

NatCen

Social Research that works for society

Future of Britain Project

Online Deliberation June 2019

Expert Responses to Questions about Immigration

This pack has been written for attendees of the online deliberative polling event that was held in June 2019. It contains answers to questions about immigration that were not addressed in the plenary secessions, due to time constraints. The questions have been answered by one of our immigration experts and are grouped under broad subject headings:

- Level of Immigration
- Economic Causes, Costs and Benefits
- Controlling Who Should Be Admitted
- Integration
- Accessing and Providing Benefits and Services
- Family Members
- Miscellaneous

Level of Immigration

Questions:

- How are immigrants counted and where are truthful statistics available?
- Is there an evidence-based argument to explain how the UK would benefit from reduced migration (as opposed to an ideological argument)?
- Currently we have nearly 70 million people living in the country, how many people can sustainably live here?
- What is the plan to make sure we are not reliant on other countries? i.e. how do we become self-sufficient?

Response:

There is no 'right' level of migration from an economic perspective. Economists can identify the approximate impacts of different types of migration, but cannot say what is 'needed' because there are too many different considerations to weigh up (e.g. impacts on public finances, productivity, labour force, UK workers) and no single way to decide what matters most. My organisation, the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, provides statistics on many different aspects of immigration: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk>

Economic Causes, Costs and Benefits

Questions:

- Do you agree that high level unskilled immigration causes low wages, low technology, low automation, low growth, poor production and poor wealth creation?
- Low skilled migration can be seen as equally necessary as high skilled. Where do the evidence that low skilled migration is not beneficial come from? Can they expand on that?
- What are the social-economic circumstances that cause us to have a need for unskilled work that we can't satisfy with our own citizens
- Is there any way in which circumstances can be created to make low paid work more appealing for people that are already here so that we don't need to rely on more immigration?
- To deal with the possible shortage of nurses/doctors post Brexit, why isn't the government focussing more resources on training people within the UK?
- Is it moral to attract high skilled workers away from their countries when they should be making a contribution to their own societies?
- Why can't we have a mixed migration policy, in which employers can hire the people they need regardless of where they are from or their skill / wage level?
- How much financial impact will changing the immigration rules for EU nationals have after Brexit and is there research being done on this impact?

Response:

There is a consensus among economists that high-skilled immigration has *more* economic benefits, on average, than low-skilled migration. Economists do not agree on how necessary low-skilled migration is or whether it causes meaningful negative impacts. There is an enormous amount of research on this but you can find a summary done by the Migration Advisory Committee on p108 of this report: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741926/Final_EEA_report.PDF.

This report concluded that overall, the impacts of restricting EEA migration would be small, but did raise some concerns about the impact on the social care sector.

Controlling Who Should Be Admitted

Questions:

- How does the Norway system of immigration work? Could it be implemented in the UK?
- What can be done to make sure people are entering the UK for a genuine reason?
- What different categories currently exist for immigration from different countries, what is the advantage of having preferential immigration access for certain countries?
- If 40% of people in Britain have an earning below the benefit threshold (£18,600) then shouldn't the obstacle to migrants entering the country be below that threshold
- How would the experts envisage setting target levels?
- Who should decide what targets should be? What would the repercussions be for missing targets?
- Does the DWP assess how many jobs are available in comparison with the number of people who are unemployed when thinking about immigration caps?

Response:

The Norway system of immigration is so similar to what we already have, i.e. free movement, that in practice it is unlikely that there would be any noticeable change in immigration if this were to be introduced.

On the impact of preferential systems, see section 1 of the migration briefing on the arguments about family migration.

In practice, it is essentially impossible for experts to set numerical targets based on rigorous evidence; this is a political exercise because there is no 'right' level of migration from a technical perspective.

