

Managing our borders

Mr Cameron and Mrs May both kept telling us the UK needed to cut the numbers of migrants coming to the UK. They chose to highlight a net figure, subtracting those who moved abroad from those who arrived. They wanted to get this new figure down to under 100,000. They got nowhere achieving this target.

Some objected to the idea of a net target. Every new migrant arriving needs a home and other support from public services. They often need benefit top up of their incomes. This needs to be done well and generously, and becomes difficult to do to a decent standard when the numbers become very large. The country did not have a sufficient supply of affordable housing, and was short of health and education capacity in the fast growing parts of the UK where many migrants arrived. An elderly couple with their own means moving to Spain for a few years did not compensate for the costs of the new migrant arriving and needing social housing and other support. Indeed, the absence of the richer UK resident reduced the tax take.

Some said that Mr Cameron and Mrs May were unable to hit their target owing to a sudden surge in inward migration to the UK from the rest of the EU. It is true there were big movements of people during this period. Many EU citizens were attracted to the UK by the jobs and relatively high wages compared to their home countries. It was also true that the government did not even hit the target for non EU migration which also continued at high levels.

Once out of the EU the government will lose the argument that it cannot hit its target owing to EU membership and freedom of movement. The government will need to set a fair migration policy for the whole world, removing preference for people coming from the continent. The system should mainly be based around an assessment of how many people with what skills levels we need to grant work permits. If people want to come and live here and have the means to support themselves that is no problem. We should also have a humane and proportionate policy towards asylum seekers. Current levels of gross and net migration are too high, damaging our ability to provide good homes and public services for all.