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An overview of UK migration

Introduction

1 In recent years public attention has been focused on asylum seekers but their numbers have fallen sharply. In 2005 there were 30,000 asylum applications including dependants and the number is likely to reduce slightly in 2006. Meanwhile, other forms of immigration have risen very sharply. Net foreign immigration reached 340,000 in 2004 before falling to 290,000 in 2005. These represent the highest net inflows on record. It is hard to see how we can achieve the successful integration of immigrants on this scale. The Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has warned that we are "sleepwalking towards segregation" but he does not appear to have made the connection with the massive levels of immigration that have occurred in recent years. To get a full picture of this complex problem it is necessary to consider labour migration, family settlement, students, asylum seekers and illegal immigration together. This paper, therefore, provides an overview of the main issues. Numbered footnotes indicate the sources.

Recent History

2 Until the 1950s there had been no major immigration into Britain, other than from Ireland, since the Norman invasion nearly 1000 years ago. About 50,000 Huguenots arrived from France in the 16th and 17th centuries. This represented about 1% of the existing population of England spread over 50 years. About 300,000 Jews immigrated to Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries also over a timescale of about 50 years. Again this was less than 1% of the UK's population... New Commonwealth immigration began in the 1950s. In the 1960s acceptances for settlement were at the rate of 70-75,000 a year. Racial tension led to successively tighter restrictions on immigration. By 1971 it was believed that primary immigration had been brought to an end. However, in practice, there was only a modest reduction in Commonwealth immigration. The average number of New Commonwealth acceptances for settlement in the 1970s was 72,000 per year, in the 1980s and early 1990s it was about 54,000 per year. Since 1996 the overall settlement figure has nearly trebled from 61,000 to 179,000 in 2005. The total since 1963 is nearly 2.5 million (some of whom, of course, will no longer be living in Britain). The ethnic minority population (largely New Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants) accounted for 4 million (7%) of the population of England and Wales in 2001. (See also [Briefing Paper 6.1](#)). In the 2 years after the 2001 census the number of people of Asian, Black or Chinese ethnicity in England increased by 370,000. 283,000 of this increase was attributable to international migration.[1]

Work Permits

3 The work permit system, established in 1920, is employer-driven. It enables employers to bring in skilled labour for up to 4 years (now 5) provided that they can show that there is no suitable worker from the European Economic Area (EEA) (this requirement is waived for so-called shortage occupations). From 1974-94 approximately 15-30,000 work permits were issued each year. The number issued rose sharply in the late 90s. 156,000 new work permits and first permissions were issued in 2004 [2]. The number of permits issued fell slightly in 2005 to 137,000. [3] These workers will be able to bring their families and, on past form, most will be accepted for settlement after 4-5 years if they so wish. This massive expansion of the work permit scheme therefore represents a major new avenue of immigration. It is not at all clear that the government attempts any serious check of applicants' credentials. Their target is to decide 90% of completed applications within one day of receipt. The argument, apparently, is that providing legal routes of entry will reduce illegal immigration. However, the countries that produce asylum seekers are not those which produce applicants for work permits (see [Briefing Paper 3.1](#)). The more likely result will be to increase the already very strong pressures by giving the impression that we are a country of immigration.

Family settlement.

What is happening to the numbers?

4 Those settled in the UK (and those granted asylum) have the right to bring their dependant spouses and

children to the UK. Under certain circumstances their parents and grandparents can also join them.

5 In 1976, when there was a major debate in parliament, it was claimed that the "pool" of dependants from the Indian sub-continent would be largely exhausted by the end of that parliament. Indeed, a former Minister of Immigration (Mr Alex Lyon) claimed that the total was about 100,000 [4]. In fact, from 1976 to 1999 there were 375,000 applications for entry clearance from the Indian sub-continent, 317,000 of which were as wives (fiancées) or children. In 2003 the worldwide total for family settlement in the UK was 65,000 (90,000 if accompanying dependants of work permit holders and refugees are included) [5]. In 2004 and 2005 the number accepted for family settlement reduced to 33,000 and 37,000 respectively but this fall was due to a technical change whereby the qualifying period for settlement for spouses has been extended from 1 to 2 years.

What is government policy?

6. In June 1997 the government abolished the "primary purpose" rule. This had required applicants to satisfy the Entry Control Officer that it was not the primary purpose of an intended marriage to obtain admission to the UK. Other requirements remain but they are difficult to enforce. One effect of the change is that marriage, even if it is an arranged marriage, to someone settled in the UK can be used as a means of immigration. It also, of course, establishes a continuous source of new migration.

