

The facts & the fixes: Immigration

In brief: The way we talk about immigration has become poisonous. Immigration targets have been set and missed, while many politicians fail to recognise how essential migrants are for our economy and the effect of anti-immigration narratives on our communities.



What can we do to change attitudes towards immigration?

Anti-immigration narratives have empowered racists and led to a rise in hate crimes in the UK. We need to acknowledge that the UK has been enriched by immigration and emigration for centuries, and how essential migrants are for our future.

1 — Change the narrative. Immigration must be depoliticised, and should not be used as a political football. We must foster a better understanding of the long history of immigration and emigration to and from the UK. Politicians need to be honest about the dangers of limiting immigration for the UK economy, and put a stop to language that demonises immigrants. In schools, children should be taught UK history in a way that contextualises the multicultural makeup of the UK today.

2 — Drop immigration targets. The government has missed every immigration target set over the last six years, and by setting them has reinforced the idea that immigration is bad for the UK. The UK needs migrants, and the government must admit that blindly limiting immigration would damage our social and economic life.

3 — Maintain freedom of movement to ensure a soft Brexit. EU migrants work in essential industries and keep our NHS running. Maintaining freedom of movement would not only guarantee EU migrants can stay in the UK, but would provide these workers with security and enable us to negotiate a soft Brexit – staying in the single market and protecting valuable trade links with remaining EU countries.

4 — Stronger employment protections. Exploitative employers take advantage of both British and migrant workers by offering poverty pay and insecure contracts. We need stronger employment protections and empowered trade unions to prevent exploitation and the undercutting of wages.

5 — Invest in public services. Politicians have used housing scarcity and the NHS crisis to justify cutting immigration, but these are false narratives. The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world, and there is no excuse for not providing the services required to look after our population. Adequate investment in public services, along with a house building program, would combat claims the UK can't manage an increasing population. Both the housing crisis and cuts to public services have been caused by political choices, and are not inevitable. The re-introduction of the Migration Impact Fund would also help to ease any concerns around shortfalls in public services.

6 — Tackle false reporting on immigration. The UK media have misled the public about the extent and effects of immigration for a long time. The rise in hate crimes after an inflammatory focus on migration during the EU referendum was no coincidence. We urgently need a regulator with powers to demand immediate corrections, public apologies and fines for false reporting on immigration.

7 — Develop projects that build community cohesion. Areas of the UK with higher levels of immigration are generally pro-immigration. Encouraging people to work together breaks down barriers and builds community cohesion. Initiatives that include investments in community spaces and build on common values, including the National Citizenship Service, or smaller initiatives that bring together new parents, help foster strong cross-cultural relationships.

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Immigrants make up 12.5% of the population (5.5m people),¹ and the UK ranks 16 out of 32 for OECD countries in terms of migrant population.² When surveyed, the British public believed immigrants made up a quarter of the UK population.¹



There are more than 4.5m British citizens living abroad – more than any other European country.³



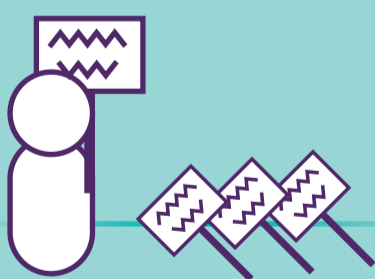
Developing countries host 86% of the world's refugees.⁴ Despite being the fifth largest economy in the world, the UK granted asylum to only 9,933 refugees (0.047% of the world's refugees) in 2016.^{5,6}



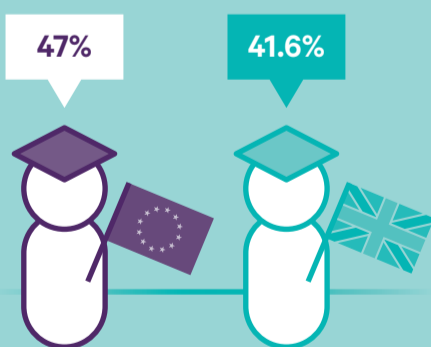
Immigration has not led to a rise in unemployment. In fact, levels of unemployment are at their lowest since 1975.⁷



Decreased union membership, technological change and the financialisation of the economy are far more to blame for fewer jobs and falling wages than immigration.



Migrants fill skills shortages. 47% of working-aged EU immigrants have reached tertiary education,⁸ versus 41.6% of the total UK population.⁹



Immigrants are not a drain on public services. Between 2001 and 2011, migrants from EU-15 countries contributed 64% more in taxes than they received in benefits. Those from newer EU countries contributed 12% more than they received.¹⁰



The UK has an ageing and growing population. If immigration dropped to 40,000 per year, our population would increase by 6%, but only 1% would be workers.¹³ This would weaken our tax base and ability to pay pensions.



Immigrants make up 26% of NHS doctors and 16% of nurses.¹¹ EU immigrants make up 10% of doctors and 4% of nurses.¹²



After the EU referendum, reported hate crimes rose by 60%.¹⁴