Integration

Questions:

- Whose job is it to facilitate integration? The migrants, the UK, the government, or both?
- Where countries have introduced a high level of language requirements for immigrants - what have the effects been of that?
- What criterion should be set to ensure willingness to integrate?
- What was the rationale for withdrawing the training in conversational English language that used to be provided by the government for migrants who didn't have a basic level of English?
- Help migrants to learn English and UK children to be taught foreign languages to a higher standard?
- What are the statistics on violence amongst migrants and what are they going to do about this problem?

Response:

Researchers generally see integration as a shared responsibility between migrants and the communities they enter; for example, getting a job requires initiative by the migrant but it also requires someone to be willing to hire them.

The reduction in funding for language learning since 2010 was part of a bigger programme of budget cuts across all areas of government. There is an ongoing debate about whether this should be at least partially reversed.

Statistics suggest that migration does not affect the levels of crime. See chapter 6 of this report for more information:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741926/Final_EEA_report.PDF

Accessing and Providing Benefits and Services

Questions:

- How does it work accessing benefits and state pensions in other EU countries as a foreigner, now and post-Brexit?
- What are people entitled to in this country? What do people from Britain get when they are abroad? Those that have been here a long time and contributed to the country, should they be allowed to stay?, Do the same rules apply to commonwealth countries?
- If the UK does allow increased migration, what are the plans to provide appropriate services, e.g. housing, education, health care - given the current issues e.g. with homelessness for British citizens?
- What are the plans, if any, for infrastructure post-Brexit in relation to our plans for immigration?
- How can we devise an immigration policy that is fair and accepted across the country? Particularly in terms of housing, employment, distribution of migrants across the country, and integration. For example, finding a home and integrating may be different in Hackney than in Lancashire. Is it possible to develop a one size fits all solution?

Response:

There is a summary of current arrangements for access to benefits in section 6 of the migration briefing. Access to benefits does not depend on whether someone is a Commonwealth citizen, only on whether they are an EU or a non-EU citizen. Other countries have broadly similar arrangements that would apply to Brits who migrate – UK policy in this respect is not unusual.

You can find a summary of the arguments in favour of having more vs. less regional variation in migration policies here:

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/reports/location-location-location-different-parts-uk-different-immigration-policies/>

Family Members

Questions:

- What are the migration-related statistics on family members brought to the UK by migrants and the skills brought to the UK by migrants? To what extent do the headlines sensationalise the statistics?
- How can we keep track of family members of migrants if we increase restrictions?
- Why does it take so long to reunite family members to the UK when one partner is British? How difficult/easy should it be to become a citizen if your partner is British?
- Why is there an age restriction of 16 years for admission of family members?
- How is a fair and transparent process created by government to explain to people who can and cannot stay, have their partner here etc?

Response:

There is no restriction on children migrating with their parents, but people coming as partners must be at least 18 years old. One reason it takes time for British people to bring their non-EU family members to the UK is the income threshold, which in some cases requires them to move on their own to Britain first in order to start earning in the UK (since foreign income is not counted towards meeting the income requirement). You can find statistics on family migration here:

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/non-eu-family-migration-to-the-uk/>

Miscellaneous

Questions:

- What were the circumstances whereby migrants from the Commonwealth could not get citizenship and how can we prevent that from happening again?
- How would the enforcement be carried out of people who are here illegally post Brexit?
- Is there a pack/set of guidelines given to immigrants when they arrive in the UK laying out some ground rules for living here?

Response:

People from the 'Windrush generation' of Commonwealth nationals had difficulty proving their immigration status because many of them had lost or never had documentation showing that they lived here, and the government had not kept track of it either. There are many enforcement policies in place to make it difficult for migrants who are not here legally to live normal lives, e.g. finding a job or renting an apartment. However, these policies had the unintended effect of also making life difficult for people who were here legally but lacked documentation, such as the Windrush generation.

There is no single set of guidelines or 'welcome pack' for migrants who move to the UK. Some local authorities provide such information, as do community groups working with refugees, but it is not done systematically.