

The need to lower legal migration

In the year to June 2023 1.2 million people came to our country legally. This overwhelms the 30,000 illegals who made their way here. The new arrivals were rightly welcomed. Some came to take educational courses, some came to fill jobs, some came to join family here or as dependents of those coming to work or study.

In the years ahead we will want to welcome more students to fill courses, some people with skills we need for jobs we find difficult to fill. We want more investors, entrepreneurs, business builders. We do not want to prevent families reuniting where there is good cause.

We also need to recognise that the huge numbers are no longer fair on either those who come or who are in the settled communities that receive them with a welcome. We want people coming to enjoy a good lifestyle. They need decent homes, school places for their children, NHS doctors and hospitals capable of seeing them promptly when need arises. They need roads to drive on and utility supplies for their energy and water. All of these things are under stress and much stretched as we are not keeping up with providing the extra capacity in all these areas that 700,000 extra people a year need.

It is true that last year 500,000 left the country which is why I wrote 700,000 not 1.2 million. Some people just net that off, but in practice for some purposes you need to look at the gross number. People leaving may sell or vacate homes that are in different parts of the country or in a different price bracket to the new comers' needs and pockets. People leaving may be older requiring fewer school places than younger migrants arriving. There may be concentrations of new arrivals particularly in big cities and in places with plenty of jobs.

We also need to be fair to taxpayers. The low wage model, inviting in people to fill low paid jobs may be cheap for the employer but it is very dear for the taxpayer. A low wage worker will need a subsidised home, benefit top up of wages, a wide range of free public services, and extra capital for the additional utility supplies and transport they need. I have set out before how it probably costs around £250,000 per low paid migrant in public sector capital set up costs and early years public service and benefit costs. This is in line with the EU estimate of 250,000 euros a migrant in 2016.

In future pieces I will explore the government's plans to reduce legal migration by 300,000 a year. This could be expanded and speeded to the benefit of many. We need a higher wage higher skilled economy.