

BRIEFING

FAIR AND DEMOCRATIC MIGRATION POLICY

A PRINCIPLED
FRAMEWORK
FOR THE UK

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Responsibility for the contents and conclusions of the paper remains the authors' alone.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to provide some foundations for the new mainstream consensus on migration policy that is so sorely needed in the UK. We hope that many of those who participate in the UK's migration debate, at all levels, will be able to support some if not all of the principles we set out below, and that this can provide a starting point for more productive discussions about policy, a more positive political debate, and ultimately a more open and balanced public conversation about migration.

For progressives who believe that politicians and policymakers have no alternative but to engage with the reality of people's views on immigration (as we do), the challenge is how to incorporate this sense of realism into an approach which is still distinctively progressive – which does not give in to the prevailing political and media negativity about immigration, nor opt out of value judgements in favour of a purely managerial approach.

Our 'principles' are not foundational philosophical positions (although we necessarily have to take positions on some of the big philosophical issues), but rather axioms that could guide a realistic but values-based approach to policymaking, and suggest tests that could be applied to judge the success of migration policy from a progressive perspective.

This paper sets out 10 broad 'principles' for migration policy that we believe would provide the basis for a UK migration policy that is fair, democratic, progressive and effective.

Foundations for a fair and democratic migration policy

- Establish clear democratic accountability for migration policy
- Ensure that migration policy and its implementation are governed by the rule of law
- Put human rights and equality at the heart of policymaking
- Focus on delivery and competence – for its own sake, and for public confidence.

Progressive objectives for migration policy

- Measure what can be measured – policy should aim to increase net economic and fiscal benefits
- Take account of what is less easily measured, but still crucial – cultural and social costs and benefits
- Remember that distribution matters – avoid policies which exacerbate inequality, and manage the impacts of migration on vulnerable groups and communities
- Look beyond the UK – seek to increase net benefits in developing countries.

Realism about outcomes

- Accept that numbers matter – the pace and pattern of migration flows are important
- Be realistic – understand what governments can and can't control, and don't make promises that can't be kept.

The first four principles describe the foundations for a fair and democratic migration policy. We hope that politicians and policymakers from all sides of the political debate would be able to support these foundation principles: they should be regarded as the basic 'rules of engagement'.

Within this though, there is plenty of scope for legitimate debate among different mainstream perspectives. The second set of principles set out what we believe should be the basic tenets of a *progressive* migration policy. This account of the objectives of migration policy should be debated against alternative objectives (for example, to reduce net migration to a particular level) which are entirely legitimate, but which we believe to be inferior.

The objectives of migration policy under the last Labour government were sometimes unclear, or were left implicit rather than being made explicit. This made effective policymaking difficult, and led to unclear public messaging. In contrast, the Coalition government (or at least the Conservative part of it) has been very clear that the primary objective of their migration policy is to reduce net migration to less than 100,000 a year.

This objective is, in our view, the wrong one, and has led to a number of bad policy decisions. However, it has the advantage of providing a clear test by which policy proposals can be judged and is easily communicated to the general public (and indeed to parliamentarians, journalists and officials inside government). If progressives are to make a different case to the public successfully, we must start with an equally clear (although unlikely to be equally simple) account of what migration policy is seeking to achieve.

However, there is a risk that an approach to migration policy that focuses too much on objectives and aspirations (particularly when these are defined broadly to include a wide range of measures) loses touch with the core metric that concerns the public: how policy affects migration flows. Our last two principles make clear that the question of migration numbers and patterns must remain central to progressive policy debates, while recognising the need for politicians and policymakers to be realistic about the degree to which they can affect migration flows. Policy must be workable, as well as democratically accountable.

The aim of this paper is not to set out rules which will always give a final answer on any given question of policy. Indeed, there will sometimes be unavoidable tensions between the principles proposed here. Aside from some issues that should be ‘red lines’ for progressives (including some human rights issues), the process of designing and implementing a new migration policy for the UK will be a matter of democratic choice and, in many cases, choosing what position to adopt in the face of a number of trade-offs.

Ultimately, the importance of democratic accountability means that such questions must be seen as inherently open to argument and debate as part of a healthy democracy. The principles outlined in this paper are intended to inform that debate, and to provide progressive politicians and policymakers with a framework that can be applied to policies to assess the extent to which they meet progressive values.

IPPR will set out its own detailed proposals for a fair and democratic migration policy for the UK in the coming months, based on the principles set out in this paper. In keeping with our first principle, those proposals, like this paper, should be seen as a contribution to the wider democratic debate about migration.

INTRODUCTION

Migration (or at least immigration¹) has long been an issue where progressive policymakers and politicians (particularly, but not exclusively, those on the political left) have found themselves conflicted in numerous ways: torn between an instinctively internationalist outlook and the realities of migration's local impacts; between a desire to open up opportunities for people from poor countries and the need to protect the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the UK; between the interests of individual migrants and the countries and communities they leave behind; between an understanding of migration's positive economic impacts and fears that it may make communities less cohesive, or negatively affect public services and welfare provision; between evidence and strongly-felt public concerns; and above all, between principle and political reality.

It is unsurprising then that progressive politicians in the UK have tended to be rather quiet on immigration in recent years. These are genuinely difficult conflicts, with no easy answers. Progressive politicians also see public views moving further away from them on the issue, and would rather avoid being forced into a choice between saying something unpopular, or saying something they don't believe. This is understandable, but there are strong reasons, both principled and pragmatic, why progressives should be actively engaging with the issue of migration, and with the reality of people's views on it.

The pragmatic reason is that immigration is likely to remain important in UK politics for the next few years at least. Public concern about immigration has risen across the developed world, but particularly in the UK. The most significant change in public opinion has been in intensity rather than preference: the majority has always had a preference for less immigration; what has changed is how intense that preference is. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, although most people preferred less immigration, in surveys which asked them about the top issues facing the country, immigration rarely featured. By contrast, since 2000, immigration has never dropped out of the top five. Occasionally it has been first, and often second or third. (It is currently fourth and second according to IpsosMORI and YouGov respectively).²

The proportion of people citing immigration as one of the top issues facing the country has fallen somewhat since 2008. However, this shift appears to reflect the rise in concern about the economy and unemployment, rather than any independent diminution of concern about immigration. And in fact, rising concern about the economy and unemployment are likely to keep concerns about immigration at a high level, even at the same time as they overtake immigration as the top issue.

The strong implication of all this is that public concern is unlikely to fall for the foreseeable future. So all politicians have a pragmatic reason to engage with the issue.

But there are principled reasons why progressive politicians *in particular* must engage with migration policy and politics. The first is that immigration can be a deeply divisive as well as emotive issue. The consequence of progressive politicians' silence on the issue is that there has been a vacuum at the centre of the public and political debate. This has too often meant that the most prominent voices are extreme ones. Progressive politicians have an obligation to try to set out a position on immigration that can secure mainstream support and ensure that extremist parties are marginalised.

