

Introduction

Contrary to Eurosceptic arguments, the Remain side argues that the system of the free movement of workers is good for Britain and its people. While there are problems, these can be addressed with sensible integration policies. Adopting a harsher border policy or the Australian points system would make things worse for Britain and fail to address the real problems.

The public purse

The Office for Budget Responsibility, the government agency set up as an independent body to provide independent economic analysis, finds that the current level of migration boosts overall growth. The agency's latest report, from November 2015, also indicates that robust levels of migration are needed for the government to meet its deficit-reduction targets.

A study from the University College London study estimates that European migrants paid 10% more than native Britons in taxes, and that European migration added about £20 billion to the public wealth in the 2001-2011 period. This is because EU migrants are more likely to be young and well educated, and to be in work. Compared to one in ten Britons, 17% of European migrants set up their own businesses here, directly contributing to our economy. They also access most kinds of welfare far less than British people, even before the 2016 EU renegotiation takes effect, which will limit some in-work benefits rights to migrants.

High migration does contribute to Britain's housing shortage, which is felt especially in high migration areas like London. However, the housing gap is considerably greater than the number of migrants: there would be a severe housing shortage even if net migration was zero. Stories about EU migrants being prioritised over Britons for social housing are untrue, as are most reports about EU migrants claiming excessive benefits or being an unnecessary burden on the NHS. Actually, the NHS is able to claim back the cost of caring for EU migrants from their home country.

Effect on jobs and wages

A 2015 [study by the LSE](#) plots the number of migrants in each UK county against native wage levels, native unemployment, and native youth 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training) levels. It finds no link between high migration and any of those three social ills, when you would expect to see higher unemployment and lower wages in areas of high immigration if Eurosceptic arguments were true. The [Bank of England](#) estimated there was a small wage impact from migration on unskilled service jobs, but only when the economy was contracting. However a [study in Denmark](#), which experienced a similar jump in foreign labour during the 1990s, found that such immigration had a positive medium-term effect on young native low skilled workers because it pushed them to work in sectors requiring high language skills.

Other [academic studies](#) find that high migration helps the economy because it allows a more efficient division of labour, freeing people to do what they do best. For example, affordable child-care allows high-skilled parents to do their accustomed jobs rather than staying home with the children, while lower skilled or younger migrants babysit. This is arguably good for gender equality as well as general productivity.

Britons abroad

Between [1.4 million and 2.2 million Britons live in the rest of the European Union](#) according to the government, and many of them access the benefits systems of those foreign countries – at least [30,000 are on unemployment benefit](#), for example. Paying tax in another EU country can contribute to a Briton's record of contributions for later British benefits. A clear majority, 69% of [Britons think they should have the right to work in EU countries](#). This may be curtailed if Britain left the system of free movement, although some kind of visa arrangement is likely.

Limiting access to welfare or the NHS would be counterproductive

Limiting migrants' access to benefits would mean those migrants were competing for jobs at a disadvantage relative to British workers, so employers could offer them lower wages or worse conditions and still get them to work. This could add to the wage-depressing and job displacement effects of migration, which is only a minimal problem currently (above).

Similarly, denying migrants access to our healthcare system would drive the least wealthy migrants to simply endure diseases, creating a greater risk for the public if the diseases were contagious. If migrants sustain injuries and are not treated, so gradually get worse, they will be less able to work (and contribute to the economy), and may eventually be admitted to emergency care, costing more in the end. This is a cold way to look at human life or migration rights, for sure – really the NHS should be open to all residents as a matter of principle.

Integration

High migration has had a cultural impact on Britain, but it is often overstated. The 2010-2015 government did not help matters as it slashed funding for English as a Spoken Language (Esol) courses, making it less likely that migrants would fit in with the native community or compete for high-skilled jobs that require language proficiency. This bunches competition for low-skilled or manual work, partially explaining the wage effects found by the Bank of England.

The think tank [British Future proposes](#) that there should be a kind of fund which pays local authorities extra if they have a high immigrant population, christened the 'Free Movement Impacts Fund', so there is a clear link between migrants' tax contributions and the quality of public services. This is a good integration suggestion as it is fair for both the migrant and native populations and addresses the issue of overburdened public services, which might otherwise disadvantage both groups and lead to resentment.

In addition, the government has been [very poor at enforcing minimum wage laws and labour standards](#). This means some migrants, unaware of their rights due to their language ability or unscrupulous employment agencies lying, are effectively exploited at below UK-standard pay and conditions. Tackling these problems would be better both for migrants, and for those native Britons with whom they compete.