



Future Immigration Patterns and Policies in the United Kingdom

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I. Executive Summary

In the past decade, the size and characteristics of immigration to the United Kingdom have changed significantly. Immigrants are more numerous, more mobile, and more diverse than ever before. The experience of immigration is different: immigrants are coming from a broader array of countries, staying for shorter periods of time, enjoying significant engagement with communities outside of the United Kingdom, and are no longer settling solely in cities.

In parallel, UK immigration policy has undergone radical changes. Public opinion (which leans toward restricting immigration) and other forces have prompted policymakers to focus their efforts on combating illegality and on flows of asylum seekers. At the same time, economic pressures have dictated the need to hone selection systems so the country can attract desirable economic immigrants.

Despite the current recession, immigration to the United Kingdom is expected to remain at approximately 150,000 net immigrants per year. To successfully manage these flows in a way that benefits both the economy and the migrants themselves, this paper identifies three main challenges facing politicians: improving public trust, promoting immigrant integration, and establishing good governance practices (especially with regard to illegality).

This paper begins with an analysis of the changed environment and context of immigration to the United Kingdom before outlining some of the strategies policymakers should focus on to address the three challenges. Among those strategies:

- *Improve public confidence* by communicating directly and openly with the public about migration policies; making government strategies more transparent; ensuring accurate evidence exists as a basis for good policy; and soliciting support from immigrant communities themselves.
- *Invest in immigrant integration* as part of a broad, long-term approach that targets both immigrants and nonimmigrants and recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the United Kingdom's immigrant communities.
- *Strengthen good governance and legality* by building flexibility, independence, and accountability into policy levers used to stabilize migration; encouraging legal migrants to belong; and offering unauthorized immigrants a path to legality (with fines and community service).

II. Introduction: UK Migration Patterns

Immigration is among the top three political and policy issues in the United Kingdom. Four-fifths of the population would like to see immigration reduced, and the majority of the public does not have confidence in the government's ability to manage migration. As Ben Page documents extensively, the British public resents current immigration levels and shows particular antipathy toward asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.¹

The level of resentment is increasing, a trend correlated with greater numbers of immigrants and media coverage. However, public attitudes differ by gender, race, geography, wealth, education,

¹ Ben Page, "British Attitudes to Immigration in the 21st Century" (working paper, Transatlantic Council on Migration, Bellagio, Italy, May 4-9, 2009).

values, and other variables. For example, minority groups are less likely to be concerned about “cultural” issues but more concerned about economic competition. The overall, broad-brush picture is thus one of hostility toward immigrants, with the public generally convinced that there are too many migrants and the country is in an “immigration mess,” while the fine-grain picture is rather more complicated.

The causes of such attitudes and the lack of public confidence in the government’s immigration policy are complex, but they begin with the extraordinary change in migration patterns to the United Kingdom over the last 15 years. Britain has experienced immigration throughout its history. The most visible waves of immigration came after World War II from colonies and former colonies in the Caribbean and South Asia. There were also some significant refugee movements (e.g., from Hungary in 1956 and East Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s), as well as ongoing and large flows from Ireland. Recent immigration is nevertheless quantitatively and qualitatively different.

The United Kingdom had about 6.6 million immigrants in 2008 (about 11 percent of the total population) — defined as individuals born abroad, or the foreign-born — and 4.2 million foreign citizens (a lower figure primarily because of naturalizations).² In all, 2.2 million non-British nationals have been added to the population in the last decade, between 3 and 4 percent of the total UK population. Because of a high rate of emigration of British nationals (for instance to Spain and Australia), the net flow over the last ten years totals 1.6 million (see Table 1).

Table 1. Migration to and from the United Kingdom, 1997 to 2006

	British	Non-British	Total
Gross immigration	902,000	3,668,000	4,570,000
Gross emigration	1,521,000	1,450,000	2,970,000
Net immigration	-619,000	+2,217,000	+1,599,000

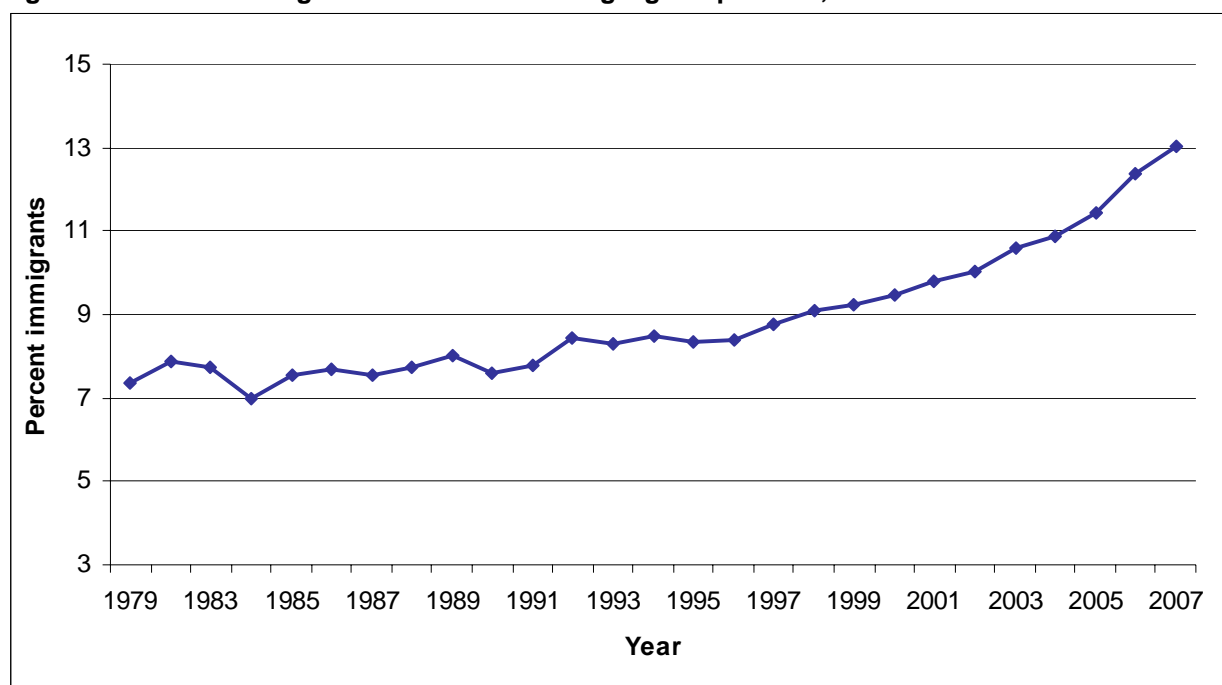
Note: Numbers may not round; minus sign refers to net outflow and plus sign refers to net inflow.
Source: UK Office for National Statistics, Total International Migration Statistics, 1997 to 2006.