1 Although the public and political debate is dominated by immigration, policy needs to consider both immigration and emigration, as well as 'net migration' (the balance of the two). In this paper, we generally refer to immigration in the context of the political/public debate and migration in the context of the policy debate.

2 Latest IpsosMORI data is available here: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2905/Issues-Index-2012-onwards.aspx?view=wide>; latest YouGov data is available here: http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/xua1xq9dw7/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Issues2-051212.pdf

The second principled reason for progressive politicians to engage with the migration issue is that it raises genuinely important and difficult questions about both political values and public policy. Perhaps because the public and political debate about immigration is often heated and emotive, it is sometimes suggested by progressive voices that the issue is purely one of better communication or management of public opinion. This is a mistake. It is true that changing the nature of the public and political debate is both important in and of itself, and a separate task from sorting out migration policy. But the danger of focusing exclusively or primarily on communication or public opinion is that we can lose sight of the fact that there are serious and substantive issues at stake: migration to the UK has been at historically high levels for the last decade, a trend that has significant consequences for wide-ranging areas of public policy, for our economy and for society.

Nor can we rely on technical or managerial policy fixes: more effective policy and institutions are important (as we argue below), but not enough. There are ‘win-wins’ in migration policy, and they should be identified and pursued wherever possible, but it is important to recognise that some of the tensions and trade-offs which progressives (and the public) feel with respect to migration are real and inescapable. Policy decisions bring benefits of one kind and costs of a different kind which cannot be easily traded off against each other, or bring gains to one group but losses to another.

It is the job of democratic politics to deal with these tensions and trade-offs, but too often they have been glossed over or ignored. In a well-functioning democratic system, public and political debate can produce a mainstream consensus or accommodation even on controversial and difficult questions like migration, including when those questions involve making trade-offs between the interests of different groups in society. And it is only such a consensus or accommodation that can provide the basis for stable and effective policy responses.

This paper aims to provide some of the foundations for the new mainstream consensus that we believe is sorely needed. We hope that many of those who participate in the UK’s migration debate, at all levels, will be able to support some if not all of the principles we set out below, and that this can provide a starting point for more productive discussions about policy, a more positive political debate, and ultimately a more open and balanced public conversation about migration.

Achieving a principled framework for migration policy

The purpose of this paper is not to revisit fundamental ethical or philosophical debates about migration, human rights, or the nature of political community. This is not to deny the importance of these debates. As the world changes and mobility increases, it is important that political philosophers and others continue to think about how to balance the rights and needs of individuals and communities, and indeed how political or national communities are formed and defined. It is essential that human rights theorists work towards an account of human rights related to migration (and in particular those fleeing persecution) that can provide the basis for a stable international legal regime. But for the purposes of this paper, those debates must remain in the background.³

For progressives who believe that politicians and policymakers have no alternative but to engage with the reality of people’s views on immigration (as we do), the challenge is how to incorporate this sense of realism into an approach which is still distinctively progressive;

3 For a good summary of the wider issues, see Carens 2010.

which does not give in to the prevailing political and media negativity about immigration; and does not opt out of value judgements in favour of a purely managerial approach.

Our ‘principles’ are not foundational philosophical positions (although we necessarily have to take positions on some of the big philosophical issues), but rather axioms that could guide a realistic but values-based approach to policymaking, and suggest tests that could be applied to judge the success of migration policy from a progressive perspective. We set out ten broad ‘principles’ for migration policy (which is defined broadly to include measures taken in response to migration as well as measures to control it). Some are distinctively progressive; others we hope anyone who believes in democratic and responsible policymaking would happily sign up to. Together, they represent a framework for thinking about migration policy in a principled, progressive, and coherent manner.

It is often unclear in public and political debates about migration what the implied ‘counterfactual’ is. This applies to those who object to a particular *level* of immigration or net migration – for example, it is incumbent upon those who object strongly to recent levels of net migration to analyse the consequences of the policy changes that would be necessary to achieve a radically different level. It also applies to those who object to a particular *model* of migration policy – those who argue that all or most restrictions on migration are unjustifiable in economic or human rights terms, for example, must analyse the consequences of the levels of migration that would result from a radically different approach. Participants in public and political debates about migration are often reluctant to set out these counterfactuals, so the discussion continues at cross purposes: ‘pro-migration’ actors focus on models of migration policy but are unwilling to engage in serious discussions about the migration levels that would result, while ‘anti-migration’ actors focus on migration levels and are unwilling to engage in serious discussions around the policy required to achieve them.

In this paper we are primarily talking about principles and tests for migration policies, rather than for any particular level of migration. So the question should be whether a particular set of policies satisfies the framework set out here, not whether more (or less) migration would do so. However, we are clear both that any analysis of the effects of policies must (of course) involve an assessment of their impact on migration flows, and that the pace and scale of migration matters for both policy and politics (as we argue below).

A fair and democratic migration policy must also consider the different impacts of migration on different parts of the UK, which means that, to some extent, the principles set out below need to be considered at local and regional as well as a national level. A given scale or type of migration, or a given migration policy, can have very different effects on different regions. Opponents of immigration tend to focus on the projected impact of immigration on the national population, referring to the UK as a ‘crowded island’. But many parts of the UK are neither crowded, nor indeed experiencing high immigration. Equally, pro-migration voices often focus on the remarkably positive attitudes to migration in London, neglecting the more mixed picture in some other areas.

A final preliminary question is to what extent we should apply these principles and metrics not just to migration policy as a whole but also to different types of migration. The political right (including current Conservative ministers) are generally happy to talk about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigration, but those on the left have often felt uncomfortable about this – fearing that it might shade off into ethnic or even racial discrimination – and as a consequence have preferred to keep the conversation at the level of immigration as a whole.

While this caution is understandable, particularly when it comes to identifying immigration from particular countries or parts of the world, it does make sense to disaggregate the discussion at least into the main immigration routes: EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA (considered not as a geographical or ethnic distinction, but based on the fundamentally different place they have in UK migration policy for as long as we remain members of the EU); and work, study, family, and asylum-seekers and refugees.⁴ To the extent that migration in the UK reflects migration policy, it is perfectly legitimate to ask, for example, how migrants arriving via different immigration routes affect the UK's economy, fiscal position, or public services. It is not necessary (or possible) that each and every migration route should meet all the principles set out below, but it is important to be clear (and transparent) about the reasons for policy decisions on different migration routes, as well as to demonstrate that overall migration policy lives up to the principles we propose below.

Finally, we should emphasise that the aim of this paper is not to set out rules which will always give a final answer on any given question of policy; indeed, our first principle states that such questions must be seen as inherently open to argument and debate as part of a healthy democracy.

⁴ Asylum/refugee flows should be treated somewhat separately to other migration flows, and assessments of asylum/refugee policy should be primarily based on justice rather than impacts on the UK (see below) but it is important to be clear about the (unique) principles and tests that should apply in this area.