Students

7. Excluding students from the 10 countries which acceded to the EU in 2004, 284,000 students were admitted to the UK in 2005 - a similar level to 2004 and efforts are being made to attract larger numbers of foreign students for higher and further education. Extensions were 128,000 in 2005. Rules were tightened following evidence that a high proportion of the extensions were for sham courses and that a proportion of students stay on illegally [See Migration Watch [Briefing Paper 2.2](#)].

Asylum seekers

What is happening to the numbers?

8. The number of applications nearly trebled from 30,000 in 1996 to 84,000 in 2002 [6]. The numbers fell to under 26,000 in 2005 and are running at a similar level in 2006. All figures exclude dependants. If they are added the 2002 total would have been 103,000 falling to 30,000 in 2005 [7]. The likely outcome in 2006 is 29,000. The final figure will be higher since those granted asylum can subsequently bring in non-accompanying dependants. In due course, their children can bring in spouses so new and continuing sources of immigration are being generated. Despite the fall in applications the United Kingdom still received more asylum applications in the first 9 months of 2006 than any other European country apart from France [8].

What about those who are refused?

9. Since 1997, up to the end of Q3 2006, 540,000 asylum applications have been heard of which 62% have been refused asylum and humanitarian protection/discretionary leave but only about a quarter of those refused are believed to have left the country [9]. The number of removals was about 1,000 a month on average in 2003 and has remained at about that level since then. In September 2004 the Government set a target of removing as many failed applicants as the number of new applicants entering the system who would be expected to have their claims rejected [10]. This target was for December 2005 but it was not met until 2006 when removals in the first 2 quarters of the year exceeded the target. However, in Q3 removals slowed significantly and the target was missed. Even if the target were met it would mean that no inroads were being made into the reducing the backlog of failed asylum seekers who number about 240,000 plus dependants [11].

What is the cost?

10. The cost of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office, the Department responsible for asylum seekers was 1.89 billion in 2003-04 and reduced to £1.5 billion in 2005-6. It is expected to stay at about this level in 2006-7 and 2007-8 [12]. The cost of legal aid, 204m in 2003/4 [13] is additional - as is the cost of the courts, for which the government have given no estimate.

What about dispersal?

11. An Audit Commission report of June 2000 estimated that at least 85% of asylum seekers live in London. Government efforts at dispersal have had limited success. By the end of 2005 there were 35,000 (including dependants) in dispersed accommodation and 16,000 outside it [14].

For the legal position and other more detailed information about asylum - see Annex

Illegal Immigrants

12. After years of claiming that it was impossible to estimate the number of illegal immigrants in the UK the Home

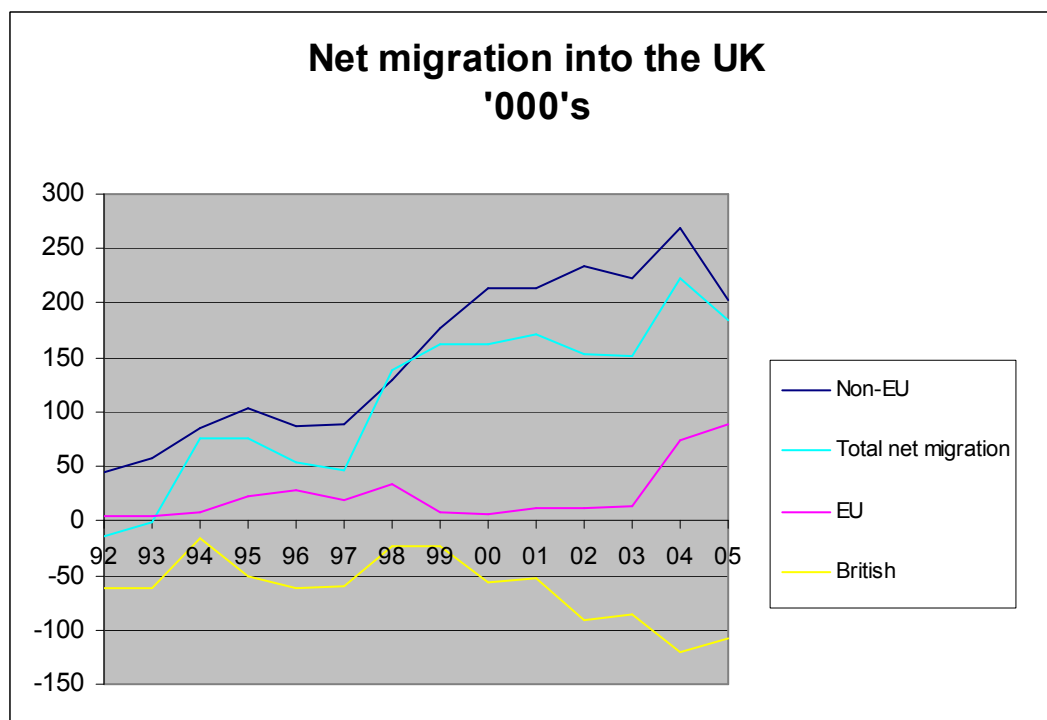
Office finally produced an estimate in June 2005 [15]. This compared the number of foreign citizens subject to immigration control who were recorded in the 2001 UK census with the number of foreign citizens who had outstanding permissions to be in the UK in 2001. The difference was the best available estimate of the illegal population. This methodology gave an estimate of between 310,000 and 570,000 illegal immigrants in 2001, with a central estimate of 430,000.

