

UK Migration controversies

A simple guide

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Introduction

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has produced this overview of the current state of research evidence on migration and its impacts on UK economy and society to help non-experts better understand some of the debates in this complex and politically sensitive area.

This is not intended to provide exhaustive answers to every contentious argument in relation to migration. The implications of migration are less well understood in some areas than others. The complex relationships between economic, social and political dimensions can make it difficult to draw clear conclusions: there may be a mixture of positive and negative consequences for different groups in society. Instead, the Royal Geographical Society - as the largest and most active scholarly geographical society in the world - responds here to ten key arguments that are currently in circulation in the UK by setting out, in simple terms, where the weight of research evidence lies.

Parliamentary introduction



Too often controversy surrounding UK migration and what impact migrants have on our economy and society is based on myth, fear and falsehood.

The Migration Parliamentary Group was established to generate a balanced and rational debate based on empirical evidence. It is essential for Parliamentarians and decision makers to be in a position to objectively analyse the benefits and disadvantages of UK migration. As the UK faces more challenging economic circumstances, the need for a balanced debate based on facts has never been more important.

The Migration Parliamentary Group is a cross-party group that brings together a wide range of stakeholders who have first hand experience of the impact of migration in the UK. It provides a forum for Parliamentarians to access accurate and up-to-date information on migration issues and helps to generate dialogue and debate.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a learned Society of international standing that aims to advance understanding of geographical issues, including that of migration. I am delighted the Society has produced this simple guide to migration controversies and that the Migration Parliamentary Group has chosen to endorse it.

This report provides Parliamentarians, influencers and decision makers with the facts behind the controversies. It is an invaluable resource for those who need access to the facts in order to form objective conclusions. It is all too easy to ignore some of the harder questions we face about UK migration. This simple guide will inform and balance the debate, helping all those who read it counter some of the myths – both in Parliament and beyond.

After all, we need a migration policy in the UK that is based on empirical evidence rather than perceptions, prejudice and false assumptions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Cruddas".

Jon Cruddas MP
Chair of the Migration Parliamentary Group



Controversy 1



What does the evidence say?

The scale of international migration has increased dramatically over the past 25 years: UN estimates of numbers of people living outside their own country exceed 200 million. This is more than double the figure recorded in 1980 (GCIM 2005; UN 2007).

Yet what is striking about these numbers is not how many people choose (or are able to choose) to live in another country, but how few (Salt 2005). Only a small proportion of the world's population migrates in any one year, mostly within their own countries. International migrants account at present for only about 2.5% of the world population. And migration is often temporary.

Until 1982 there was a net *outflow* of migrants from Britain (ONS 2005). Between 1982 and 1997 this trend reversed with an average net international migration (the difference between long term migration into and out of the UK) of about 50,000 a year.



Increases in international migration result from liberal policies and weak border controls



It has climbed rapidly since 1995 to reach a peak of 244,000 in 2004. Net immigration in 2007 was 237,000 (ONS 2008a).

Population projections suggest that migration is – and will continue to be – an important element of UK population change. Net migration into the UK accounted for just over half – 52% – of all population growth during the 12 months to mid-2007, compared with 55% in 2006 and 72% in 2001 (ONS 2008b).

The trend towards increased immigration is common to most developed countries. Indeed despite recent high levels of immigration, the proportion of the UK population born overseas is lower than in many other countries. The UK has a lower share of immigrants in its total population (9.7%) than many other countries including Australia (23.8%), Canada (19.1%), Germany (13.1%) and the United States (12.8%) (OECD 2007a).

There are a number of reasons for the increase in international migration, including economic globalisation, large and persistent differences in living standards across countries, regional economic integration and increasing political instability around the world.

The last two decades have also seen the emergence of a global migration market for skills (Salt 2005). At the same time there has been a growth in demand for lower skilled migrants in countries – including the UK – with high economic performance, increased educational standards and ageing populations.

Even before EU expansion, migration flows from Eastern Europe had increased following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The 1990s also saw a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers fleeing conflict in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. More recently there have been significant inflows of foreign students coming to study at British universities, and of migrants moving to join their families in the UK.

Measures which have been introduced to control migration are largely effective. Many hundreds of millions of people around the world comply with immigration regulations (GCIM 2005).