FOUNDATIONS FOR FAIR AND DEMOCRATIC MIGRATION POLICY

DEMOCRACY, THE RULE OF LAW, AND COMPETENT ADMINISTRATION

Our first four principles set out the basic political, legal and institutional conditions for a fair and democratic migration policy.

Principle 1: Establish clear democratic accountability for migration policy

The first principle follows from the centrality of immigration to our politics, as discussed above. Arguments over migration cannot be left to ‘experts’ – government officials, technocrats, academics, judges (or thinktanks!) – but must be shaped through democratic debate and choice. It is essential to accept the fundamentally political nature of the issue and engage with the reality of current public opinion.

Some see this as an abdication of responsibility: they argue that political leaders should try to lead public opinion into a less negative position, rather than accepting its current position as a constraint on which policies are politically possible. They urge political leaders to challenge people’s beliefs and views. They worry that talk of ‘realism’ about public opinion on immigration will open the door to populist policies that might be damaging, discriminatory or even racist.

We agree that political leadership on immigration is important, and we are not arguing for a populist approach to migration policy, or one which is simply passive in the face of existing opinion, but rather for a democratic approach which engages with public views but is realistic about how far they are likely to change.

In fact, we are more optimistic about people’s views and attitudes than many of those who worry that engaging with current public opinion is dangerous. We believe that most people in the UK recognise the benefits that immigration brings, that most communities are welcoming to migrants, and that British people are generally respectful of the hard work and contribution of migrants. Public concerns about immigration are real and serious, but in most cases they stem not from racism or extremism, but from concerns about fairness, government competence or simply about the pace of change in the economy and labour market, and in local communities. Our view is that it would be disastrous for progressive politicians to start the conversation with the public by telling them they are wrong; but that over time it is possible (though not easy) to build political and public consensus and confidence around a migration policy for the UK that remains recognisably progressive.

There is evidence for this cautious optimism: more detailed recent surveys and past qualitative research by IPPR suggest that public attitudes to immigration are more complex than standard surveys can suggest, and that in the right context, there is scope for a more positive public debate.⁵ But there is no denying that overall public attitudes to immigration are largely and increasingly negative. These attitudes are often based on inaccurate beliefs. (For example, people consistently estimate the number of UK residents born overseas as more than twice as high as it is.⁶ People also worry about the effects on schools of large numbers of children of migrants, when the evidence suggests that both their results, and those of the schools they are in, are better than average⁷.)

Responsible politicians and policymakers have an obligation to challenge views, and certainly to avoid reinforcing them, where they are based on false beliefs and/or have damaging consequences. But they also have to be realistic about the extent to which

5 See Blinder 2011

6 See Transatlantic Trends 2011

7 See Portes 2012

some attitudes are highly emotive, and very resistant to challenge. Progressives need to think about imaginative ways of engaging with people's views on immigration, rather than seeming to lecture them, or hoping to bypass democratic debate through managerial or legalistic approaches.

A true commitment to democratic accountability means that democracy should determine the questions, as well as the answers. When Labour seemed out of touch on immigration in government, it was as much that they seemed to be asking the wrong questions, never mind the answers. For example, for most of its period in government Labour refused to take any position on the question of how many migrants it thought the UK needed or could cope with. This stance might have been respectable as economic theory, but clearly failed the test of democracy, since that was the question people wanted answered. It was a reasonable question (see below). Similarly, Labour persisted in framing the debate exclusively at the level of the impact on the economy overall, when people's concerns were increasingly focused on the impact on specific sectors or groups. Finally, Labour appeared much readier to ask questions about the economic effects of migration, than questions about the effects of migration on our culture and way of life, even when it was clear that the public felt both sets of questions were important.

Democratic accountability means promoting and supporting democratic debate on questions of relative priorities. These are the kind of questions that will be discussed throughout this paper: for example, how should we weigh up the public desire to cut low-paid, low-skilled immigration, against public reluctance to pay more for certain areas of public services which rely on low-paid, low-skilled immigration, such as social care? Similarly, democratic accountability means promoting rather than avoiding debate on the differential impact of migration on different groups: London versus other parts of the UK, heavy users of public services versus lighter users, higher and lower earners and so on. These trade-offs should be rendered explicit, confronted and debated – based on evidence rather than anecdote. Different groups will bring different values and preferences to the debate, and simple resolution will not always be possible, but we should be able to agree on the nature of the trade-offs, and the evidence.

As well as questions about how benefits to one group should be traded off against costs to another, or how economic benefits should be traded off against social costs, democratic accountability means debating the relative priority of migration against other issues or objectives: in foreign policy, welfare policy, human rights policy, housing policy, and so on. For example, could widespread public concern about immigration levels be a sufficient reason for the UK to change its position on further expansion of the EU? Some will argue that this would be an obvious error, a case of letting the 'tail' of migration policy wag the dog of foreign or European policy. We may decide, after a proper democratic debate, that this is indeed the case. But simply assuming it must be so – an assumption that was previously shared across all the main political parties, not just Labour – is an example of precisely the kind of 'elite' attitude which has alienated so many voters in the immigration debate.

None of this is to say that migration policy should be populist, or that a progressive government should not sometimes take unpopular decisions in this area. Rather we are arguing for an open and accountable migration politics in which politicians and policymakers are realistic about public opinion but also confident enough to engage with it and to challenge it where appropriate; to communicate clearly their own objectives, policies and positions to the public; and to stand ready to be held accountable for those decisions by the electorate. We believe that a fair and democratic migration policy

formulated according to the principles set out in this paper could, through this kind of debate, secure mainstream political support, though it will be far from easy.

Finally, democratic accountability in migration policy also means looking beyond the national political and public debate, and beyond the ballot box. Progressive policymakers, politicians and other stakeholders should seek out practical ways in which ordinary people can be informed and involved in decisions about migration at the local level. That could include employers working more openly and effectively with local communities and services when they are considering employing migrant workers. It might mean local authorities informing and engaging with local residents around decisions about where to house asylum-seekers. The objective should be to make migration part of everyday democracy, as well as the national political debate.

Principle 2: Ensure that migration policy and its implementation are governed by the rule of law

The second principle of a fair and democratic migration policy is that it should be governed by the rule of law. Most people, across the political spectrum, take this as read, but it is worth briefly setting out what it means, and why it is important.

The first point is that migration policy must be governed by the rule of law in order for the principle of democratic accountability set out above to be meaningful. There is little point in a democratic debate about migration policy if policies are not then decided and implemented consistently and fairly.