13. The methodology treated asylum claimants whose claims or appeals were outstanding as being in the UK legally. Since 2001 the very high backlog of asylum claims and appeals has been significantly reduced with the effect of creating many more asylum claimants whose claims have been finalised and rejected.

14. Migration Watch updated the Home Office figures to allow for this factor and this gave a range of 515,000 to 870,000 with a mid-point figure of 670,000. However, other factors point to the number being towards the top of this range (see Migration Watch [Briefing Paper 9.15](#))

Total net migration

15. Net migration reached a record high of 222,000 in 2004 before falling slightly to 185,000 in 2005. During the 60's and 70's emigration generally exceeded immigration and in the 80's and early 90's net immigration was generally below 50,000 people a year. Such very high migration into Britain is therefore a new phenomenon. Net non-EU migration to the UK has been rapidly increasing from 44,000 in 1992. In 2004 it reached a new record high level of 268,000. In 2005 it fell to 203,000 reflecting the fact that ten new countries had acceded to the EU in May 2004. There has been a steady net outflow of British citizens during this period - reaching a record high of 120,000 in 2004 before falling slightly to 107,000 in 2005. Net flows of EU citizens into the UK have been modest until recently. The maximum net inflow of citizens of the 15 continental European countries which were EU members before May 2004, in the period 1995 –2004, was 24,000 in 1998 and the maximum net outflow was 35,000 in 2002. This changed with the accession of the 10 countries to the EU in May 2004. The international migration statistics show that a net 49,000 and 65,000 people migrated from the accession countries in 2004 and 2005 respectively bringing total net migration from the EU up to 74,000 and 89,000 in these years. However, net migration from the accession countries only accounts for about 1 in 5 of net foreign immigration in total. [16]. The following graph shows the trends.



The net migration total includes family settlement, students and workers here for more than a year, some of the asylum seekers and others who extend their stay. [Briefing Paper 9.1](#) and [Briefing Paper 9.2](#) explain this further.

Economic Considerations

16. It is argued in favour of immigration that it relieves labour shortages and reduces inflation. Inflation will only be reduced to the extent that the growth of wages is depressed. Furthermore, labour shortages are being addressed by means of a massive increase in work permits which are valid for 5 years. Some make a case for the importation of labour to perform low quality work which is unpopular with the indigenous population but this risks creating an under-class; it does not amount to a case for large scale inward migration.

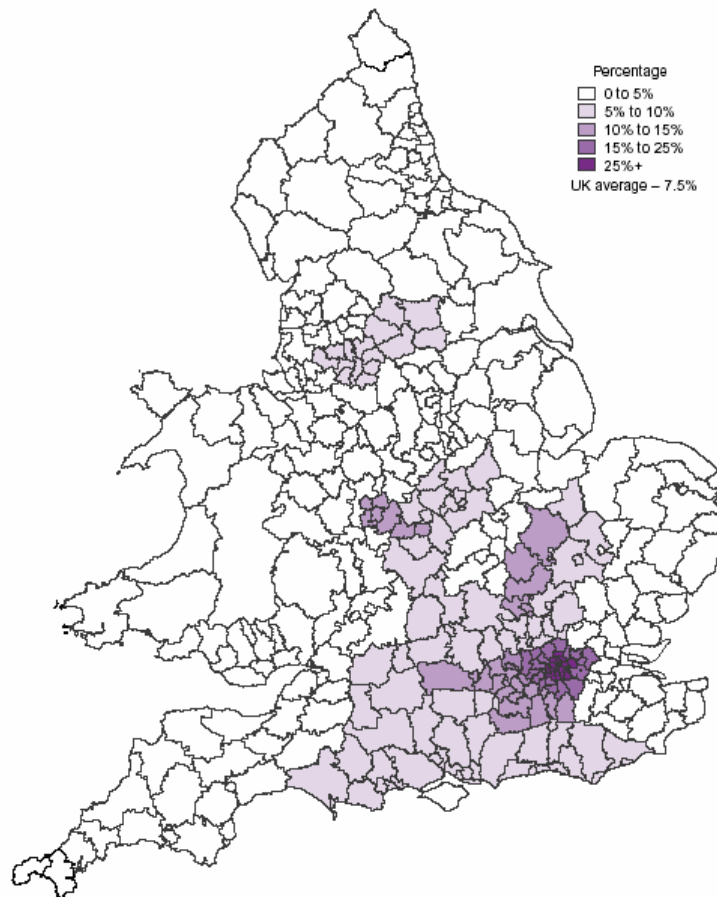
17. It is also suggested that immigration tends to promote economic growth. Many of the immigrants will be able and anxious to contribute to the economy but the social costs of housing, health and education must also be taken into account. A Home Office research paper describes the evidence for immigration promoting economic growth as "far from definitive". [17]

