate on a three year moving average to reduce the effect of fluctuations. The latest 2008 based projections also assume that net migration from the East European countries will decline to zero after six years[7] so the drop in net immigration from Eastern Europe has already been factored in to the population projections.

7 To stop the UK’s population hitting 70 million, net migration –the number who come here minus those who leave –would need to be reduced by 66% from the probable 2008 level of 150,000 a year to 50,000 a year – but even this would be the equivalent of adding the present population of Sweden to that of England. To

hold our population at 65 million we need to bring net migration down close to zero. This is illustrated in the bar chart below.

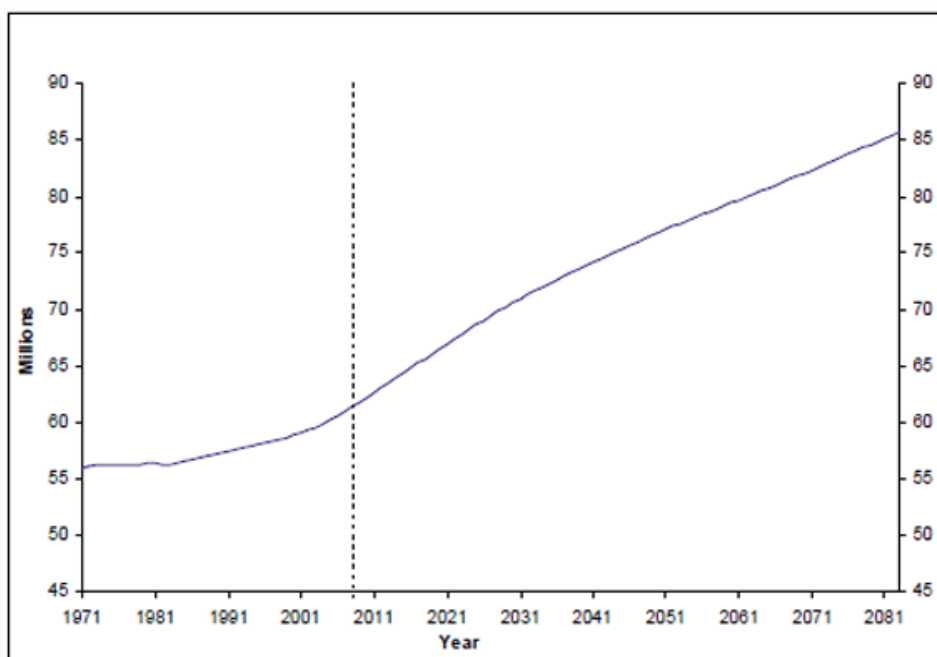


Source: ONS, TIM UK area, 1997-2007 (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=15053>), 2008 estimated.

8 Those who discount the significance of ONS population projections should be aware that in 2007 the ONS published a study of the accuracy of their projections over the past 50 years. At the 20 year range the average error was about 2.5%^[8] - on the 2029 projection of 70 million that is about plus or minus 215,000.

9 The Immigration Minister is reported in the Daily Mail of 19 November as saying that “The ONS have published projections, not forecasts, that clearly show that the population growth is starting to slow down..”. The graph of the principal projection, issued by the ONS, is shown below:

ACTUAL AND PROJECTED POPULATION OF THE UK 1971 –2083



Source: ONS, 2008-based population projections, page 50.

Over 3 million immigrants under Labour

10 Thursday's figure for net immigration in 2008 of around 150,000 will have subtracted British emigration of about 90,000 so net foreign immigration will be approximately 240,000. The total of net foreign immigration 1997 –2007 is already 2.67 million [9], so the total up to 2008 will be 2.91. Adding a cautious estimate of 200,000 for 2009, gives a total of 3.1 million immigrants during Labour's term of office, leaving aside illegal immigration.

23 November, 2009

NOTES

1. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm091026/debtext/91026-0004.htm#09102612000597>
2. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page21298>
3. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/IPS_estimates_of_long-term_international_migration_YE_Dec_08.xls
4. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/Provisional_IPS_vs_TIM.pdf
5. <http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/newpointssystem?area=allNews> See also Note 4 to Editors (not published on the web site).
6. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/NPP2008/NatPopProj2008.pdf page 35
7. Ibid Page 37
8. Population Trends 128 Summer 2007 "Fifty years of UK national population projections." Page 14
9. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15053>