The most basic starting point for this discussion is to recognise the right of legitimate governments to make immigration rules. This may sound self-evident, but it is important to reject explicitly the arguments of those who argue that immigration restrictions are either immoral or inconsistent with progressive politics. In the case of a democratic nation state like the UK, which is bound together by a sense of common identity and national community as well as by its democratic politics, it is not controversial, for the vast majority of people, to assert that it has the right to limit and control the ability of outsiders to enter. This does not mean it has an absolute, unfettered right to choose who may enter (on which more below); and indeed it may decide to waive some elements of this right on a systematic basis (as do all states who join the EU, for example). But ultimately (and to a very large extent) it has the right to set its own immigration rules.

Anyone who accepts that legitimate governments have a right to make immigration rules must also accept that they have a right to enforce them. Indeed, they have not only a right but a duty to enforce them consistently and fairly: people have a reasonable expectation that the rules will be enforced, on themselves and on others. In relation to migration policy, this means that governments should aim to reduce illegal and irregular migration; but also that they should try to design all their policies and rules in such a way that they can reasonably be delivered in practice, and create institutions that are effective in so doing (although there are important limitations to their ability to do this – see below).

The second point is that the rule of law provides an important protection against the kinds of populism that make some progressives nervous about democratic policymaking in this area. The principle that migration must be governed by the rule of law places significant constraints on governments: policy, rules, and their implementation and enforcement must be fair, consistent and transparent in order to be governed by the rule of law as understood in democratic countries like the UK.

Finally, while international law is not directly analogous to UK law, we believe that it should be a central objective of migration policy that the UK upholds its international obligations, particularly in relation to asylum-seekers and refugees; and also that the UK government should play an influential and constructive role at both European and international levels in helping to make the European and international legal and policy frameworks governing migration fairer and more effective. Migration is essentially an international phenomenon, and requires an international as well as national policy response.

Principle 3: Put human rights and equality at the heart of policymaking

Beyond the basic requirement that migration be governed by the rule of law, progressives should be particularly concerned to ensure that migration policy is consistent with the human rights of migrants. Much of the discussion in this paper is about weighing the costs and benefits of migration; that is, accepting that costs in one area can be traded off against benefits in another. But there are ‘red lines’: migration policy must respect fundamental human rights, even if doing so reduces the net benefits that migration brings to the UK.

Interpreting this principle is not always straightforward. For example, there is a fundamental human right to protection from torture, persecution, and slavery; the UK has an asylum policy designed to recognise and act on this right. However, progressives should recognise that it is a legitimate objective of policy, not only to ensure that those who do qualify under this policy should receive protection, but also to ensure that those who do not qualify have their applications rejected, and to enforce those decisions by removing failed asylum-seekers from the country. Migrants who are ‘in contravention of immigration rules’ (including failed asylum-seekers) may well be making a positive contribution to the UK – often working in jobs which are hard, sometimes dangerous, and badly paid – and may be valued members of their local community, but this cannot justify ignoring the responsibility of government to enforce the law. Migration rules should themselves be fair and consistent, but once decisions have been made it is entirely legitimate (and indeed desirable) for government to enforce them, as long as such enforcement does not abuse migrants’ rights.

Some argue or imply that the rights of refugees trump all these considerations: that although discouraging and rejecting unfounded asylum applications are in principle legitimate objectives, if there is any risk of even a single genuine refugee being turned away, the policy cannot be enforced. This is a coherent position, but not self-evidently true. A less demanding view, and one which is more likely to secure broad agreement, is as follows. Some parts of migration policy (in particular the asylum system) should be designed specifically to secure migrants’ fundamental human rights. No part of migration policy should be designed in such a way as to require, encourage, or tolerate the abuse of migrants’ fundamental human rights (or anyone else’s): this has particular implications for the enforcement and removal regime, for example. But no migration policy can guarantee the rights of all migrants. The importance of the issues at stake means that great care should be taken, something which clearly has not always been true of immigration decisions in the UK in recent years. And progressive politicians and policymakers should confront honestly and openly the very difficult issues that a commitment to both human rights and the rule of law raises in practice, particularly when enforcing immigration rules and removing people from the country.

At the same time, campaigners on migration and asylum should recognise that for migration policy to be stable and effective, and fair in the broadest sense, it must respect fundamental human rights and the rule of law, but must also be grounded in democratic

politics. All participants in the debate should take care not to conceive of these principles in a way that makes them seem inherently opposed: the commitment to respecting human rights and to democracy are foundational principles that all sides of the debate should be able to sign up to.

Beyond considerations of fundamental human rights (which apply in particular to the asylum system and to the enforcement of immigration rules), migration policy should be designed to reduce the tendency for migrants' wider rights to be flouted in the UK. This includes, for example, workplace rights: all migrant workers, not just those here illegally, are potentially vulnerable to exploitation, including being paid less than the minimum wage, or enduring unacceptable working conditions. This is an inherent risk when people are unfamiliar with the rules. The visa and work permit system, including the inspection regime, can and should be designed to minimize this, and wider regulatory systems should take greater account of the specific issues associated with migration.

It is also important that migration policy is consistent with wider legal and policy frameworks designed both to secure equality before the law, and to promote broader definitions of equality. On one level, the very notion of immigration control rests on a form of discrimination (on the grounds of nationality). This must be honestly and straightforwardly accepted by anyone who does not believe in completely open borders, and accepts the right of legitimate governments to exercise some control over their immigration rules (see above), but policymakers should ensure that migration policy is in all other respects based on the principle that everyone, regardless of nationality, country of birth, or ethnicity should be entitled to equality before the law.

Progressives must also go further than this: the broader progressive commitment to fight unfair discrimination wherever it exists, and to create the economic and social conditions that allow everyone in the UK to fulfil their full potential regardless of background, must also extend to migrants.

None of this is to say that migrants (and particularly newly arrived or short-term migrants) need necessarily have exactly the same *entitlements* as the settled population. It may be quite legitimate and indeed desirable for migration policy to provide privileges for the settled population, or for citizens, that are not available to migrants. This may be for reasons of fairness (for example with regard to a welfare system to which settled residents have 'paid in'), as well part of gaining democratic acceptance.

Principle 4: Focus on delivery and competence – for its own sake, and for public confidence

We argued above that governments must have the right to make and enforce immigration rules, and will argue below that progressive policymakers must also consider a wider range of policies to respond to migration. But designing the right or best rules and policies is only part of the challenge: they must then be implemented. Too little attention has been devoted to ensuring that rules and policies are enforceable in practice, and backed up with institutions and delivery mechanisms that work. Progressive policymakers and politicians must have the resolve to follow through on their decisions, even when that is practically or politically challenging.

It should, of course, be obvious that any government, not only a progressive one, should care about competence. But this is particularly relevant in the context of the UK migration debate: a significant part of the distrust felt by many members of the public

on immigration is based on a perception that successive governments have been incompetent. It is worth highlighting four challenges in particular.

