

Summary of the APPG on Migration Roundtable - 23rd January 2013

Immigration across the UK: how do we ensure no-one is left behind? House of Commons

The APPG on Migration held a roundtable discussion on '*Immigration across the UK: how do we ensure that no-one is left behind?*', on 23rd January 2013 in the House of Commons. The meeting was chaired by Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrats). Cross-party parliamentary representatives on the panel were Gavin Barwell MP (Conservative), Jack Dromey MP (Labour), and Pete Wishart MP (Scottish National Party). The panel also included migration experts Dr Scott Blinder (Migration Observatory) and migration activist Zrinka Bralo (The Forum) as well as Cllr. Paul Kenny (Boston Borough Council). Approximately 90 people attended the debate and contributed to an interesting Q&A at the end of the discussion.

Drawing on the latest data from the 2011 Census of England and Wales, the debate focused on the local impacts of migration on communities and economies across the UK over the past decade and how the debate about the regional effects of migration is often undermined by the lack of clear information indicating the benefits and costs of migration for the UK's countries and regions. Scottish data will be out at a later date, but early indicators indicate that there has been a rise in migration into Scotland, making these discussions timely and relevant to Scottish social and political life.

Baroness Hussein-Ece opened the meeting by reflecting on the aim of the debate, and on her own experience as the child of migrants. She noted the necessity of building cross-party consensus to ensure that existing communities and newcomers gain access to support relevant to their needs, to ensure that no-one is left behind.

Gavin Barwell MP expressed the need for a more balanced and nuanced debate around migration, whilst also recognising the need for a regional perspective across the UK, as migration flows are diverse nation-wide. He noted that politicians are often affected by doorstep encounters on election campaigns. Encounters with constituents who hold strong views on immigration can directly shape MP's attitudes towards government policy. Reflecting on his own experience of an encounter with a constituent who held strong views on immigration, he said that engagement in deeper conversation with the man revealed a more nuanced viewpoint on an issue that had initially seemed quite straightforward. He advocated MPs engaging in deeper conversation which can give politicians the balanced perspective necessary for making contributions to government immigration policy. He also asserted that there was a need to look for solutions that addressed issues in public services that went beyond migration policy, as spending and adapting public service infrastructure are important contributory factors.

Jack Dromey MP said successive waves of migration had positive effects on the UK, highlighting that migrant labour is essential for agriculture, the NHS, and other sectors dependent on migrant workers. Such benefits must be highlighted, but he added that we also need to address the real concerns held by the public, such as wage undercutting. Whilst the previous Labour government had greatly underestimated the numbers of migrant workers from Eastern Europe who came to the UK after 2004, he added that the coalition government will find it impossible to reach their net migration target, and in the process, will adversely impact students and business. He said that politicians needed to be more sensitive to local and regional concerns and needed to do more work on integration which supports poor white communities. He agreed with Gavin Barwell on the need for strong leadership to address the myths and the impacts of immigration.

Pete Wishart MP argued that Scotland was not full up and that negative attitudes towards immigration need to shift - immigration is not a 'bad' thing. He reflected on how his constituency had Poles with local accents, who have become part of local Scottish communities. Historically, Scotland was a country of emigration, causing a population decline. Coupled with the current problem of an ageing population, skills gaps, and the general need for an increase in population, he added that Scotland is heading towards a 'demographic time bomb'. As such, he said, there a strong need for a range of immigration policies that addresses these particularly Scottish problems. He outlined the impact that current UK immigration policy has had in Scotland and in particular on the Scottish higher education sector, which has experienced a decrease in international students. He indicated that an independent Scotland would be one that would welcome migrants and acknowledge their contribution to Scottish society. As such, migration policy would be a crucial aspect in the Scottish independence debates.

Dr Scott Blinder drew on the 2011 Census findings to outline recent migration trends. He commented that 7.5 million people in England and Wales are now foreign born due to migration from India, Poland, Pakistan, and Ireland. London has seen the greatest concentration of newcomers, where 40 per cent of the population is foreign born. However, London also saw the smallest percentage increase in population. Migration had significantly impacted on other regions, with Polish migration in particular spreading across the country. He suggested that this has fuelled public opinion about its impacts.

Cllr Paul Kenny highlighted the importance of the term 'no-one left behind' in relation to Boston in Lincolnshire, one of the English districts most changed by migration during the past decade. He said that there was a public perception that the area was being taken over by migrants and that the government had let the locals down. He led a local taskforce inquiry on the impacts of migration and invited local people to give evidence. This resulted in an in-depth [report](#), which put forward

28 recommendations, and produced evidence that went contrary to claims such as migration had increased crime in the area. He added that further work needed to be done at local and national levels as well as the European Union in order to ensure the impacts of migration are addressed.

Zrinka Bralo emphasised the need to move the debate away from numbers and instead to focus on who new migrants are and what needs they bring with them. She added that 'statistics are not sexy' – we should be finding a way looking behind the numbers and asking what they mean. The Forum submitted evidence to the Leveson Inquiry about the misinformation contained in reports on migration in the media. She recommended a shift away from scaremongering regarding statistics, and instead embrace a more balanced response to migration.

Contributions from attendees at the end of the meeting focused on how the discussion predominantly focused on the economic contributions of migration instead of a human rights perspective, and how a gender focus would highlight the economic and employment effects on women. A further contributor said that whilst Scotland may give a warm welcome to migrants, there also needs to be strong consideration of local responses.

The meeting was closed by Baroness Hussein-Ece, who added that there was a need for on-going conversations in order to recognise the opportunities that immigration can bring whilst also acknowledging the challenges and taking responsibility.

Overall, this roundtable discussion offered some interesting points on the characteristics of contemporary migration flows to the UK and the need to address the debate in a more nuanced and balanced way. Gavin Barwell, in particular, suggested the move towards a more evidence-based, balanced debate would gain from MPs listening more closely to what their constituents had to say. The evidence from Boston Borough offers quality local-level evidence on how to dispel myths on migration from public perception and how to ensure that no-one is left behind. From a Scottish perspective, Pete Wishart indicated that the SNP would pursue a positive migration policy should Scotland gain independence in 2014.

These [APPG on Migration](#) debates provide a continued opportunity for public and political discourse on challenges and opportunities relating to contemporary migration flows in the UK (listen to the debate [here](#)).

With migration policy set to be a key aspect of the Scottish independence debate, we look forward to the Migration Conference that Sandra White MSP proposed on December 18 2012 during the Members Debate at the Scottish Parliament just before the International Migrants' Day celebrations.