It is a myth that the UK has an 'open door' immigration policy. While people from within the EU can come and work here freely, those from outside the EU cannot. New immigration reforms have resulted in increased checks on everyone before they enter the UK, new fines for sponsors of overstayers, higher age limits for foreign marriage partners, and an overhauled visa and work permits regime.

There is also evidence that tighter border controls have created new problems including an increase in illegal or irregular migration, the inability of refugees to seek protection from persecution and public hostility towards migrants (see controversy 10).

Controversy 2

What does the evidence say?

The number of refugees worldwide has increased significantly since the early 1980s. Although there was a steady decline in numbers after 2001, this trend has now reversed and numbers have started to rise again. There were an estimated 9.9 million refugees in 2006. By the end of 2007 the number had risen to 11.4 million. The total number of people affected by conflict-induced internal displacement (who were forced to move but remained within their own countries) also increased from 24.4 to 26 million (UNHCR 2008a).

The distribution of refugees in the world is highly skewed. The vast majority of refugees are in the poorest countries (when measured relative to overall wealth and population). The available statistical evidence confirms that most refugees flee to neighbouring countries and remain within their region of origin. In 2007, the major refugee-

Countries such as the UK support a disproportionate number of the world's refugees

generating regions hosted on average between 83% and 90% of 'their' refugees. Asia hosts by far the largest number of the world's refugees and internally displaced. The Middle East and North Africa region was host to a quarter of all refugees, primarily from Iraq, while Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe hosted 20% and 14% of the world's refugees respectively (UNHCR 2008a).

Most wealthy countries have relatively few refugees per head of population. The number of refugees arriving in industrialised countries has fallen sharply in recent years (UNHCR 2008b). It is difficult to say how much of the recent drop in asylum applications is a result of conflict resolution and stabilization, and how much stems from the deterrent effect of current legislation which makes it difficult – if not impossible – for asylum applicants to reach the countries of Europe.

Contrary to public perceptions, only a very small proportion of the world's refugees come to the UK and this proportion is getting smaller. The number of asylum applications received in 2007 was 23,430, 1% less than in 2006 and continuing the fall from the peak of 84,130 in 2002 (Home Office 2008). This is the lowest number of asylum applications since 1993.

While there have been many accusations that a high proportion of asylum seekers are 'bogus' or are really 'economic migrants', there is strong empirical evidence of a relationship between conflict and forced migration to the countries of Europe (Castles et al. 2003). The majority of asylum seekers and refugees worldwide come from countries affected by conflict, violence and human rights abuses. Ethnic conflict and human rights abuse were factors common to all the top ten refugee creating countries to the EU from 1990 to 2000. The main countries from which asylum seekers come to the UK continues to be those where serious human rights violations occur or which are seriously affected by warfare, with Afghanistan topping the list.

The reasons that refugees choose to come to the UK are complex. Some asylum seekers have little or no choice in their final destination. Others have the financial and social resources to exert a degree of choice. Democracy, opportunity and better life chances for children are assumed to exist in all Western countries with additional factors being the presence of family or friends in a country, language and cultural legacy of empire, images and preconceptions. There is little or no empirical evidence that welfare support is a principle motivation for choosing to come to the UK.

It is important to acknowledge that we are currently faced with a complex mix of global challenges that could result in more forced migration in the future. These range from multiple new conflict-related emergencies related to bad governance, the effects of climate change, and extreme price hikes that have hit the poor the hardest and are generating instability in many places. However, even here, the likelihood is that most additional migration will be within the developing world (Black et al. 2008).

Controversy 3

Migration is bad for the developing world because it leads to 'brain drain'

What does the evidence say?

The term 'brain drain' has been widely used to refer to flows of highly skilled migrants from the developing to the developed world. Nearly one in ten adults with some university or post-secondary schooling born in the developing world – between a third and half of the developing world's science and technology personnel – now lives in the developed world.

There has been particular concern about the recruitment of foreign doctors and nurses. Ageing populations in developed countries have driven up demand for health professionals. At the same time the countries with the most significant outflows include those sub-Saharan African nations suffering acutely from the HIV/AIDS epidemic and dwindling numbers of health workers.

Solid evidence on the international mobility of health professionals is limited,

giving rise to much speculation regarding this complex issue (OECD 2007a). There is evidence that substantial and sustained emigration of highly-skilled workers can lead to critical shortages of some skills and undermine the ability of some countries to deliver certain public goods (like healthcare). The World Bank estimates that sub-Saharan Africa currently suffers shortages of 600,000 nurses. Since 1997 more than 90,000 international nurses have registered in the UK – the major source countries being the Philippines, Australia, India and South Africa (Buchan and Seccombe 2006).