First, effective migration policy needs to be based on accurate and timely data, and good quality evidence. There are substantial challenges even on the most basic level of data about migration flows to and from the UK. Ongoing improvements to migration statistics and the rollout of the e-Borders system will help, but more can and must be done. Better data on inflows and outflows should be used as the basis for the development of a much more detailed evidence base about the impact of migration on the UK. Data alone will not answer all policy questions. As we made clear above, such decisions must be made via a political process of democratic debate and negotiation, which brings in objectives, values and principles as well as data. However, data and evidence about those aspects of migration that can be measured provides an important underpinning for a healthier and ultimately more useful political debate (for example, we should devote more time to debating the biggest and most urgent problems rather than those which are exaggerated), and makes an important contribution to the process of democratic accountability.

Second, the institutions tasked with delivering migration policy must be competent and effective. Many of the UK Home Office's critics and even one serving home secretary have described its immigration functions as 'not fit for purpose'. The Coalition government came to power promising to address this as a matter of urgency, but despite this – and despite a new policy framework which is simpler and should therefore be easier to apply – damaging reports of incompetent administration have continued to emerge.⁸ A fair and democratic migration policy needs institutions that are better than merely 'fit for purpose' to deliver on the ambitious and complex agenda set out in this paper.

Third, and related to this, it is essential that migration policy is consistent and coherent with wider policy frameworks and that migration institutions act in ways that are consistent and coherent with other parts of government. As we argue below, migration's impacts are complex, and a progressive migration policy should be ambitious about managing them to increase the net benefits for the country as a whole, while managing impacts on inequality and vulnerable groups. This can only be achieved if migration policy is integrated with other areas of policy. Similarly, migration has the potential to affect progressive objectives and policies in a range of areas, and decisions about migration should be taken in that light. The coordination of migration-related policies across different departments of government was a clear failing under the last Labour administration, and the signs are that this problem has not been resolved under the Coalition, either at ministerial, cabinet committee, or official level.

Finally, it is important to note again that many aspects of migration policy require successful cooperation at the international level. The UK government needs to engage effectively and strategically with European and international institutions in order to achieve its own domestic objectives (as well as, we would argue, as a responsible member of the international system). For example, without European and international cooperation, the UK's efforts to manage its asylum system or to reduce irregular migration will be at best partially successful.

⁸ Including a number of reports from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, see <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/>.

PROGRESSIVE OBJECTIVES FOR MIGRATION POLICY

COSTS, BENEFITS AND DISTRIBUTIONAL EFFECTS

The four principles set out above describe the foundations for a fair and democratic migration policy, but they do not say a great deal about what migration policy should be aiming to achieve (beyond a few very specific parts of immigration policy, in particular asylum). We hope that politicians and policymakers from all sides of the political debate would be able to support these foundation principles; they should be regarded as the basic ‘rules of engagement’.⁹ Beyond this though, there is plenty of scope for legitimate debate among different mainstream perspectives. This section attempts to set out what we believe should be the basic tenets of a *progressive* migration policy. This account of the objectives of migration policy should be debated against alternative objectives (for example to reduce net migration to a particular level) that we believe to be legitimate but inferior.

The objectives of migration policy under the last Labour government were sometimes unclear, or were left implicit, rather than being made explicit. This made effective policymaking difficult, and led to unclear public messaging. In contrast, the Coalition government (or at least the Conservative part of it) has been very clear that the primary objective of their migration policy is to reduce net migration to less than 100,000 a year. This objective is, in our view, the wrong one, and has led to a number of bad policy decisions. However, it has the advantage of providing a clear test by which policy proposals can be judged, and is easily communicated to the general public (and indeed to parliamentarians, journalists and officials inside government). If progressives are successfully to make a different case to the public we must start with an equally clear (although unlikely to be equally simple) account of what migration policy is seeking to achieve.

Principle 5: Measure what can be measured – policy should aim to increase net economic and fiscal benefits

Migration policy should be designed with the objective of increasing the benefits of migration, and reducing the costs, for the country as a whole. This can sound so obvious as to be hardly worth saying, but in fact this broad objective is either explicitly or implicitly rejected by many of the key players in the current debate. For example, the government’s current approach to migration policy reduces any consideration of the costs and benefits of migration to a secondary objective, well behind the primary objective of reducing net migration to less than 100,000 a year. The previous Labour government did base at least some aspects of migration policy on a broad objective of economic benefit, but lacked a coherent account of exactly how this was defined. This was highly problematic, but on closer inspection is understandable: defining and measuring the benefits and costs, and indeed defining ‘for the country as a whole’, is not as straightforward as it seems.

Economists can (and sometimes do) put a price on anything. In theory, it would be possible to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis of migration. Analysts could ascribe economic values to non-economic impacts of migration to allow an assessment of the trade-offs that decision-makers might face. They could try to assign a monetary value to the costs of poor community cohesion, for example, or the unease which some feel about the pace of change; or the cultural as well as economic benefits of diversity; and putting all these factors together with more straightforwardly economic costs and benefits, they could try to come up with a number to describe the total net benefit or cost to the UK of migration.

⁹ This is not to say that all mainstream politicians and policymakers do, in practice, abide by these principles. Our hope is that this paper can make a small contribution towards encouraging this!

We don't believe that such an approach would be helpful. Many of the benefits and costs of migration are extremely hard to quantify, particularly in the medium to long term, and in many cases the data simply does not exist to make accurate estimations. There is also a strong argument for saying that some of the different costs and benefits are genuinely incommensurable. Assigning a numerical cost to a reduction in community cohesion, for example, and trading it off against economic benefits, would be unlikely to reassure many of those who care most about this (even assuming it was possible to do in any rigorous fashion). Moreover, seeking to condense the many different aspects of migration policy into a single number would suppress rather than inform democratic debate.

Analysis of the costs and benefits of migration should be focused on those factors that can be measured and analysed sensibly in this way. A cost-benefit analysis is an important contribution to democratic debate, but can only play that role if it is widely trusted and accepted, and that is far more likely if it is restricted to economic and fiscal questions. Even then, the experts who carry out the cost-benefit analysis, whether inside government or independent, should be careful not to over-claim for it. It will never be possible to calibrate migration policy precisely to maximise the net economic or fiscal benefit, in part because the impacts of migration are too complex to measure and model accurately, and in part because governments simply don't have the kind of control over immigration that would be needed to maximise the net benefit even in a world of perfect information. However, and with these caveats in mind, economic benefits and costs are clearly of vital importance, and progressive policymakers should make the best use they can of available evidence and analysis, to form a clear account of how the successes or failures of migration policy might be judged.

