

Upward revision to numbers of migrants

The Migration Observatory reports this week that the official figures for migrants coming to the UK need to be amended, as it seems many more migrants came from the EU over the last decade and fewer from the rest of the world. The suggested changes to the figures show a 76% increase in EU numbers from 2012 to March 2020 and a 31% decrease in rest of the world numbers. Instead of the EU being a minority they accounted for 64%. The overall total also rises. The ONS is having to change its way of estimating the numbers. It has in the past used passenger surveys, but now recognises these were not accurately capturing what was going on. It appears net migration has been running at around one third of a million a year. It is clearly difficult to pin people down about their plans in a system of free movement when interviewing them on arrival.

It is most important that we have more reliable data. as many policy decisions flow from how many people are coming to stay in our country. We need better figures to work out how much health and education capacity we need, how much more transport capacity, and above all how many additional homes. We want all who are coming to have access to good services and the opportunity to rent or buy a suitable home. Assuming more than 3 million additional people have come over the last decade, as seems likely, that means we needed another 1.25 homes assuming the same average household size of 2.4 people per home as the current population. For some purposes we also need to look at gross migration, as the newcomers may want different housing in different places to those leaving the country. Some leaving the country still keep a residence in the UK and might return years later as their life draws to a close.

An answer to the Green wish to reduce the claim on resources, to cut pollution and reduce the production of CO2 would be to cut the rate of growth of the population. The UK needs to expand its output of CO2, make more claims on minerals and food and take more land for houses because the population has been growing rapidly over the last decade.

I want to live in a free society so I have no wish for government to stop couples having babies as they choose. Nor in a decent society should we say No to asylum seekers seeking a haven from violence and oppression. The UK has gone well beyond these central rights and decencies, welcoming in millions of people to take on low paid jobs. The UK state has also recruited many to come here with great skills and qualifications from lower paid countries. There is a strong case for a new model. We need to grow more of our own skills base by excellence in education and support for those who will make the commitment to gain the qualifications. Is it really sensible to bid away more great people from a poor country than would come naturally, only to have to do more by way of overseas aid to support that country that is missing some of its natural leaders and qualified people? We also need to move to a higher pay higher productivity model of working. More of the low paid jobs should be backed with better machinery and automation to enrich the job in many ways. We want more interesting and better paid jobs which more automation and

digitalisation can generate.

In order to have a good migration policy there needs to be accurate data. In order to plan service and other provision there needs to be good data. No wonder we have seemed short of homes, short of transport capacity, short of NHS capacity, if we have been catering for more people than the official figures say are here. Migration Observatory also thinks there has been a further net increase in EU migrants since the Brexit vote up to March 2020, despite claims that the opposite would happen. They also think that far fewer people left the UK last year than some have suggested despite the collapse in many lower paid jobs owing to the closures of many businesses in response to the pandemic.

These large errors in the official figures had consequences. It meant the government was constantly blamed for failing to control migrant numbers from the rest of the world, when it turns out they had done much more than recognised. It also meant pro EU commentators and politicians could claim EU migration was not large or important, when the numbers were understated by 76%.