When a developing country loses personnel whose training has been funded from the public purse, there may be significant financial implications. India has reportedly lost up to US\$5bn in investment in training of doctors since 1951. 12% of India's doctors are currently working in the UK. There are also fiscal costs associated with the

brain drain, because the country of origin loses tax revenue from these potential high-earners.

However, some of the assumptions made about 'brain drain' may not actually hold. Much depends upon the nature of migration and the links between host and home countries. Outflows of health care workers are not necessarily a sign of health system malfunction. In some countries, such as the Philippines, India, and Cuba, such flows have been part of strategic labour export plans. In some cases, those who leave have been unemployed or underemployed at home. Some of those who migrate return, often with greater skills.

'Brain drain' only tells part of the story about migration's overall impact on an economy or society. There is growing evidence that when all the other impacts of migration are taken into account, the net impact may be positive in many sending countries. The money sent home by migrants – remittances – are often a more important source of income than either development assistance or foreign investment (GCIM 2005).

World Bank estimates global remittances for 2007 will surpass US\$300 billion (World Bank 2006). The official reports of remittances are always underestimates; migrants also use unofficial, unrecorded, channels. The UN Development Program estimates that 500 million people – 8% of the world's population – receive remittances. This can have a direct impact on poverty reduction, since the money tends to flow directly to poor households and is used primarily for basic needs such as food, shelter, education, and health care. In addition, migration leads to return flows to countries of origin of certain skills, information and technologies. Growing understanding of the role of migrants as agents of development has led many to question the use of the term 'brain drain' altogether (Skeldon 2005; Faist 2008).

Whilst not a panacea, there is growing evidence that migration has the potential to deliver massive economic gains, which could be used for poverty reduction and contribute to international development objectives (House of Commons 2004). Migration provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for both the developed and the developing countries to restructure the world economy in favour of the poor.

Controversy 4

What does the evidence say?

Throughout much of the world, migrants are not only employed in jobs that nationals are reluctant to do, but are also engaged in high-value activities that local people lack the skills to do. In certain countries, whole sectors of the economy and many public services have become highly dependent on migrant labour (GCIM 2005).

The UK is no exception. For centuries it has been a destination for immigrants, and a source of emigrants. The benefits of this migration are not in doubt. Immigration supplied the labour that aided the post-war economic recovery. More recently the UK's good macro economic performance has been underpinned by embracing the opportunities offered by globalisation, including those offered by increased immigration (OECD 2007b).

Migrants take more from the economy than they put in

There is widespread agreement, even among those who want to see zero net immigration, that the UK would be much the poorer – economically and socially – but for the contribution that immigrants have made (Migration Watch UK 2008). The difficulty is in calculating the extent of the contribution, and the degree to which this is 'offset' by costs associated with immigration.

The fiscal impact of migration is complicated, not least because there is considerable variation between the economic characteristics of immigrant groups. A Home Office study found that, as a group, migrants made a net contribution of around £2.5 billion for the period 1999-2000 (Home Office 2001). More recent work has also concluded that migrants have a positive – and growing – impact on public finances. This is because they have higher average earnings than the UK-born population and are disproportionately situated at the upper end of the income

spectrum (Sriskandarajah et al. 2005). In addition, international students are estimated to contribute at least £3.74bn annually to UK universities and a further £1bn per year to GDP (Vickers and Bekhradnia 2007). The weight of the evidence suggests that far from being a drain on the public purse, immigrants actually put more into the economy than they take out.

Net fiscal impacts only represent part of the economic impacts of immigration. There is also evidence that migration can help fuel economic dynamism, capital formation and labour market flexibility. Migrant workers help fill gaps in the labour market and widen the pool of available labour, stimulating improved standards and leading to the development of a more diverse, multicultural workforce. There is evidence that migrants are important in meeting acute short-term skills shortages and overcoming structural or seasonal labour shortages (Home Office 2006). Migrant workers open up new product markets and services, creating more demand and in turn more jobs. For example in 1996, the 10,000 curry houses in the UK had a turnover of £1.5 billion – more than the steel, coal and shipbuilding

industries put together (Home Office 2002). By 2005 annual turnover for the sector was £2.5bn.