The volume of immigration has significantly affected the labor market. Together, foreign-born workers from different entry categories make up 12.1 percent of the UK labor force, up from 7 to 8 percent a couple of decades ago (see Figure 1). This proportion is high by historical British standards but below that of other developed countries, such as Australia, the United States, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. During this period, immigrants have become an increasingly important source of labor in certain sectors. For example, foreign-born workers are thought to make up over 80 percent of the seasonal agricultural workforce during peak months.³

² John Salt, “International Migration and the United Kingdom” (Report of the United Kingdom SOPEMI Correspondent to the OECD, 2008), http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/mobility-identity-and-security/migration-research-unit/pdfs/Sop08_fin.pdf.

³ Sam Scott, “Staff Shortages and Immigration in Agriculture” (paper prepared for the Migration Advisory Committee, September 2008), <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/workingwithus/mac/scott2008>.

Figure 1. Share of Immigrants in the UK Working-Age Population, 1979 to 2007



Source: UK Office for National Statistics, Labor Force Survey, 1979 to 2007.

Patterns and Characteristics

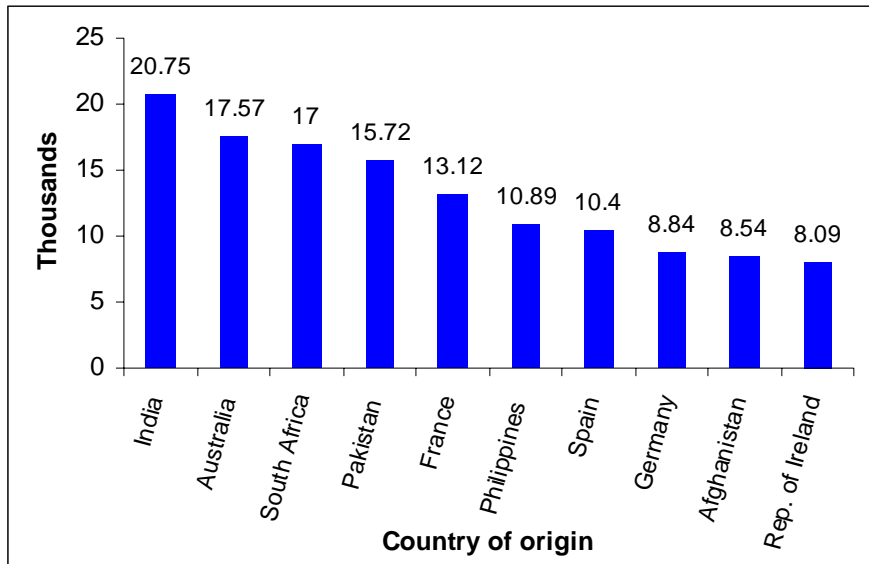
The increased volume of immigration is a powerful headline finding but one that can crowd out other major changes from the analytical picture. Among the most important changes is that immigrants are coming from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

People are arriving from a greater constellation of countries than they did in the past. The most dramatic change stems from the United Kingdom's decision to grant labor-market access to nationals from the eight Eastern European countries that joined the European Union in 2004.⁴ Polish citizens now make up *the* largest foreign-national population, up from 13th largest in less than four years, and account for 12 percent of all foreign nationals in the United Kingdom. Figures 2 and 3 show the top ten source countries for immigrants receiving National Insurance numbers (equivalent to US Social Security numbers) in 2002 and in 2007-2008 — a rough indication of the number of immigrants working for the first time at both those points in time. While India, Australia, and Western European countries are longstanding source countries for labor migrants, the Eastern European source countries shown (Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Romania) are newcomers to the top ten, with the numbers of new Polish entrants to the labor market in 2007-2008 some ten times higher than the leading entrants, Indian nationals, in 2002.⁵

⁴ The eight Eastern European countries that joined the European Union on May 1, 2004, referred to as the A8, are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

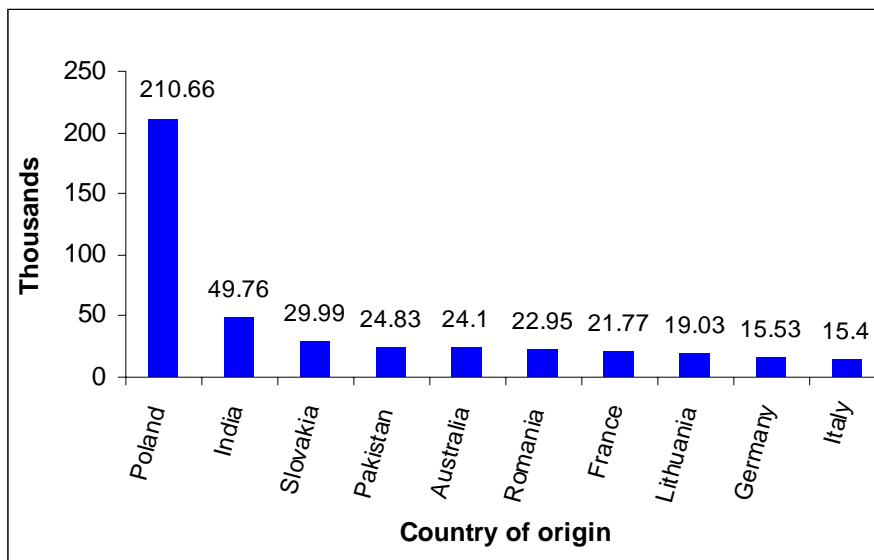
⁵ Will Somerville and Madeleine Sumption, *Immigration in the UK: the Recession and Beyond* (London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009).

