

# The Myth of Immigration as an Election Issue

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April 30, 2015

The movement of a native of one country to another is not a new phenomenon, often referred to as immigration. Settling into new areas has been practised by people of early civilizations such as the Greeks to those of new countries such as Pakistan. Reasons for this are plenty as are the difficulties faced by the migrants, including cultural differences; however nations have been created by immigrants, case in point America.

Europe, perceived to be a beacon of forward-thinking, liberalism and freedom, has witnessed its fair share of immigration, with many pounding the alarm, creating a heightened sense of fear that the "Muslims are coming", as a large portion of immigrants from non-European countries tend to follow the Islamic faith and bring their unique cultures and beliefs, erroneously believed to be contradictory to Western and European values.

Within the European Union (EU), the 1985 Schengen Agreement created the Schengen Area, which now includes 22 of 26 participating member states, permitting free movement of the citizens of the member states ([BBC](#)) ([European Commission](#)). The UK is not a part of the Schengen agreement; however as a part of the EU, the immigration policy towards EU citizens is more relaxed than for non-European citizens.

The Schengen system has been exploited by those from the African and Asian continents who arrive in Europe via Italy and Greece and then either travel to other countries or stay in those countries and many from poorer new EU countries than the UK such as Romania have come in large numbers to make a better life for themselves. Many politicians have jumped on this issue, using immigration to deflect blame or claim it is the cause for problems in the economy, unemployment, rising crime and other societal issues.

The case of illegal migration is also a hot topic, where people migrate to another country without prior permission, violating the laws of that country, referred to as illegal immigration. This can prove expensive as access to healthcare and education becomes limited to the illegal immigrant, as in the UK ([Sigona](#)). It is said that over 80% of immigrants pass through Greece when entering

the European Union owing to its place on the map with many immigrants going to Greece via Turkey and then travelling to France or others in the Schengen Area or risking it for the UK ([Lowen](#)).

Immigration is often blamed for the failures of the state, often inaccurately as immigrants can contribute a wide variety of skills to the economy of their country of choice. The Cato Institute, in a study, found that immigration had very little effect on the income of those already living in the area ([Cato Institute](#)). However there may be some basis to those who argue to the contrary, as Denmark, said to have a strict and selective approach to immigration, recently released a government report stating that immigrants actually cost the state 2.3bn euros, whilst migrants from the West actually contributed 295mn Euros and this saving allowed the government to reinvest in the citizens through housing, education and health etc. ([Reimann](#)).

There are various debates as to the benefit of immigration, whether the risk outweighs the reward, in the sense that the risk that one may be a benefit leech, live off the NHS and the taxpayer, only to contribute very little back, to a migrant going on to study within the country or earning a job and going on to make great strides and develop themselves and the country through hard work and prove themselves as a Great British success story.

The positives begin with the opinion of CBI director general, John Cridland, the Confederation of British Industries, who sees the merit of immigrants of "keeping the wheels of the recovery turning" by fulfilling skills shortages. By increasing production in industries, this leads to an increase in jobs for British people and increases growth. The EU free movement scheme allows the recovery to progress, hospitals and care homes operate on the backs of both immigrants and natives with up to 26% of health professionals being immigrants (UK) and the infrastructure plans of Britain could not come to fruition ([Kirkup](#)). On top of this, since 2001, EU migrants have contributed £2,732 per person to the economy ([Cridland](#)).

Misconceptions around immigrants are also flamed by negative stereotypes in the media, such as many being unskilled, however many EU migrants are actually skilled in IT and engineering. Another one is that the immigrants are taking all the jobs, however this has been disproved by the fact that the employment rate in Britain is amongst the highest in Europe, disproving the argument.

A speculative link between the depression of wages and immigration has been dismissed as weak by the Migration Advisory Committee and wages have actually increased the average wage packet. Another common argument is that immigrants primarily come here for the benefits; however the Office for National Statistics has found that 2/3rds of EU citizens migrated for work and 1/5th for studies .

The [Daily Mail](#), surprisingly, reported on the benefits of EU migration, stating that EU Migrants contribute more than £20bn to the British economy. Along with this, immigrants from the original 15 EU countries have contributed 64% more in taxes than received in benefits, and those from the rest of the countries contributed 12% more than welfare received. However despite these findings, critics still argue that the influx of immigrants has caused significant strain on resources such as health and education.

Despite this, efforts by anti-EU party UKIP and a Euro-sceptical David Cameron has placed Britain's place in the EU in jeopardy as plans for a EU in/out referendum are in the works, and this uncertainty places massive risk to the British economy and causes a strain on Britain's relationship with other EU countries if it tries to leave the EU or implement regulations against immigration.

Immigration is now the main issue of discussion in the 21st century, parties have formed as a response to curbing immigration to much success, and fringe views of people like Jean-Marie Le Pen are now in the mainstream and accepted. Many feel immigration is an issue that must be tackled in some way or another, regardless of political standing. This has created a culture of fear and dissent against immigration and parties appease to the masses, acting harshly to one-up the actions/proposed actions of other parties and appeal to voters at the cost of the livelihoods of hard-working individuals ([Marquand](#)). Some say alarm is coming from a fear of Islam and this affects immigrants of Arab, Asian and African descent, and restrictions on the migrant status of these nationalities are increasing.

A parable to describe the immigration political climate is best described in Switzerland, where the largest party the People's Party, in the 2007 elections, released flyers with an image of three white sheep, kicking out a black sheep, "intended" to symbolise a proposed law to deport any non-citizen committed of a crime, however verges on being racist and reflects the attitude spreading across Europe.

However amongst this climate of fear, Scotland remains different from the rest, and continues to accept multiculturalism. Europe itself is a very large region and all countries should not be tarred with the same brush. Whilst England (mainly London), suffers from massive overpopulation, Scotland is often left short-changed by this concentration of immigrants in the capital, whilst the Scottish Government as part of its case for referendum or further powers asked for control over immigration (BBC, 2014). However, this localised London-centric approach to politics rejected this approach and has alienated others in the UK. Many of these immigrants come to apply their trade in London, but overlook that there is a demand for their skills in other areas ([BBC](#)).

The Scottish National Party is potentially the only national party, in Europe at least, that welcomes immigration. Scotland is an ageing population and as a result there is an ever-increasing work gap that needs to be filled. The UK has the resources in the form of the concentration of immigrants in London/UK, however many refuse to leave, despite unemployment being an issue in the city.

Whilst immigration is vital, it is universally accepted that the stance towards immigration must be reformed, a more rational and regional approach must be adopted where visas are granted on the basis of region applied, akin to the system in Canada and Australia where regions have quotas for work etc. and fulfil accordingly. This system could be used across the board in the EU to tackle unemployment in metropolises; the movement of immigrants to areas where work is available could be a simple yet very effective method of tackling immigrant over-population and unemployment.

It is with that it could be concluded that the merits of immigration be recognised however the adage that moderation must be adhered to strikes true. Wide spread immigration can lead to

strains in relations and this is often capitalised on by politicians and makes their jobs easier as the accountability for their actions is neglected by using the excuse "it was the immigrants". Scenarios must be in place to ensure integration is successful and immigration is efficient and responsible, to ensure the spreading of skills across a populace instead of a concentration.

What good is a United Kingdom, if the people, it's most important resource, are not being shared?