There is also evidence that recent high levels of immigration have been good for the economy more generally. Both inflation and interest rates have been lower as a result, skills and labour shortages have been avoided and the economy has been kept on a stable growth path (Work Foundation 2008). Work by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research suggests that around 17% cent of economic growth in 2004 and 2005 is attributable to immigration.

Such calculations represent a quantification of the common-sense position that migrant workers cost the economy less because they are past their schooling and a long way from retirement when they arrive. This makes them net contributors rather than beneficiaries. There is also a higher average level of educational achievement than in the population overall.

Controversy 5

Migration doesn't solve the problem of an ageing population because migrants get old too

What does the evidence say?

Europe stands on the cusp of a demographic revolution. Over the next few decades, Europe's population will change substantially as a result of rising life expectancy and lower fertility rates. The baby boom generation, born between the late 1940s and mid 1960s, will gradually move into retirement. The generations behind are much smaller. It is predicted that by 2050 Europe will *lose* 48m people of working age, but *gain* 58m over 65 years of age.

In the UK there are now more people of state pensionable age than under-16s for the first time. The oldest age group (80 and over) is the fastest growing, increasing by more than 1.2 million between 1981 and 2007, mainly as a result of improvements in mortality rates at older ages.

Europe's changing demographic profile poses political, economic and social challenges. Population ageing will place

increased pressure on public finances as state pension and health care expenditure rises. But because there will be fewer people of working age there will be no increase in tax revenues. The number of workers in Europe supporting each pensioner is expected to shrink dramatically over the next 30-40 years, resulting in an increase in what is described as the 'dependency ratio' (Salt 2005; IPPR 2007).

There is growing evidence that the ability of European countries successfully to negotiate this process of economic transformation and social change will depend, in part at least, on increased flows of labour migrants into various sectors of the labour market. The United Nations Population Division has suggested that Europe might need 'replacement migration' to cope with these potential problems of between 1 million to 13 million new migrants per year between 2000 and 2050 (UN 2007).

Migrant workers tend to be younger than the domestic workforce. In recent years some 80% of migrant workers have been under 35 years old, compared to only 42% of the overall UK working-age population. This means that, if they stay in the UK, migrants are likely to work for longer and thereby make lengthy contributions to the UK's economic welfare. Initially migration can also raise the birth rate because fertility rates among immigrants tend to be above the replacement rate, but fertility rates decline over time to indigenous levels. And there is empirical evidence that whilst population ageing reduces regional competitiveness, immigration – particularly of entrepreneurs and highly skilled workers to metropolitan areas – enhances competitiveness.

The most common argument against increased migration as a solution to the problems associated with an ageing population is that ultimately the migrants themselves will retire and contribute to the increasing dependency ratio. This will require countries to attract ever larger numbers of new arrivals to keep the ratio stable. These arguments assume,

however, that migrants will remain in the UK for the entirety of their working lives and into retirement. There is evidence that migrants often choose to go home before they get old. It is widely accepted, for example, that most Eastern European migrant workers will return as their home economies strengthen relative to the UK economy (IPPR 2007; Migration Watch UK 2008)

The ageing of the UK population is inevitable. There is, however, no unanimous agreement about the scale of any demographic deficit over the next few decades or, as a consequence, how much replacement migration will be needed. The growing consensus, based on the existing evidence, is that immigration can play an important role in off-setting the extent of population ageing, but it is not a panacea. Increased migration needs to be part of a comprehensive package of measures that includes increasing the retirement age and increasing the productivity of those who work.

Controversy 6

Shortages of basic resources such as housing and health care are inevitable consequences of migration

What does the evidence say?

Increases in the scale of international migration have been met by growing concerns about the implications for public service provision and for the availability of basic resources such as housing and healthcare. Some have argued that migration is a threat to the existence of the welfare state and that it is environmentally unsustainable.

Most thinking about the impact of migration on the welfare state has been based on the assumption that immigrants represent a burden on public finances. Growing awareness that an ageing society, along with certain structural characteristics of the labour market, has increased the need for labour migration, and has turned the welfare logic on its head. There is growing evidence that immigrants may play an important role as *producers* of the very resources necessary to enable the modern welfare state to function effectively.

The contribution of migration to the functioning of the welfare state occurs in two main ways. First, in terms of tax revenue, immigrants on average pay proportionately higher amounts of tax than the UK born population due to having higher average earnings and the progressive nature of the taxation system.