Taking this as our starting point, we need to define how a sensible economic objective for migration policy should be framed. Pro-migration voices – and Labour when in government – have been inclined to measure the economic benefits in terms of the contribution migration makes to GDP or (another way of putting the same point) to economic growth. Mainstream opinion has recently shifted against this metric on the grounds that it is too crude, and too easy to satisfy, especially after the publication of an influential report by the House of Lords economic committee in 2008.¹⁰

In the simplest terms, migration can contribute to total GDP growth in three ways: by increasing population, by increasing average employment rates, or by increasing average productivity (and thus wages). The House of Lords committee objected to the total GDP metric on the grounds that if migrants had a lower than average employment rate, or lower than average wages/productivity, or both, they could add to GDP (by increasing population) without increasing GDP per head. In this scenario, they argued, there would be little benefit to the previously resident population (although there would probably still be benefits to migrants themselves). Some go further and argue that positive net migration will *by definition* increase GDP (by increasing population) and that therefore this metric is essentially meaningless.

These objections to making total GDP growth the main economic objective of migration policy are perfectly valid, and we agree that the 'total GDP test' is too easy to satisfy. However, it is worth noting that, in retrospect, 2008 was an ironic moment for these objections suddenly to be seen as decisive: this turning point in the debate occurred at exactly the moment when contribution to GDP (as distinct from GDP per head) was about to become *more* important. Given that the UK is now in recession, has entered an

¹⁰ House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs 2008

extended period of deficit reduction, and hopes to reduce debt stocks, there is a case for thinking that over the next few years at least we should favour immigration which increases GDP even if it does so merely by increasing population, since that will help reduce the burden of debt *even if it does not increase GDP per head*. It is also important to note, particularly at a time of recession, that there are economic risks associated with shrinking populations: economic contraction caused by population decline can have the same kind of negative multiplier effects as economic contractions caused by declining GDP per capita. Nevertheless, we accept that *in the long term*, contribution to total GDP growth is too crude to be the central economic objective of migration policy.

Another relevant question, if we are seeking to estimate the benefits and costs of migration ‘for the country as a whole’, relates to how we define the UK’s population for these purposes. If the right test is whether migration policy brings net benefits for the previously resident population, then we would need to refine the metric further, since even migration that increases GDP per head does not necessarily benefit the previously resident population. Migration can increase GDP per head either by increasing the employment rate, or by increasing productivity (and thus wages). But in either case, benefits may still accrue entirely to migrants themselves: average employment rates or productivity can be increased if migrants have a higher-than-average employment rate or productivity, without creating benefits for the previously resident population.¹¹

Based on some of these concerns, the House of Lords economic committee and the Migration Advisory Committee have both recommended that migration policy should be tested according to whether the resulting scale or type of migration increases *GDP per head among the existing population*.¹² Their argument is that it is hardly surprising if immigration benefits immigrants themselves – otherwise they wouldn’t come – so the only interesting question is whether it benefits everyone else.

Only counting the ‘existing population’ may not be as easy in practice as it sounds: would it include all people (including migrants) who have been in the country for a certain period, and if so how long? Would it depend on their intention or probability of staying? What about their children?

Leaving aside these practical questions, the principled argument for confining ourselves to the existing population may not be as powerful or obvious as its proponents believe. As an analogy, consider how we would think about policy relating to other long-term demographic factors, including ageing and fertility. We might think about how current trends in ageing and fertility are likely to affect GDP per head, and how we might adjust policy to offset any negative effects, or reinforce any positive effects. But we would not confine ourselves to asking only about the effects on those who are currently here, or currently alive. In the case of fertility in particular, leaving future residents out of the policy discussion would seem bizarre as well as unreasonable. It is at least arguable that in relation to migration too, policy should be developed on the basis of the effects that it will have on our society as a whole, rather than only looking at how it will affect those who are already here.

11 Though it is worth noting that with any kind of redistributive system of tax and spending, such migrants would probably be net contributors to the public purse, which would tend to generate economic benefits for the resident population (see below).

12 Strictly, the MAC favours ‘resident output’, because they regard this as identical to output per head of the resident population, since for these purposes, the resident population is fixed.

There is also a risk that the benefits of migration for migrants are ignored by both sending countries ('emigrants don't count') and receiving countries ('immigrants don't count'). While it is indeed unsurprising that migration benefits those who participate in it, that is still a good thing, and it should feature in the policy debate somewhere.

Moreover, if the point of all these metrics is to inform democratic debate and choice, then there is a sense in which there is already a 'check' in the system to ensure that policy is decided in the interests of current settled residents. In a democracy, it is current settled residents, not future migrants – and indeed nor recent immigrants, who usually don't have a vote in national elections – who get to register their preference between a number of possible migration policies. It is not obvious that there is any need to build in a further bias in favour of current settled residents by stipulating that benefits to migrants should be excluded from the debate.

On balance, we believe that it makes sense to establish GDP per capita – for society as a whole, not excluding recent immigrants or future citizens, whether migrants or those born here – as the key metric of overall economic impact of migration, although policymakers should also consider the distribution of benefits between migrants and the previously resident population, as they should other distributional questions (see below).

There is also a different and better way to guard against a scenario in which the benefits of migration are entirely captured by migrants: by focusing on median income rather than GDP per capita. This is a better approach in part because median metrics better reflect what the public understand as 'the average', but also because a median income metric is less likely to hide important 'compositional' effects. For example, using a mean GDP metric could lead to a government favouring migration policies which add merely some very rich immigrants to the population, dragging up the mean without actually benefiting those on average incomes. This is not the kind of migration that progressives should obviously welcome, other than to the extent that these rich immigrants make a contribution to tax revenues or generate wider economic activity (and these positive impacts would in any case be captured by a median income or median disposable income metric, or by a supplementary assessment of fiscal impacts – see below).

Median metrics are not immune to compositional effects: the addition of new immigrants will shift the median to some extent, even if there is no effect on the previously resident population. However, this effect would likely be small, both because migrants make up a small proportion of the total population, and because they are spread across the income distribution. In practice, migration on the scale seen in the UK would only have a significant impact on median incomes through affecting the incomes of the previously resident population, and in particular if it affected the incomes of those on average wages.

Whichever metric we use, the economic impacts of migration (on GDP, or GDP per head, or median income) should be considered alongside the net *fiscal* impact: that is, the benefit of migrants' tax contributions, set against the cost in terms of their use of benefits and public services. Economic benefit and fiscal benefit are closely related, but distinct: for example, an EU migrant who has full access to public services and benefits may make the same economic contribution as a non-EU migrant who is not entitled to access the same services and benefits, but might therefore make less of a net fiscal contribution.

The net fiscal benefit should in turn be considered alongside a wider concept, that of the overall net impact on public services. This includes the fiscal impact of migrants as contributors to those services (through tax contributions) and as users of those services,

but also goes wider than simple cost: for example, it includes the uneven distribution of added demand, which may add to queues or reduce quality, as well as increasing cost. It also includes their role as workers in public services (for example, around a third of health professionals in the UK were born abroad).

One final and important question which is relevant to all these discussions of economic and fiscal benefits and costs is whether we take a short-term view, or a snapshot at a particular moment, or instead attempt to consider benefits and costs over a longer time horizon. The latter brings in to consideration what happens when migrants age, and have children who then become economic contributors in their own right. (Many of these children will be born here and so are not usually classified as migrants themselves). Too often, both supporters and opponents of immigration have tended to be short-termist about its benefits and costs, in ways that reinforce their prior beliefs.