Figure 2. Top Ten Source Countries for Immigrants Receiving National Insurance Numbers, 2002



Source: UK Department for Work and Pensions.

Figure 3. Top Ten Source Countries for Immigrants Receiving National Insurance Numbers, 2007-2008



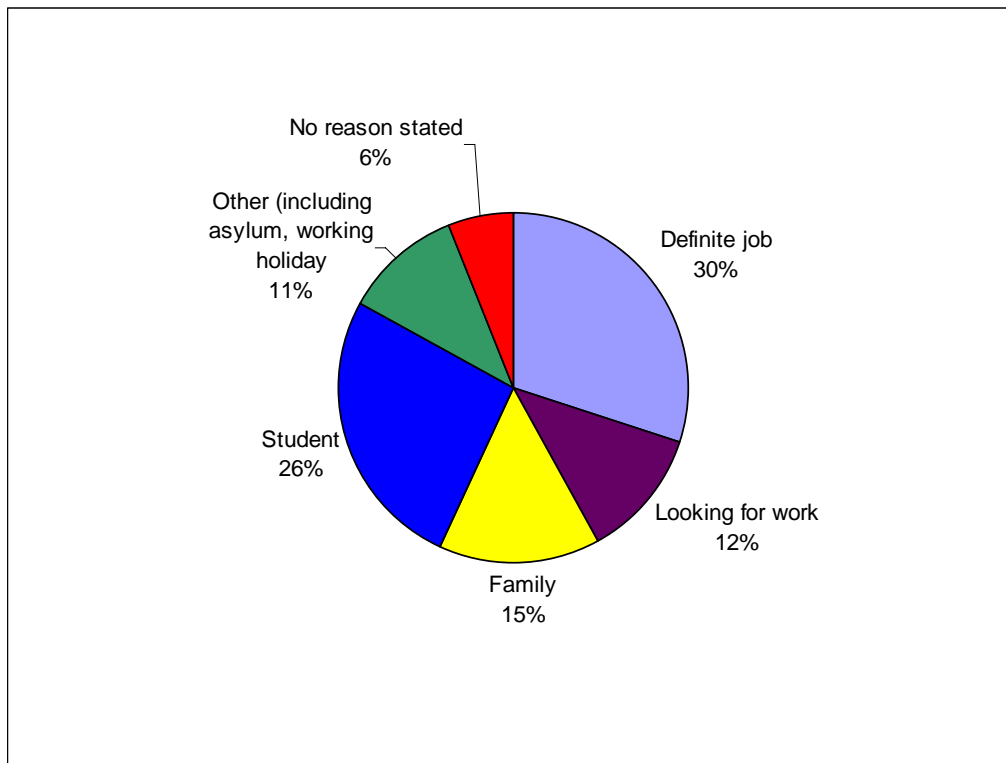
Source: UK Department for Work and Pensions.

Eastern Europeans have come to the United Kingdom mainly to work. But other pathways have contributed to the diversity of UK immigrant communities. Examples abound. The growth in the Nigerian community since the early 1990s resulted from the growth in work permit holders and international students (many who worked or whose families worked); the Bangladeshi community

from family reunification; and the Somali community almost entirely from the humanitarian pathway.⁶

Overall, the single most important motivation for migration to the United Kingdom remains work, with 42 percent of all immigrants arriving in 2007 citing this as the key reason; the majority of this group arriving to take up prearranged jobs (see Figure 4). However, a breakdown by nationality reveals important details: two-thirds of citizens from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries come for work compared to just under one-fifth of non-OECD migrants. For non-OECD immigrants, study and family reunification are more important motivations.⁷

Figure 4. Reasons Immigrants Gave for Migrating to the United Kingdom, 2007



Source: UK Office for National Statistics.

The variety of origins and motivations within immigration flows, coupled with the high emigration rates of British nationals, means more people in absolute numbers arriving from greater cultural distances at a time when the country’s increasingly service-based economy punishes those who lack English-language skills and recognized qualifications. The diversity of the immigration experience is thus crucial to policy analysis and carries within it some important challenges.

Beyond greater numbers from a larger number of countries, three other characteristics of recent immigration are also important. Immigrants are increasingly connected to communities beyond UK borders. One indicator is the increasing level of international travel. In 2008, over 33 million

⁶ Jill Rutter, Lawrence Cooley, Naomi Jones, and Rachel Pillai, *Moving Up Together: Promoting equality and integration among the UK’s diverse communities* (London: ippr, 2008).

⁷ Salt, “International Migration and the United Kingdom.”

overseas visitors came to the United Kingdom for less than six months, up 45 percent since 1990; around a third of those visitors came to see families and friends.⁸ Perhaps more importantly, the revolution in global communications means that immigrants can instantly connect through the Internet and make cheap international calls. Such interconnectedness has helped globalize ambition: many highly skilled now see their career aspirations on a worldwide scale, not a local one; and for the lesser skilled, particular those with legal migration opportunities, a period of work abroad has become attractive.⁹

Second, immigrants are staying in the United Kingdom for shorter periods of time, which has consequences for the communities where they live. More than 40 percent of all immigrants to Britain now move on again, either returning home or moving to another country, within just five years. Professionals in particular are likely to be country-hopping for a few years at a time.¹⁰ One of the negative consequences of this faster global movement is a sense of disconnect (or churn) at the local level, as communities of newcomers and long-time residents lack the time to develop support networks that characterize fully functioning communities.

