

► Questions and answers

What is the point of immigration control if EU citizens are free to come and go?

Immigration from Eastern Europe is expected to decline. There are already signs of this. Meanwhile, some of those already here will decide to go home. As a result, net immigration will fall sharply (see Appendix B). This is what happened when Spain, Portugal and Greece joined what was then the EC. The real long-term problem is in the developing world where populations are growing very rapidly but jobs are not.

Why hasn't Balanced Migration been proposed before?

For a generation people have avoided tackling the subject for fear of being thought to be racist. Now we are having a proper debate, we can address the issues sensibly. The Government are putting in place a whole range of measures to try to get our borders back under control but they have, so far, resolutely avoided any commitment to limit numbers, despite extremely strong public opinion.

Is "Balanced Migration" really feasible?

Certainly – over a period of time. It would also provide a focus for policy formation as the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs has suggested. At present, the Government have literally no idea what size of population they wish to see in the UK.

How can you know what will happen to emigration?

The Government have no control over emigration which is a result of the free decisions of British citizens. However, the broad trend rate of emigration could most certainly be used as an aiming mark for immigration policy if the Government had the political will to control the numbers.

Surely immigrants benefit our economy?

Some do, but their performance is very mixed. The Government claim that immigrants add £6 billion to our economy. What they do not say is that they also add to our population in almost exactly the same proportion as they add to production. Thus the benefit to the native population is very small – an outcome confirmed by major studies in the US, Canada and Holland and most recently by the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs. The Government's own calculation, submitted in evidence to that Committee, implies an annual benefit to the resident population of only 62p per head a week (see page 26).

Surely London would collapse without immigrants?

This debate is not about existing immigrant communities. Nobody is remotely suggesting that they should leave. The issue is how many more people our island can sustain.

Do we need immigration to fill 600,000 vacancies?

No. The Government made this claim in 2002. Since then there has been net immigration of over one million but there are now nearly 700,000 vacancies. The reason is that immigrants also create demand which in turn creates new jobs, so the argument from labour shortages leads to an endless cycle of immigration (see page 24).

Surely we need the skills that foreigners can bring?

Yes, there are skills gaps which foreigners could fill but they should do so only temporarily. We propose that they should be admitted only for period of four years while British workers are trained. The CBI themselves admit that immigration is not a long term solution to skills shortages.

Don't we need foreigners to do to the jobs that British people are unwilling to do?

No. The underlying issue is pay rates for the unskilled. At present, the difference between unskilled pay and benefits is so narrow that, for some, it is hardly worth working. That partly explains why we have 1.6 million unemployed and a further 2.6 million on incapacity benefit, of whom the Government wishes to move 1 million from welfare to work. These figures include just over one million young people who are not in education, employment or training (see page 24).

Who will pick strawberries?

There is a need for seasonal unskilled labour, especially in agriculture and horticulture. This is now being met largely by workers from East European members of the EU. If this proves insufficient, a strictly policed system of temporary migration could be considered (see page 40).

Surely there is no harm in migrants who work and pay taxes?

There is a developing view, supported by the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs, that the effect of immigration on the budget is broadly neutral in the long term (see page 25). However, large numbers add substantially to the pressure on housing and public services which take a long time to adjust. They also add, of course, to pressures on our environment.

Don't we need migrants to help pay for our pensions?

This is false. Immigrants themselves grow older so the only effect, even of very large scale immigration, is to postpone by a few years the impact of an ageing population. The real answer is that, as people now live longer, they should work longer. The Turner Commission on pensions dismissed the argument that immigration would help with pensions saying that “only high immigration can produce more than a trivial reduction in the projected dependency ratio over the next 50 years...and this would be only a temporary affect unless still higher levels of immigration continued in later years...” This view was endorsed by the of the House or Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs in their report published in April 2008 (see page 25).

Won't EU migrants be so numerous as to exclude all others?

It will take some years to achieve Balanced Migration and there will have to be some flexibility on the way; the management of the inflation target could provide a pattern. Over the past ten years net immigration from the EU15 has been only 19,000 per year and we expect immigration from Eastern Europe to decline over the coming years. This makes it unlikely that EU migration will squeeze out all others.

Is it “racist” to apply limits only to non-EU citizens?

No. The basis for this is not race. If you are a French or German citizen of whatever race, you have free access to Britain.

Equally, if you are a non-EU citizen you do not have free access, whether or not you are white.