At the same time, because most immigrants are of working age, they are less likely to draw heavily on the services provided by the state, such as health care and education. There are strict rules governing migrants' eligibility to claim welfare support, and only a very small proportion of social housing is allocated to foreign nationals.

Secondly, there is evidence that many areas of the public sector would be unable to function without the contribution of migrant workers. In the health care sector, migrant workers play a key role. Approximately one

third of doctors and dentists registered to practice in the NHS qualified abroad (Migration Watch UK 2008). In London, nearly half (47%) of nurses are migrant workers. Migrant health personnel have provided an important means to meet staff shortages and to reduce cost pressures within the health system. Education is another sector that has benefited significantly.

Although migration seems to have a broadly positive impact on public service delivery, there can be acute problems at grass roots level. Migrants make use of a wide range of local public services, alongside the rest of the local population. Any significant increase in a local population is therefore likely to lead to some increased pressures on services including schools, translation, social care, English language teaching, policing and the NHS (House of Commons 2008). There is also evidence that recent changes to the housing market can have an impact on the private rental sector and on housing conditions for new arrivals.

The evidence on local impacts suggests that most areas of service provision have not caught up with the transformations

brought about by the new immigration of the last decade. This has led to a mismatch between the amount of revenue available to local authorities and the number of people who need their services. These problems are not a necessary negative impact of migration; rather, they are a consequence of poor planning, the system of local government finance, inadequate mechanisms for estimating the size and composition of the local population, and limited data on immigrant trajectories after arrival in the UK. Similarly whilst there is a severe shortage of social housing in Britain – around one and a half million families are on the waiting list – evidence suggests that housing shortages have more to do with family fragmentation than with immigration.

Controversy 7

What does the evidence say?

The effect of labour migration on jobs and wages is central to the wider debate on migration. There is concern – expressed by both the public and politicians – that increased immigration leads to higher unemployment and lower wages for the existing population. This is usually based on two specific issues: a belief that migrants compete with and take jobs from the existing population; and a concern that migrants obtain employment because of their willingness to work for lower wages, thus reducing the earnings of British workers.

The public debate about the possible consequences of immigration on employment seems to be led by a perception that there are a fixed number of jobs in the recipient economy (the 'lump-of-labour' fallacy), and that immigration will lead to more competition for these jobs. But almost all economists

Economic migrants increase levels of unemployment and reduce the earnings of British workers

agree that the number of jobs available can grow (or shrink) according to economic conditions and that inward labour migration often results in the creation of more jobs. Growth in the supply of labour in the UK is currently limited by an ageing population, longer periods spent in education and high levels of economic inactivity. By increasing the supply of labour, migrants can allow particular sectors to expand, enabling those sectors to produce new goods and services, increasing economic growth and, in turn, creating *more* rather than less employment opportunities for native workers.

There is little or no evidence that migration has had a negative impact on the employment prospects of British workers. The UK-born population has experienced a stable employment rate of around 75% over the last decade despite the higher number of immigrants in the country. And recent significant inward migration from

the countries of Eastern Europe has not had any discernible impact on employment levels (Lemos and Portes 2008). Conversely, unemployment rose rapidly in many EU countries during the 1980s when immigration levels were low and stable.

The evidence on wage effects similarly suggests that over time the impact is either small or positive. There is no robust evidence that a relative increase in skilled immigrants exerts any discernible adverse consequences on wage levels. Figures from the Bank of England show that average wages across the economy are on the rise (TUC 2007). Research commissioned by the Low Pay Commission as part of its ongoing evaluation of the National Minimum Wage found that immigration to the UK has made a positive contribution to the average wage increase experienced by non-immigrant workers (Dustmann et al. 2007).

Migration therefore seems to have had a largely benign effect and, other things being equal, offers long-run economic benefits. The evidence records no real experience of migrants 'stealing our jobs'. None of this is to say that an *individual's* job will not be affected by migration.

Overall the impact of migration will be to increase employment and wages for native workers, but *some* workers in *some* sectors may be negatively affected. Evidence from the US suggests that immigration may undercut the wages of unskilled native workers. In the UK similarly there is some evidence that immigration has placed downward pressure on the wages of the most poorly paid native workers, reinforcing the need for legislation to increase minimum wage levels and training to up-skill the existing workforce.

Controversy 8

Immigration has resulted in segregation and the growth of parallel communities

What does the evidence say?