Finally, UK immigration is no longer a solely urban phenomenon. Eastern European migration in particular has broken through the cordon of London and the major urban areas, a result of its volume and the needs of the labor market over the last decade. Such immigration has been felt in rural areas but also in cities that used to house the majority of immigrants (who were typically Irish). Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool have seen sizeable immigration for the first time in two generations. Government policy has also had a hand in such dispersal: since 2001, the government has relocated over 100,000 asylum seekers to cities and towns outside of London.¹¹

These forces and patterns have together produced a society-changing phenomenon. Migration, in a nutshell, is bigger, bumpier, more unpredictable, more shuttling and short term, and more diverse than the United Kingdom has experienced before, with ramifications across society.

III. How Have Politicians Responded?

Politicians have recognized — perhaps belatedly — the scale of public concern and have taken action, passing more legislation on immigration than on any other area of social policy over the last decade.¹² As a result, British immigration policy has changed radically.

⁸ Computed from tables in Office for National Statistics, *Travel Trends 2007* (Newport, South Wales: ONS, 2009), http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_transport/Travel_Trends_2007.pdf.

⁹ It is easy to overstate the extent of change and in doing so one can miss previous movements, such as the significant immigration of Irish nationals, who have long found work in the United Kingdom. This is a welcome caution, but it should temper, not change, our perspective: we are living through an expansive phase of global movement.

¹⁰ This is particularly clear from research on medical professionals. For example, in Australia, 66 percent of doctors have made five major geographical moves (internationally or within states) in their careers. See Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Bob Birrell, and Doris Young, *Factors Influencing the Retention of Overseas Trained General Practitioners in Regional Victoria* (Melbourne: Rural Workforce Agency Victoria, 2003); Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Graeme Hawthorne, and Brendan Crotty, *The Registration and Training Status of Overseas Trained Doctors in Australia* (Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing, 2007).

¹¹ Will Somerville, *Immigration under New Labour* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007).

¹² *Ibid.*

Prior to 1999, the country's immigration policy framework had been in place for more than a generation. The approach, created when the British Empire was being dismantled, was based on two pillars. The first pillar, *limitation*, comprised three laws — enacted in 1962, 1968, and 1971 — that together had the goal of restricting immigration. The 1971 Immigration Act, the capstone legislation that repealed all previous laws, made a strong statement: Britain was a country of “zero net immigration.” The second pillar, *integration*, involved a framework of race relations inspired by the US civil-rights movement. The most potent policy measures were anti-discrimination laws, in a limited form in the 1965 and 1968 Race Relations Acts and most comprehensively enacted in the 1976 Race Relations Act. The dominant postwar policy model was thus a bifurcated one, emphasizing both the integration of immigrants through a “race relations” approach and the restriction of immigration.

The Labour Party, in power since 1997, has discarded this template. Politicians have made a commitment to economic migration and, as a result, limiting or restricting immigration is no longer a prerequisite for UK policy. Among the most important new policies that enabled change were those aimed at high-skilled immigrants (such as the Highly Skilled Migrants Program, now incorporated in Tier 1 of the new Points-Based System or PBS¹³); the expansion and redesign of the work-permit system (now Tier 2 of PBS); and measures to attract international students (including two Prime Ministers' Initiatives).

While the government has opened up channels for students and certain workers, it has attempted to restrict particular streams, notably asylum, in response to increased application numbers in the last decade (which peaked in 2001-2002) and consequent public and media pressure to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers. The justification lies in the perception that many asylum seekers are economic migrants rather than people in legitimate need of protection. Successive pieces of legislation have sought to curb the number of asylum applications, speed up application processing, and more effectively deport failed asylum seekers. Reducing the quantity of asylum claims remains a key policy goal.

To reduce “undesirable flows,” the government also has instituted a set of measures to “extend” UK borders beyond the physical coastline. These include more restrictive visa regimes for some countries, such as transit visas (known as DATVs), biometric visas (where fingerprints are taken), and mandatory identity cards for foreign nationals living in the United Kingdom. In addition, the government has implemented major institutional reforms, probably the most important of which was the creation of a separate arms-length agency that has greater operational freedom and combines customs and immigration functions: the UK Border Agency.

The policy approach to integration has also pivoted away from a race relations and a “multicultural approach.”¹⁴ Instead, integration policy has become multilayered but generally more proactively

¹³ The Points-Based System (PBS) was introduced in stages beginning in 2008. It reforms all the economic and study routes into a five-tier structure. The five tiers have different conditions, entitlements, and entry checks. Tier 1 refers to highly skilled individuals; Tier 2 to skilled workers with a job offer; Tier 3 to low-skilled workers needed to fill temporary labor shortages (currently suspended); Tier 4 to students; and Tier 5 to youth mobility and temporary workers. There are a variety of sponsorship requirements for employers and educational institutes.

¹⁴ Multiculturalism is a contested term — described in different quarters as demographics, political ideology, a set of public policies, cultural expression, or new political struggles (Vertovec 2001). The UK multicultural model or multiculturalism policy in the United Kingdom (leaving aside the varied academic work on multiculturalism as a philosophy) has developed since the 1970s. The best, and certainly the most classic definition of a multicultural

concerned with national identity and social cohesion. For instance, those becoming British citizens must undergo a test (which includes a language component) and attend a ceremony in the communities where they live before being granted citizenship.