18. Another consideration is the "Support Ratio" - the proportion of the population of working age. It would require over 1 million immigrants per year up to 2050 to keep the present ratio of workers to pensioners; the population would double to 120 million. This is clearly not feasible. An older population is an inevitable and permanent consequence of fewer babies and longer lives. But there is no demographic crisis in the UK. The birth rate at 1.80 is not far below the replacement level of 2.1. However, this estimate understates family size because motherhood is being delayed. (By comparison, the birth rate in Germany is 1.3 and in Italy is 1.2). The over 65s will increase from 16% to about 25% in the future but this can be managed by encouraging workforce participation and by removing obstacles and disincentives to a longer working life as the population becomes healthier [18]. In the longer run, it would help if it were made easier for women to have the number of children they consistently say they want to have (around 2). It is significant that the Turner Commission on pensions, reporting in November 2005, made no mention of immigration. This may be because they dismissed the argument in their interim report.

19. [Briefing Paper 1.1](#) assesses the main economic considerations and [Briefing Paper 1.14](#) explains why the government have had to back off most of the economic arguments they have put forward to justify their immigration policy.

20. In the 1990s, immigration became the most important component of population growth (accounting for 83%) and one of the most important components of the projected future growth of households and hence for the new building programme. Over half of migrants live in London and the South East and more than 75% of new migrants are settling there. According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 65,000 households will be formed each year as a result of immigration. This is nearly one in three of the total 209,000 new households that are now projected [19]. See also [Briefing paper 7.6](#). Annex B, taken from the Home Office research paper shows the distribution of migrants in England and Wales as a share of the population.

Migrants as a share of the population



21. Ethnic minorities now make up 29% of London's population. This is projected to rise to 31% by 2011. Children in London schools speak more than 300 languages [20].

Conclusions

22. Although net inward foreign migration fell slightly in 2005 from its peak of 340,000 in 2004 to 292,000 in 2005 it is still nearly treble the level of 1997 (106,000). Significant components - work-related migration and family settlement - are likely to continue at or around present levels. Indeed, under present policies, they will continue at high levels indefinitely. Illegal immigration is additional.

23. The economic case for such massive flows of immigrants is weak. Immigrants add to production but they also add to our population and to overcrowding (especially in the South and East of England). All major studies have shown that the benefit to the host population is of the order of 0.1 % of GDP per head per year. In the UK that would be about £25 per year. A recent analysis by Migration watch shows that the benefit may well be even less than this (see Briefing Paper 1.15). Any benefit has to be balanced against the problems of integration and the social consequences, for example for housing, which are considerable. Congestion in the cities, particularly in London, will increase; greater demand for new housing in the South outside London is already apparent.

24. A recession would have some temporary impact on the inward flow but a fundamental change in policy would be necessary to achieve a permanent impact. We need to find a balance between the limited economic benefits of immigration and the serious practical consequences for our society and its future that stem from migration on its present scale. Migration Watch UK will be conducting further research on key aspects of this problem.

ANNEX

More detailed information about the asylum system

What is the legal position?

1. The United Kingdom and other countries which are Contracting States to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol undertake to grant asylum to claimants who can show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution. The obligation is expressed in Article 33 of the Convention as an obligation not to "expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." An asylum applicant will normally be claiming a fear of persecution on one or other of these grounds if he returned to his country of origin.