Supporters cite migrants' positive short-term effect on the ratio of working age people to dependents, but often disregard the costs incurred when migrants themselves age; while opponents emphasise the costs or 'burden' of migrants' children on the state (in terms of education and health), but leave out the fact that those children will themselves grow up to be contributors. A longer-term perspective is useful as it exposes both these selective arguments. It brings in the contributions migrants' children make across their lifetimes, as well as the costs they impose in their childhood, but also the costs that settled migrants (along with all other residents) will impose when they age, as well as other factors. Indeed, so many and varied are the factors involved in taking a longer-term view that economists tend to argue that a complete modelling of the long-term dynamic effects of migration is almost impossible. But even if we cannot hope to make a truly comprehensive long-term cost-benefit calculation, the more we can incorporate long-term and dynamic effects into the way we think and talk about migration, the better.

Despite all the complexities discussed in this section, there is value in having a relatively simple single metric to assess the overall economic benefits and costs of a given migration policy. It is impossible to try to synthesise all the different economic aspects into this single metric: there is incommensurability even within economic aspects, let alone across economic and social or cultural aspects, and condensing them all into a single economic assessment would obscure more than it illuminates. The value of a single economic metric is not that it captures everything important about the economics of migration, but that it measures something that matters, is factual rather than anecdotal, and is simple enough to inform a wide debate. We just need to be clear about its limitations.

In this context, it seems that the best single economic metric is that of the effect of migration on median income (not GDP per head) for the country as a whole (not just those previously resident; that is, including rather than excluding immigrants). This can be combined, where relevant, with supplementary metrics focusing on the net fiscal effects of migration, and on the net impact of migration on public services.

Principle 6: Take account of what is less easily measured but equally crucial – cultural and social costs and benefits

Any principle or framework which is confined to economic and fiscal benefits and costs, even if it is clear about its limitations and the reason for them – 'measure what can be measured' – will fail to satisfy those whose primary concerns about immigration are social or cultural. It may even alienate them further. Of course, social and cultural benefits and costs are even harder to define and measure than economic factors, but that does not make them less important.

Many of those who are most concerned about immigration explain this concern by saying that immigration is threatening their way of life, or the national way of life. The first thing to note here is that our 'way of life' is under threat from many other aspects of modernity, perhaps to a greater extent than immigration. For example, internal mobility within the country, including of those born here, has many of the same effects in terms of loosening people's sense of connection to a place. Moreover, the permeation of our way of life by international influences occurs through many other channels besides immigration, including modern communications, the influence of multinational corporations, and so on. Nevertheless, immigration is a contributing factor, and this is a genuine concern, which progressives should not ignore, or leave to conservatives to worry about.

On the other side of the debate, many people would argue (and we would agree) that the UK has gained significant social and cultural benefits from migration, as the celebration of the UK as a diverse, multicultural and welcoming country during the Olympics showed. These days, most people – including many of those who would like to see immigration reduced – accept that it does have social and cultural benefits, as well as costs, and that managing migration levels can be a trade-off between these social and cultural benefits and costs.

Both supporters and opponents of migration should accept that evidence, rather than gut instinct, should determine where this trade-off should be struck, even if what counts as 'evidence' in the social and cultural sphere is more contentious than in economic matters. Supporters of migration must also confront the possibility that its social and cultural benefits may display diminishing returns. The benefits of the first stages of 'opening up' a society to outside influences are enormous (as is clear from looking at the cultural as well as economic stagnation of truly 'closed' societies throughout history) but the cultural and social benefits to increasing an already high level of immigration by an extra 50,000, for example, are less clear, even if the economic benefits continued at a linear rate. Even those who are sure that the social and cultural effects on the UK thus far have been clearly net positive must accept that there is some level of immigration after which the social and cultural impacts would become negative, and perhaps negative enough to outweigh other (including economic) benefits that migration might bring. So all sides of the debate should be able to agree on the shape of the question: that there are social and cultural benefits as well as costs, that the benefits may be diminishing and the costs increasing as levels of immigration increase, and that it is a matter for empirical study rather than gut assertion whether or when the UK (or parts of the UK) have reached that point. It is also a matter for empirical study whether, as seems likely, this 'tipping point' is susceptible to being changed through policy – whether there are new ways to manage migration that can make its net social benefits more positive across the range – or indeed if there are more radical approaches (with respect to migration, or communities, or both) that can change this dynamic more fundamentally.

What does it mean in practice to say that the social and cultural debate about migration should be based on evidence? The cultural and social impacts (whether negative or positive) of migration can seem to be inherently qualitative rather than quantitative concepts, and at least in some cases inherently subjective rather than objective. If migration undermines a sense of identity, for example, that is an inherently subjective effect. However, these features do not mean that evidence-based policymakers should ignore social and cultural effects. How people feel (that is, the subjective impacts of migration, including its effects on people's sense of national identity or their sense of connection to place) can be very important to wellbeing and other important trends, as well as being an important driver of the immigration debate itself.

Progressive politicians and policymakers should be no less concerned than conservatives with ensuring that everyone is able to participate in a rich and rewarding social, communal and cultural life, based on successful and cohesive communities; they should therefore take a close interest in how migration affects this, including through its effects on people's attitudes, while at the same time noting that the way migration affects attitudes is itself subject to change rather than being an immutable dynamic.

We should be realistic about the prospects of accurately measuring the social and cultural impacts of migration, but policymakers and politicians should seek out evidence that goes beyond the anecdotal in order to define social and cultural objectives for migration policy. The most straightforward approach would be to measure wellbeing directly – not least since wider government policy seems to be heading in this direction – and use longitudinal survey data to assess the impact of migration.

Another way to anchor a policy discussion about the social and cultural impacts of migration would be to use a concept like social capital which is fairly well understood by social scientists (if not the general public). If migration does directly reduce (or increase) social capital, this is a social impact that is reasonably easy to define and measure. Another approach is to identify a specific social problem, like segregation – different communities living 'parallel lives' – and try to understand the extent to which a certain level or type of migration is inherently rather than merely accidentally associated with this problem. In all these approaches, it is important to control for socio-economic factors: for example, it may appear that there is a correlation between areas of high inward migration and poor or worsening cohesion or social capital, but it might be that economic deprivation is the real driver of cohesion levels in these areas. It is also important to identify those areas of high inward migration which have performed better in terms of cohesion or social capital, and try to understand what – other than socio-economic factors – explains that: for example, whether some local approaches to integration or housing policy have produced better social and cultural outcomes at similar levels of migration.