British politicians have been largely mute on the growing influence of the European Union. Europe affects UK policy through the common economic space, in which movement is free, and through its institutions, which have roles in governing immigration, for example in harmonizing certain rules on asylum applications. Europe is also important in developing freer movement and trading links with countries at Europe's borders. However, the UK government — in at least three coordinated exercises across departments over the last decade — has focused on rather different messages that emphasize sovereign control. The messages have essentially been variations on the themes of “control,” “strengthening borders,” “targeting illegality and criminality,” and “ensuring fairness,” often using exactly that terminology, backed up by a set of facts and statistics that imply progress toward achieving those goals.

In short, politicians have shown an overarching desire for greater control over migration flows while also “selectively opening” British borders to desirable flows. The core narrative remains one of control combined with a greater emphasis on national identity and fairness, and a vision of cohesive communities, with little room for other actors, whether they be European institutions, employers, or trade unions.

Recent indications from the Conservative Party suggest that the “selective opening” approach favored by Labour is a largely bipartisan model, though not explicitly so. Both parties worry about the public's lack of faith in the state's ability to control immigrant flows (the Conservative Party goes further and suggests a cap on non-EU flows), yet they rarely diverge on long-term strategic goals on integration or the need for immigration, at least publicly. Instead, the two parties question each other's ability to control flows and debate whether existing policies to properly manage immigration have been competently implemented.

IV. Horizon Scanning

Immigration has transformed the United Kingdom more than virtually any other developed country. And much like other processes of globalization and “openness,” it has deeply unsettled parts of the population while also unlocking longer-term cultural and economic dynamism. Indeed, the country is still coming to terms with immigration and its implications. Looking ahead, there are several factors (aside from political ones) that make a new approach to migration possible.

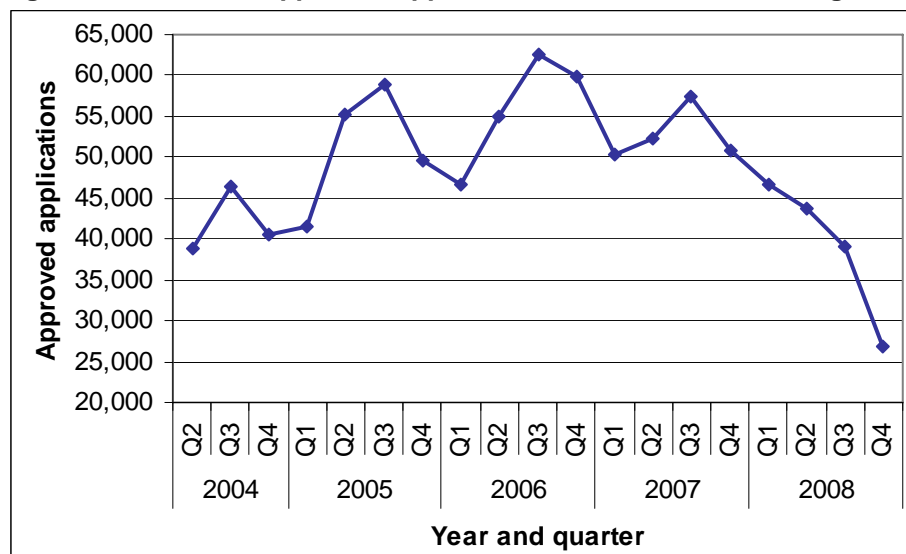
First, as the world continues to work through the recession, UK policymakers will be forced to think harder about immigration's impacts on UK society, not least if immigration is perceived as a force that may fracture social harmony. In the short term and in the midst of an unquantifiable economic downturn, some immigration patterns will be affected, as will immigrants and host communities.¹⁵

approach to integration, was coined by then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins as “not a flattening process of assimilation but equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.”

¹⁵ Immigrant flows are not synchronized neatly with the economy. See Somerville and Sumption, *Immigration in the United Kingdom*.

Our analysis indicates that inflows to the United Kingdom will contract but only in the short term. Most official and unofficial predictions suggest a drop of between 10 and 50 percent. In particular, immigration from Eastern Europe has likely peaked. Our analysis of data confirms that the number of approved applications for the Worker Registration Scheme (a reasonable proxy for Eastern European migration) in the fourth quarter of 2008 was the lowest since EU enlargement in May 2004, representing a drop of almost 50 percent from one year earlier (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Number of Approved Applications for the UK Worker Registration Scheme, 2004 to 2008



Source: UK Department for Work and Pensions, Worker Registration Scheme data, 2005 to 2008.

Nevertheless, while the recession may alter patterns, the evidence points to continuing, high net immigration for a generation or more. This deserves further analysis as it may seem counterintuitive at a time of economic downturn, yet several factors indicate that immigration flows will remain reasonably high. Our analysis indicates an approximate net flow of 150,000 arrivals per year.¹⁶

Among the factors on which that judgment is based:

- *Skill shortages.* The United Kingdom still needs to fill jobs at both the low and high ends of the continuum and continue to attract the most talented so the economy retains international clout.
- *Demographic pressures.* Immigration will not rejuvenate an aging population, but more people of working age will mitigate the impacts of demographic change.
- *Denser immigrant networks.* All evidence underlines that migration works in networks, with immigration begetting further immigration to some degree.

¹⁶ For an example prediction, see Communities and Local Government (CLG), “Projections of migration inflows under alternative scenarios for the UK and world economies” (Economics paper no. 3, March 2009). The number and importance of variables affecting immigrant flows, from exchange-rate pressures to conditions in source countries, make predictions uncertain. Other scenarios would significantly alter predictions. These include rampant illegal migration and high-profile terrorism. Perhaps the most likely scenario would be a more intense reaction against high levels of immigration combined with a protracted and deep depression that could unleash countervailing forces that in turn might lead to more pronounced border “closure.”

