

Report: Zero-Sum Game of Economic Migration in Europe

One day conference at Oxford Brookes, 1.7.2016

This was a multi-disciplinary event with a strong focus on economic migration rather than any other form of movement across borders. Only the material and presenters most likely to be of general interest in Oxfordshire are mentioned in this report.

Dr Sonia Morano-Foadi noted that the Government continues to emphasise a 'migrant crisis' and seeks to reduce inward migration. Freedom of movement of people between the UK and EU is now a major political issue due to the LEAVE vote. There is no clarity yet about existing status of EU citizens here or future arrangements. It is clear that there are divisions within the Conservative Party about this. It should also be mentioned that 73% of MPs are regarded as supporters of Remain. The *Open Europe* think tank has provided a new report indicating that, after Brexit, it is unlikely that migration will reduce either for low or high skilled groups coming into the UK.

[*Open Europe* says:

"Immigration

While there would be political pressure to reduce immigration following Brexit, there are several reasons why we believe headline net immigration is unlikely to reduce much:

- The business case for maintaining a flexible supply of labour. The evidence suggests that, with a record high employment rate, the UK's labour market is already tightening;
- the political and economic challenge of finding policy alternatives to relieve pressure on the public finances caused by ageing demographics, where immigration can help smoothen the path to fiscal sustainability;
- the effects of globalisation on migration flows, which the UK is not alone in experiencing;
- and the likelihood of some constraints on UK immigration policy under a new arrangement with the EU.....

.....there is likely to be a trade-off between the depth of any new economic agreement with the EU and the extent to which the UK will have to accept EU free movement. The evidence from the precedents of Norway and Switzerland suggest that the deeper the agreement, the more likely the UK will need to accept free movement. This might mean building in preferential treatment for EU citizens in the UK's new points system, which would give EU nationals priority over non-EU nationals, or it could create a separate temporary migration scheme for migrants from the EU."

<http://openeurope.org.uk/intelligence/britain-and-the-eu/guide-to-brexite/>]

Professor Achilles Skorda noted that the European Commission believes that highly-skilled non-EU migrants are only entering the EU at a rate of one third of what the Commission believes is necessary. [I assume this related to continued ageing of EU labour forces and cuts impacting delivery of skills in the EU education sectors.]

Dr Carlos Vargas-Villas emphasised how who is being counted in UK migration figures has the effect of radically inflating net migration figures. The UK is counting the re-entry of UK citizens who have been working abroad as part of immigration figures. Others counted include EU citizens and the nationals of the current European Economic Area states and students. Restrictions on low skill entry explain severe skills shortages eg for carers. [It was suggested to me some time ago that at one point the adverts for carer jobs in Oxfordshire alone had reached

700 with serious labour shortages being a problem for the sector]. Long-term plans of employers studied in 2011 suggest more recruitment from EU/EEA for employment in future years. So restricting these entrants would mean, for example, radical reduction in EU-origin construction workers despite current shortages of skills. He believes employers will want minimum restraints on construction worker entry to the UK or face continuing rises in payment to construction workers on grounds of scarcity, with no guarantee building projects will start on time due to existing, never mind future, skills shortages.

Dr Brigitte Clark noted the continuing problem of family division due to income insufficiency under current rules. Since 2012, 15,000 children have been separated from one or more parents due to this restriction. Rules disputes continue through the courts and will be unaffected by Brexit. Courts are attempting to rely on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect the interests of children. Spouses/partners must earn over £18,600 p.a. which is to rise to £22k. Half of UK households do not have an income above £22k. The UK income requirement is the 2nd highest in the world with only Norway being higher. But Norway has roughly 160% more income on average than the UK, per person. France, for example, has no income restriction. The UK opted out of the Family Reunification Directive of the EU [interesting that it could do this]. She was asked if she thought the effect of Brexit combined with even higher income requirements would mean that families who would have brought their skills to the UK would tend to stay away, damaging the already-compromised UK skills base. She thought yes, although the existing £18,600 income requirement is heading for the UK Supreme Court for a challenge.

Lucia Brieskova explained the little-discussed issue of intra-corporate transfers of employees within the EU/EEA where those moved may well be forced to do so, even if employment rights where they are going are less than those in their country of current residence. This area of employment rights is not regulated, so companies may do as they wish.

Dr Clara Della Croce spoke on immigration detention in the UK. The UK is the biggest detainer of people in the EU and the only one to practice indefinite detention. From a 1994 figure of 250 detention places the UK has raised this to 30,000. Most of the people detained have not committed a crime, only been guilty of an administrative failure in relation to their status/right to be here in the UK. The 10 detention centres are over-crowded and access to justice is limited. Our local detention centre at Campsfield has people detained with up to 6 in a room. Perhaps most disturbing, 49% of people detained in this fashion are eventually released without charge. There are serious mental health problems associated with detention. Cuts in legal aid mean access to justice is 30 mins with a solicitor. Offences committed outside the UK count against those detained, not just offences committed here in the UK. Such offences, if custodial, are added up to make a figure of 12 months or more to justify long-term removal once legal means of resisting are exhausted.

Dr Maria Faraone focussed on the social implications of current demographic trends in Europe. The UK has one of the lowest levels of unemployment in the industrialised world at present [meaning it has a higher consequential demand for labour from abroad than many other countries since many of those unemployed here do not have desired skills or have other conditions/factors impeding their employment such as alcoholism/drug addiction/mental health problems and criminal records. We also have an ageing population despite the higher than average birth rates within some ethnic groups resident in the UK.]. Within the EU, 12 countries have ageing populations and will continue to shrink in population size unless there are fundamental changes. [these are mainly Eastern European states, and include ones with Governments more hostile to immigration than the UK, as the failure to secure full EU cooperation over larger migrant movements has demonstrated] We fail to have much general knowledge about migration: 85% of migration is south-south, not to rich northern states. She noted that there had been a Joint NGO statement for the European Council 28-29 June 2016

condemning existing assimilationist policies in EU states directed towards immigrants [which can be seen at: [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/8069/Final Joint statement 110 signatories.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/8069/Final_Joint_statement_110_signatories.pdf)] She noted that these proposals are actually contradictory and do not effectively address uneven burden sharing eg with the needs of those states having the largest inward migrant flows.

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