Summer 2001 saw urban disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, three northern towns with a long history of inward migration and ethnic diversity. These events propelled concerns about the social and spatial segregation of Britain's ethnic minorities up the political agenda. A report into the causes concluded that people from different groups were not mixing and were leading 'parallel lives'. The disturbances were portrayed as an 'accident waiting to happen', and as symptomatic of deeper problems across the UK's 'multi-cultural' towns and cities. This theme was developed further when Trevor Phillips, then chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, suggested in September 2005 that Britain was 'sleepwalking towards segregation' along the lines seen in the United States. He linked this directly with the terrorist attacks earlier that year in London.

There is no doubt that settlement patterns at any point in time can be described numerically as racially segregated. Populations categorised by race or ethnic group are found to be very far from equally or randomly distributed.

In the UK, patterns of residential segregation often reflect the history of immigration into particular areas. For example, in northern England, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants are concentrated in those districts with textile industries that had expanded their labour requirements to enable 24-hour production in response to overseas competition after the Second World War. Immigrants filled the unpopular night shift. Within those districts, they are located in areas of the cheapest private housing. Immigration is also associated with concentrations of residents who provide family, cultural and social support in a new society.

But the argument that ethnic segregation is *increasing* in the UK and that it is the direct result of immigration is not supported by the evidence. Studies of the 1991 and 2001 Census have led geographers to the conclusion that British levels of segregation are much lower than those found in the USA and, for the Black Caribbean population, they are falling (Simpson 2004). South Asian levels of segregation are higher but show considerable internal variation. Bangladeshis, the most recently arrived of the South Asian groups, show the highest levels of separation from other groups, followed by the Pakistanis, while Indian rates are relatively modest.

The suggestion that ethnic segregation is the *cause* – as opposed to the consequence – of racial conflict is also highly contested. There is growing evidence that Britain is segregated more by inequality, poverty, wealth and opportunity, than by race, ethnicity or religion (Dorling et al. 2007). The continuing association between black and minority ethnic segregation, deprivation and poverty is a clear indication that exclusionary forces also play a role in shaping the geographies of racialised

groups. In other words, those from ethnic minority groups do not necessarily *choose* to 'self-segregate' but may be forced to live in the poorest areas.

Finally, despite concerns about the development of 'parallel lives', there is evidence that communities are more cohesive than might be imagined (see controversy 9). Across the country as a whole, segregation is actually *declining* as people from ethnic minority backgrounds become wealthier and move out of city centres. For all ethnic minority groups identified by the Census, the indices of segregation fell between 1991 and 2001. The most segregated religious groups in England and Wales are people of the Jewish and Sikh faiths, not Muslims as is often supposed; while the levels of geographical isolation of people of Catholic faith in Scotland exceed those of any minority religious or ethnic group in England.



Controversy 9

Britain has become too diverse and this is undermining community cohesion



What does the evidence say?

Throughout the world, people of different national origins, who speak different languages, and who have different customs, religions and patterns of behaviour are coming into unprecedented contact with each other (GCIM 2005). Increased international migration, together with rapid developments in communication technology, has undermined the notion of the socially or ethnically homogeneous nation state with a single culture.

There is no doubt that Britain is more diverse than it has ever previously been. Britain is now home – temporary or permanent – to people from practically every country in the world. In London alone there are people from some 179 countries (Kyambi 2005). By no means all ethnic communities consist of immigrants: about half were born here and are therefore British citizens. And, of course, there are many immigrants –

perhaps a third – who share a European heritage. But many aspects of Britain's new 'super-diversity' are associated with changes in migration patterns and flows over recent decades (Vertovec 2006).

Evidence on the implications of this 'super-diversity' for British society is mixed. On the one hand, there is evidence that communities are more cohesive than might be imagined. The overall national picture is a positive one with 79% of people agreeing that people of different backgrounds get on well in their local area (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007). And there is evidence that migrants often have a strong sense of belonging to the UK, and score well on other indicators of 'community cohesion' (Markova and Black 2007).

No single factor determines cohesion, with a wide variety of factors relating and impacting upon it simultaneously.

Tensions exist within and between all communities, not only between new migrants and settled white populations (House of Commons 2008). How cohesive a community is will depend upon a series of interacting factors about that area (including its geography and history) and the people who live there (both in terms of their personal characteristics and their attitudes). Evidence suggests that deprivation – rather than diversity – remains a key influencer of cohesion. And there is no direct relationship between the level of diversity and levels of community cohesion.