- *An enlarged Europe.* The 103 million people who became part of the European Union between 2004 and 2007 will have access to openings in the UK economy in the years to come.¹⁷

Second, much greater attention will likely be paid in the future to how immigrants are faring economically and socially. In the United Kingdom, unemployment is already higher among immigrants than among the UK born. In the third quarter of 2008, unemployment in the UK-born population was about 6 percent. However, it was 20 percent higher (about 7.2 percent) for immigrants, 40 percent higher for non-OECD immigrants, and almost 50 percent higher for non-OECD immigrants who had been in the country for five years or less.¹⁸ Such differences recede over time and levels vary among migrant groups, but the current downturn is likely to exacerbate differences, a worrying concern considering immigrants may not be eligible for welfare¹⁹ and are more prone to exploitation.

Furthermore, a new generation of British children has parents of immigrant origins. In 2007, 28 percent of all children born in England and Wales had at least one foreign-born parent, a share that rises to 54 percent in London. Of all UK-born children with a foreign-born mother, about a quarter had a mother from India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, and just over a quarter had a mother from elsewhere in Europe.²⁰

As a result, a substantial number of foreign-born and UK-born children now grow up with a first language other than English: 14.4 percent in primary schools and 10.8 percent in secondary schools, according to preliminary data from 2008.²¹ But English proficiency varies substantially by area. In Tower Hamlets and Newham in London, over 70 percent of primary school pupils speak English as a second language while other areas have rates of only 3 or 4 percent.²² This situation clearly presents challenges. However, the overall picture allows for more optimism than is often assumed, as the children of immigrants generally surpass their parents, and many outshine their indigenous peers, on the most commonly used socioeconomic indicators.

Finally, because immigration tends to dominate the public's attention, policymakers may have missed the developing frame of reference, which is *mobility*, not migration. The United Kingdom is one of a small number of countries that also sends significant numbers of people abroad. As more British citizens emigrate,²³ and immigrants to the United Kingdom stay for shorter periods of time,

¹⁷ Economists used to refer to the “stickiness” of European labor markets (i.e., Europeans do not move for work the way Americans do). For Britain, the accession of Poland and other countries changed that calculus. However, the opening up of Germany and other countries in 2011, migration from Romania to the south of Europe, and the fact that all EU countries are, or very soon will be, countries of net immigration suggest large flows will not continue in the longer term.

¹⁸ Somerville and Sumption, *Immigration in the United Kingdom*.

¹⁹ Immigrants come to the United Kingdom on a range of visas (work, study, and family, for example), and different visas have different eligibility requirements for social welfare. Typically, most immigrants are ineligible for welfare benefits (unemployment and social benefits, housing, etc.) for at least the first five years of residence but are eligible for free universal health care and primary and secondary education (ages 5 to 18).

²⁰ Demetrios Papademetriou, Will Somerville, and Madeleine Sumption, *Observations on the Social Mobility of Immigrants in the UK and the US* (London: Sutton Trust, forthcoming).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The author calculates there are over 5 million children born to British citizens living abroad — an equivalent to the population of Scotland — and all with full entitlement to a British passport.

the migration experience will be characterized by increasingly complex and interdependent systems of movement.

V. Challenges and New Policy Directions

The analysis of current immigration patterns and policies and public attitudes toward them — combined with our future scenarios — has a range of implications for how the United Kingdom could approach the issue of immigration.

The first challenge is for policymakers to address the public trust deficit. The current government's core narrative has been the effective management of migration (largely focused on controlling flows and implementing strong borders). However, this narrative has not resulted in support for immigration policies because the public does not believe in the government's ability to achieve these goals. A lack of faith may have several causes, among which are the disconnect between the government's message and perceived reality on the ground, media framing of government's role, prejudice toward immigrants, and statistical inaccuracies. It is patently clear that such low trust in the government's approach to immigration has corroded its ability to develop effective policies.

The second set of challenges can be loosely termed “integration challenges.” They include the churn of people arriving and leaving a local area and the problems associated with delivering public services.

In more detail, churn hurts a community because new arrivals do not possess the skills or knowledge necessary to becoming part of society. This includes an ability to speak the language and an understanding of basic social norms. Local turnover and community change also present challenges for schools, hospitals, and other public services, not unlike the effects that economic restructuring can have on communities. We may overstate the impacts of churn generally, but it is reality in a number of (mostly) inner-city areas and will likely increase over time. Economists tend to refer to such effects as “temporary adjustments,” but on the ground, this adjustment can often mean two or three years of life-altering neighborhood change. Complicating churn issues is the country's inflexible approach to funding public services. Local service deliverers, such as schools and hospitals, face significant obstacles in quickly adapting resources and services to new inflows of immigrants. Furthermore, public anxieties are also partly built on the perception and reality of competition for scarce public resources. There is scant evidence that immigrants negatively impact native wages and employment or strain public resources, but such evidence is at odds with nearly half of the general public who believes immigrants do both.²⁴

In many ways, the integration challenges sketched out above ask the age-old question of how we live together: how policy helps create harmonious relations in society — increasing our sense of belonging to place, people, society, and laws — and admonishes and punishes discrimination. At a more concrete level, it means policymakers must consider how immigration affects race relations, community cohesion, and integration agendas. As Alessandra Buonfino examines in her commentary elsewhere in this volume, such challenges are at the heart of the future success of UK society.

²⁴ See GMF, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigrations*, 2008, <http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/>.

The third challenge surrounds governance, particularly how to handle illegal immigration, which is at the heart of the public's perception that immigration is managed "unfairly." The government remains opposed to regularizing the country's unauthorized immigrants, whose numbers were recently estimated to total 713,000, because it considers amnesty a magnet for further illegal immigration.²⁵ The public, which significantly overestimates the size of the illegally resident population, also opposes amnesty. With no viable alternative policy in place, it seems likely the country will be dealing with illegal immigrants for many years to come.