2. Anyone can claim asylum on or after arrival in the United Kingdom and he may not be removed to the country of origin until his claim has been rejected by the Home Office and he has exhausted any right of appeal against that rejection which he may choose to exercise. The majority of asylum applications are rejected and most appeals against rejection are dismissed, in each case because the applicant fails to establish to a reasonable degree of likelihood that if he is returned to his country of origin he will face persecution for one or other of the reasons listed in the previous paragraph. On average in the period 1997 to Q3 1996 about 63% of claimants were eventually refused permission to stay. Of the remaining 37% about two-thirds were granted asylum and the rest were granted exceptional leave – that is their asylum claims were not accepted but the government gave them permission to stay temporarily because, for instance, of the general situation in their home country. Most asylum seekers are in fact economic migrants and their claims and appeals are frequently rejected because on investigation the evidence given in support of their claims/appeals is shown not to be believable. Each case must be considered substantively so even apparently undeserving cases cannot be filtered out, although some are now "fast tracked". Meanwhile, the claimant is entitled to free accommodation, health care, children's education, a cash allowance and free legal aid.

3. By Article 1F of the 1951 Convention its protection is denied to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that he has committed a serious non-political crime in a country other than the host country or if he has been convicted of a particularly serious crime and hence constitutes a danger to the community of that country.

4. In October 2000 the Human Rights Act 1998 was brought into force, making the European Human Rights Convention justiciable in the courts of the United Kingdom. Rights under the Convention are now regularly relied on by asylum seekers in addition to their rights under the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol. Asylum seekers will now contend that if they are returned to their countries of origin they will be at risk of having their human rights infringed in those countries as well as being persecuted there. The main Articles of the Convention which are commonly invoked are 2, right to life, 3, right not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 6, right to a fair trial and 8, right to respect for private and family life. In practice the asylum and human rights claims are now considered together and usually stand or fall together.

5. The case of the Afghan hijack illustrates the difficulties. On 7 Feb 2000 an Afghan plane was hijacked on an internal flight and eventually landed at Stansted with 170 people on board of whom at least half claimed asylum. On 10 Feb the Home Secretary told Parliament that "Subject to compliance with all legal requirements, I would wish to see removed from this country all those on the plane as soon as reasonably practical" [21]. Two years later 89 were still in the country, 36 applications were still undecided, 35 had been refused but were still appealing and 18 had been granted refugee status [22].

What is the Government doing?

6. The legal costs are running into hundreds of millions. In efforts to tighten up the laws governing asylum Parliament has passed substantial Acts in 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2004. Each of these Acts substantially amends its predecessors as well as the earlier Immigration Acts of 1971 and 1988. A summary of the 2004 Act is to be found at [Briefing Paper 8.4](#). An outline of the immigration appeal system is at [Briefing Paper 8.2](#) and a summary of the 2006 Act is at [Briefing Paper 8.8](#).

What is the outlook?

7. Asylum seekers are attracted to Britain by:

- . the English language;
- . the presence of relatives or compatriots;
- . the relative ease of entering and remaining in the UK;
- . ease of claiming compared to many other EU Countries -such as Germany or France;
- . the absence of internal controls on their movements;
- . welfare support and health care that may compare favourably with conditions at home;
- . and by the likelihood that they can merge into the community and find illegal employment even if their application is refused

Unless substantial changes are made in the legal framework or in the machinery for detection and removal, a continued high rate of applications is to be expected. Their children will later be able to bring in a spouse from their native countries - thus, under present legislation, the process becomes continuous.

What are the top source countries of asylum seekers

8. The top ten countries of origin in the 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2006 were Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iran, China, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Sudan [23]. They have a combined population of nearly 2 billion. All these countries have substantial minorities that would qualify for asylum. The risks that some take to get here is an indication of the attractiveness of Britain as a destination especially compared to conditions in their countries of origin.

How do we compare with Europe?

9. Britain topped the list in 2000, 2001 and 2002 with 98,000, 91,000 and 103,000 applications respectively. In 2003 Britain had 60,000 applications, just behind France which had 62,000. France has remained the most popular destination for asylum claimants in 2004, 2005 and in the first 9 months of 2006 with Britain remaining in second place during each of these periods. In the period 1998 – Q3 2006 596,000 asylum claims were lodged in the UK - 21% of the total for the EU-15 as a whole. The UK's share of the EU-15 population is just 16%. With the large reductions in asylum claims in the last 2 years the UK's share of asylum claims in the EU-15 has now reduced to 17% in the first 3 quarters of 2006 more in line with its population share [24]. In the year 2000 France granted 15% of asylum applications [25]. In Germany less than 3% were granted asylum [26]. In Britain, the average for 1997- Q3, 2006, including Exceptional Leave to Remain, was 37% [27] but, as noted above, over 80% are believed to stay on anyway.

Revised 10 January 2007

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