But the diversity resulting from international migration has also created some important challenges in the degree of community cohesion between new and established groups in certain geographical areas, as well as potential tensions indicated by national opinion data. In some areas of the UK – particularly those with little previous history of migration – diversity poses new challenges with respect to people's sense of identity, how social groups relate to one another and how people organise their lives. There is evidence that in some areas and within

some communities, negative attitudes towards migration have become a sub-text for expressing racist views or attitudes towards particular groups in society. Migrants – and those from ethnic minority groups who are assumed to be migrants – may be viewed with suspicion by other members of society. Many new migrants, particularly those from ethnic minority groups, suffer racially aggravated violence and workplace discrimination. This evidence suggests that *negative attitudes and perceptions* about Britain's increased diversity – rather than diversity itself – have the potential to undermine community cohesion.

Controversy 10

Illegal immigration can only be prevented by tightening up on illegal immigrants already in the UK

What does the evidence say?

The term 'illegal migration' is commonly used to describe a variety of different phenomena involving people who enter or remain in a country of which they are not a citizen in breach of national laws. These include migrants who enter or remain in a country without permission, those who are smuggled or trafficked across international borders, and unsuccessful asylum seekers who fail to leave or cannot be removed. The biggest group of people living in the UK illegally are likely to be those who entered legally with a visa or work permit but have not applied for permission to stay. Because of the complexity of categories, those who do not have formal legal status in a country are increasingly described as 'irregular' migrants.

Not surprisingly, estimating the scale of irregular migration to the UK is a difficult task. There is, however, a broad consensus

that, as the scale of international migration has increased so too has the global scale of irregular migration. The US appears to have the largest absolute number of irregular immigrants with between 10 and 11 million, about 30% of its total foreign born population. It is estimated between 10% and 15% of Europe's 56 million migrants have irregular status (OECD 2007a). In 2004, research commissioned by the Home Office offered a 'best guess' number between 310,000 and 570,000 irregular migrants in the UK (Pinkerton et al. 2004).

The consequences of irregular immigration are significant, both for society and for migrants. When it takes place on a significant scale, and receives a great deal of media attention, irregular migration can challenge society's social and economic systems of governance and undermine its legal order. It also undermines public confidence in migration and asylum policies. Irregular

migrants themselves may be at risk of exploitation and unable to make full use of their skills and experience.

Views on how best to deal with the phenomenon of irregular migration tend to be polarized between those who want to tighten conditions further, and those who want to legalise or 'regularise' the status of irregular migrants so that they are able to contribute more fully to society.

It seems unlikely that border controls alone can prevent irregular migration. States have devoted much attention and resources to stem irregular migration, with limited success. And tighter border controls endanger the lives of the migrants that attempt to get around them. There is evidence that a large – but unknown – number of people die each year trying to cross land and sea borders without detection, and that smuggling and trafficking has increased. More generally, states are reluctant to introduce measures that would lead to increased restrictions on the movement of their own citizens and on business travellers and tourists. There is no evidence that further tightening conditions for those already living

illegally in countries such as the UK would reduce the scale of irregular migration.

Some countries have established regularisation programmes in an effort to deal with the worst aspects of irregular migration. Such programmes offer legal status to irregular migrants, who have been employed in a country for significant periods of time. In the last five years alone, schemes in Greece, Spain, Italy, France and Portugal have resulted in more than one million migrants becoming regularised. The UK has not undertaken such a scheme to date.

Regularisation has pros and cons. One of the most frequently cited negative consequences is that it may encourage future irregular migration, sometimes at even greater rates than previously. There is also an argument that regularisation rewards law breaking. On the other hand regularisation reduces the exploitation of migrant workers in the shadow economy by giving them formal rights and requiring them to pay taxes. It may also undermine illegal working by bringing previously unregulated sectors into the formal economy.

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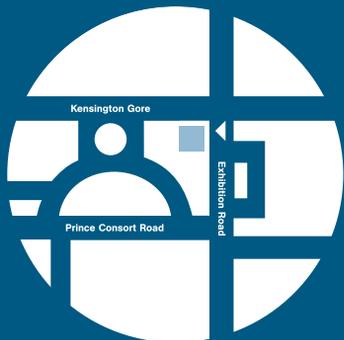
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