VI. How to Effect Change

The current policy model has not even begun to encompass the range of migration tools available. In the next year, we are likely to see further legislative change. The Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Bill, which became an Act of Parliament in July 2009, will usher in major change to citizenship policies. The current government also has plans to radically simplify existing immigration law and policy through a second piece of legislation, the so-called Simplification Bill.

However, we should acknowledge that anecdote trumps fact all too often and an evidence-based approach should be conditioned by what is politically feasible. In the United Kingdom, "politically feasible" depends greatly on the results of the next election, likely to take place in May 2010. The polls indicate a change of government, but regardless of the outcome, the campaigns themselves will require sharp platforms and a clear vision. The next election marks a huge opportunity for either or both political parties, as well as nongovernmental actors, to push for a recasting of immigration policy in order to address some of the fundamental challenges outlined in this paper.

How might these challenges be met? We start with two simple principles. First, policy, wherever possible, should avoid running counter to the market and to the motivations and aspirations of individual immigrants. Second, since every immigration system in the world blends several legal mandates — for example refugees fleeing persecution or workers selected to contribute to the economy — policymaking needs to be sensitive to these different mandates and stakeholders.

How then could UK policymakers respond differently? Examining the political and policy landscape, there appears to be room for all actors in the immigration debate (including both advocates and opponents of immigration) to agree on an agenda of improving public trust, immigrant integration, and good governance.

In political terms, these three strands would be brought together in a single overarching strategy underpinned by a core narrative. For the purposes of analytical rigor, it makes more sense to describe them discretely.

Strand 1: Public Confidence and Cooperation

Public confidence is crucial to the effective functioning of an immigration service, and political leaders should take greater responsibility for leading the debate. For instance, the more balanced and

²⁵ Ian Gordon, Kathleen Scanlon, Tony Travers, and Christine Whitehead, "Economic impact on London and the UK of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants in the UK" (Interim Report from LSE London, 2009); Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Will Somerville, *Earned Amnesty: Bringing Illegal Workers out of the Shadows* (London: CentreForum, 2008), <http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/regularisation-web.pdf>.

less heated debate in Scotland is partly due to political leaders taking a more positive approach.²⁶ Inadequately articulated goals and the use of strong, mostly negative language, has not helped the current leadership as it has continued to inflame the debate rather than tamp it down.

A broader public communications strategy would likely bring results. Canada, for example, expects its politicians to discuss immigration with voters. A new law may be unnecessary, but obligating local leaders to effectively prepare and develop their communities for new immigrants would likely reap results.

Policymakers also have a responsibility to present transparent strategies that withstand scrutiny. Obvious failings in this regard include the basis for all policy — empirical evidence. UK immigration statistics collected by the government have been rightly critiqued by many actors, from advocates and the media to the Conservative opposition, as misleading, inaccurate, and inadequate to the task. Long overdue is an independent source of data that effectively communicates with the public and media and reveals the evidence base for policy in a transparent and understandable way.

Government engagement of immigrant communities themselves on core issues (such as migrant rights), and more generally, an expansion of the currently embryonic migrant-advocacy sector in the United Kingdom, particularly through concerted nongovernmental action, would also allow for more cooperation in the long term, which in turn would lead to better policy outcomes.

Strand 2: Investing in Immigrant Integration

Current integration efforts do not meet the needs of UK immigrant communities. During the economic downturn, investment in immigrant integration policies and programs becomes more, not less, important. What does investment in immigrant integration mean in practice? Policies can be broadly grouped into those aimed at immigrants and those aimed more broadly at society.

In order of importance, the following three reforms would add the greatest value: making greater investments in English language training; focusing on moving immigrants into work; and building frameworks for recognizing credentials or qualifications earned outside the country. This implies a number of policies, from how government can best use the scarce resources dedicated to language learning to how public services can be personalized to better meet immigrant needs. It is also vital that government understands integration to be a dynamic *and* long-term process and that policy must be calibrated accordingly.

Policymakers should think beyond a set of government programs aimed at immigrants to “whole-of-society” policy approaches that encompass everyone. After all, policymakers cannot ignore evidence indicating that some host communities *do* lose out from immigration, particularly those with low wages, low skills, and non-language-intensive jobs.²⁷ A package of better regulation, Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP),²⁸ and government emphasis on volunteering and mentoring are possible

²⁶ Miranda Lewis, *Warm Welcome? Understanding public attitudes to asylum seekers in Scotland* (London: ippr, 2006), <http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=474>.

²⁷ Will Somerville and Madeleine Sumption, *Immigration and the labour market: Theory, evidence and policy* (London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009).

²⁸ Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) are generally referred to as welfare-to-work measures in the United States. In practice, they cover a range of policies and programs, from benefits to skills and training programs.

policy options.²⁹ The latter could aim to bring together immigrants and host communities through initiatives such as TimeBank’s Time Together, which connects members of the UK public to newly arrived refugees. TimeBank, a national charity that encourages young people to volunteer, created Time Together in 2002 in response to a government white paper that recommended mentoring programs for refugees. The program has the support of the voluntary and private sectors.

More specifically, a renewed examination of labor-market regulation of key sectors, supply chains, and working practices would increase public trust and yield some tax revenues if employers with unauthorized workers were uncovered. Such regulation would also reduce exploitation from unscrupulous employers. These types of measures might be possible under existing law, and we can learn from recent experience.³⁰ Similarly, ALMPs would help educate and train workers who face competition from new migrants. This assistance may involve wage subsidies or specialized training, and should be part of the government’s overall investments in skills and training. Employers, as noted above, may have an important role to play.

For such work to be effective in the long term, government might lead discussion on an immigrant integration strategy, perhaps with community groups and local government in the lead as they are on the front lines of where integration takes place. At the very least, this discussion should spell out responsibilities and devolve power where necessary in order to meet the goals of actively welcoming foreigners; better measuring belonging³¹; and finding ways to overcome funding mechanisms that do not provide the flexibility to local services facing sudden increases in arrivals. The Migration Impacts Fund, a central government initiative that funds local immigrant integration projects, is a welcome response, but does not represent a strategic answer as it does not give responsibility, or accountability, to local leaders.

Strand 3: Good Governance and Legality

The UK immigration system has undergone major surgery in recent years, providing a new platform for reform. Across the different immigration mandates, clear levers exist to stabilize flows — from the Points-Based System for workers and students to the new system for processing asylum applications. Improvements are still needed or are being rolled out, especially to asylum processing, but opportunities abound. For instance, the Points-Based System could attract workers for a postrecession economy by favoring the top experts on low-carbon industries.

²⁹ The question of who should pay for integration programs naturally arises. Since economic immigration most benefits immigrants themselves and employers, the funding could come from mandates for both. A fee-based immigration systems could charge immigrants a premium for a visa and later citizenship. Employers could invest in language and integration services for their employees to correct negative externalities. Perhaps businesses employing more than 25 percent of their workforce from abroad, i.e., foreign nationals, could be required to provide certain integration services, possibly together with a tax credit or incentive.

³⁰ The mandate of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority — a government agency set up to protect workers from exploitation in the agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering, and food processing and packaging sectors — could be extended to other sectors of the economy, or powers that it uses could be brought to bear by other government actors.

³¹ The United Kingdom tends to measure “belonging” or “community cohesion” with a standard polling question, typically a variation of “Do you feel like community cohesion has improved in your neighborhood over the last 12 months?” The answers themselves are ambiguous as they do not probe why a respondent thinks community cohesion in an area is or is not improving. But above all, there is little nuance or contextual data that long-term ethnographic research would reveal.

The government also has an opportunity to bring in other stakeholders and take the lead, for example in upholding and promoting international humanitarian law, or — as noted above — rooting out exploitation. Making change requires far greater cooperation across relevant governmental agencies and between governmental and nongovernmental actors. Change also means looking to the European and local-authorities levels.

New institutions offer similar opportunities. The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), a group of economists who help the government determine “shortage” occupations, may increase public confidence in decisions about economic-migration criteria. The new UK Border Agency regulator could help change how the public (and nongovernmental organizations) perceive operational matters. However, the greatest gains will come from improving how the immigration system works horizontally (across relevant departments) and vertically (at local, regional, and European levels).

At the core of good governance lie independent and accountable institutions. The ability to strengthen the migration delivery structure will have positive consequences on public willingness to trust government action. The accompanying commentary on this paper by Shamit Saggat begins to unpack some of the broader regulatory principles that underlie effective public-sector organizations. His commentary offers some fundamental insights into how all three of the strands above and their various policy options might be best implemented.

Two issues — expectations around the integration of legal immigrants and the problems of illegally resident immigrants — present challenges for good governance. First, as a starting point, good governance means immigrants in the country should enter legally and comply with the terms of their entry. However, recent discussions and current legislation around citizenship have focused on elongating the process and creating “stepping stones” to citizenship. Few would argue that citizenship should not be valued; indeed, valuing citizenship appears to be guiding the direction of policy. But by making the barrier higher, immigrants are less likely to naturalize, with negative consequences for integration. Instead, the frame of the debate could change if government *expected* all new immigrants, if they stay for the long term, to become UK citizens. This would likely lead to a policy that starts from the assumption of encouraging naturalization.

Second, the question of illegality must also be addressed. The debate is fraught, but considering the current economic downturn and the contours of the political scene, whoever is in power may be able to take steps toward an earned, rolling amnesty on the basis that it is pragmatic, improves UK security, and will result in tax gains. Such an approach should take into account international best practice and require those who receive legal status to pay fines and any back taxes and perform community service.

VII. Final Thoughts: Challenges and the Importance of Narrative

The size and the complexity of international migration is a huge political and policy challenge. How governments can smartly and efficiently manage the way migration will transform society is a pressing question for all developed countries. The policy options above offer some insights into the levers that could be pulled. However, a transformative policy will only be effective if it coalesces around clear goals and a clear narrative.

The 2010 election gives the United Kingdom's two major parties room to develop a more nuanced narrative. We are only at the start of a dialogue about what the content of that narrative might look like, but such a conversation might start with a vision based on evidence and the likely migration trends of the future. There are likely to be several interlocking elements to such a narrative, and their sequencing will be critical. Thus, outlining the case for intervention in promoting a stable flow while acknowledging impacts — some benign, some not — is an important first step to making the case for reducing the number of people illegally in the country.

The narrative should focus on the United Kingdom's interest and what its role in the world might be. Elements could include the premium on knowledge that requires the brightest talent for competitive economic advantage; the imperative to meet the needs of residents who do not have the requisite skills to enter and advance within the labor market; and the importance of strengthening communities, perhaps by making a clear statement at every level of government that foreigners are welcome and, if they stay, are expected to become British citizens. Equally, a narrative might build on Britain's role in the world and her history: as a global economic hub and as a promoter of freedom. Fundamentally, for any narrative to be effective, it must be entrenched across Whitehall in a coordinated communication strategy.

The objectives of a smart immigration approach (and the policy tools necessary to achieve it) explored above are hardly the final word but the beginning of a discussion. Success promises political and economic gains through migration's dynamism and potential for contributing to the United Kingdom's growth and prosperity. Failure risks social unrest and political instability. Migration, in all its forms, is set to be one of the defining challenges of the coming century.

VIII. About the Author

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