Progressive politicians and policymakers should be realistic, but also ambitious and optimistic, about the social and cultural impacts of migration. The objective should be to increase the benefits, and identify new approaches which can mitigate the costs, while being realistic about the fact that some social and cultural costs, both real and perceived, are inevitable, particularly above a certain level of migration (nationally or locally), and may at some point become decisive in setting policy. This means paying attention to the difficult question of measuring social and cultural impacts, while accepting that making good policy in this area, always using evidence where it can, will in the end be more an art than a science.

Principle 7: Remember that distribution matters – avoid policies which exacerbate inequality, and manage the impacts of migration on vulnerable groups and communities

A key limitation of all the metrics discussed so far is their lack of sensitivity to distributional considerations. This has been a common feature of the economic debate about migration, which is too often blind to questions of distribution and inequality. At the extreme, economists demonstrate simply that free movement of people (like goods or capital) generates an overall economic benefit, and don't concern themselves with the distribution of gains and losses that make up that net benefit. Even more moderate economic proponents of migration tend to focus on absolute gains: some argue that so long as nobody is worse off, migration which brings an overall economic benefit should be

welcomed. So, the argument runs, if a migrant worker earns more working in an unskilled job for the minimum wage in the UK than she does working in a skilled job in her home country, she benefits from the move; and as long as no previous UK resident loses out as a result, the move should be welcomed.

But progressives think that inequality matters. Although the focus on median income proposed above would help to ensure that migration policy delivers benefits for those on average incomes, it does not tell us anything about the effects on inequality. A fair migration policy must do better than this. So our next principle is that migration policy should be designed to reduce inequality, or at least not to increase inequality without very good reason. It should also be designed to promote social mobility; or again, not to hinder social mobility without very good reason.

The extent to which recent migration to the UK might have reinforced wider trends towards polarisation in the income distribution in recent years, with the richest growing much richer while average and lower incomes stagnated, should have given progressives pause for thought. Of course, migration policy was far from the only policy pursued during this period for reasons of overall economic benefit, while having questionable effects on inequality. Nevertheless, if this principle had been clarified ten or fifteen years ago, it might have prompted a more careful attitude by progressives towards migration policy.

Migration can affect inequality both via compositional effects, caused by the fact that migrants are not distributed across the income distribution in the same way as the existing resident population, and via distributional effects, caused by the fact that the costs and benefits of migration are not spread evenly across the previously resident population. As with the economic metrics discussed above, some argue we should ignore the compositional effects on the basis that only migrants themselves are affected. Again we disagree; indeed, the arguments for including migrants themselves in any discussion of inequality are even stronger than elsewhere.

We know that inequality and relative incomes have real impacts on wellbeing. A migrant worker working for the minimum wage may be better off in the UK than at home, in absolute terms, but she may find herself at the very bottom of the economic and social 'heap', unable to engage with the rest of society, and may be less happy for it. Similarly, the previously resident population might be negatively affected if inequality in the UK is increased by the arrival of low-paid migrants (for example, if communities become less cohesive), even if their absolute economic position has not changed. The arrival of very rich migrants in the UK, increasing inequality at the other end of the spectrum, might also have negative consequences for the previously resident population.

So compositional effects matter when we think about migration and inequality. Even more important though, is the fact that the costs and benefits of migration for the previously resident population are not evenly distributed. Those who recognise the economic benefits of migration are often accused of neglecting the negative effects of migration on poorer people in the UK. This accusation is often based on misunderstanding (for example, the misapprehension that a migrant who finds work must always be displacing a resident worker¹³), but there is some evidence that migration has had negative effects on wages and employment for low-skilled/paid workers (both UK-born, and previous migrants), although the effects are small.¹⁴ Progressives should take seriously the fact that the

13 The so-called 'lump of labour fallacy', on which see more below.

14 For a summary of the evidence, see Migration Advisory Committee 2012.

distribution of costs and benefits of migration in the UK has not been even, and may have increased economic inequality. A fair migration policy must ask not just how much we benefit from migration, but ‘who benefits?’

It is important that migration policy also takes a dynamic view of the impact on inequality, considering social mobility as well as inequality at any given time. Again, the impact on social mobility can be compositional (if migrants are on average more or less socially mobile than the previously resident population), or due to the substantive effects of migration on the previously resident population. And as elsewhere we believe it makes sense to consider both.

Opponents of migration often argue that it reduces social mobility, as migrants take up scarce opportunities to climb the socio-economic scale. But this is another version of the ‘lump of labour’ fallacy which sees newcomers as competing for a fixed number of jobs, or opportunities, ignoring the possibility that they might increase the pool of jobs or opportunities available (see below).

At the same time, some supporters of migration are guilty of exaggerating its positive effects on social mobility, by measuring the socio-economic distance migrants have travelled from their position in their country of origin, to their new position in the UK. This conflates the normal concept of social mobility, which applies in one country or society, with a different concept of ‘global social mobility’. It is one of the merits of migration that it gives opportunities to people from other countries; and as such we can say that it contributes to ‘global social mobility’. But in terms of measuring its effects on social mobility in the UK as that is ordinarily understood, we should measure how far migrants are upwardly mobile relative to their first established position here. This is still likely to be very positive, because of some typical characteristics of migrants; it is unnecessary and counterproductive for supporters of migration to look as if they are trying to exaggerate it.

It is also important to note that migration can affect the distribution of resources via fiscal impacts as well as through the labour market. Some migrants are (significant) net contributors to the public purse, while some are net recipients of public funds or public services. Short-term migrants also have very different fiscal ‘profiles’ to the UK-born population, or long-settled migrants. The balance between these groups over time can increase or decrease the resources available to the government to redistribute wealth (between income groups, or regions, or in other ways). It is also the case that the nature of the UK’s tax and spend system has a bearing on how migration affects inequality: a more progressive system of redistributive taxation would go some way to assuage concerns that the arrival of very wealthy migrants would increase inequality, for example.

Migration policy is unlikely to ever form a significant element of a wider policy package aimed at reducing inequality in the UK; this would be an indirect approach at best. But a fair migration policy must give real weight to distributional concerns, and try to ensure that migration does not add to inequality and, if possible, coheres with a broader approach which attempts to reduce it.

Beyond a general concern with inequality, a fair migration policy should also be designed to avoid any negative effects which migration might have on the poorest and most vulnerable groups, or groups which society (through democratic debate) deems worthy of protection. If these effects cannot be avoided, policies should be designed to mitigate their impact, or ensure the groups concerned are compensated in some way.

In many people's minds, the most important negative effect of immigration will be the effects on the unemployed, especially in the current economic climate. This 'common-sense' view sees immigration and employment as a zero-sum game: since migrants compete for jobs with residents, then higher immigration must mean fewer jobs for those already here. Economists reject this view, described as the 'lump of labour fallacy'. It relies for its plausibility on the asymmetry between the visible negative effect of a migrant getting a job over a resident, and the invisible positive effects of, first, the extra spending by the employed migrant adding to UK demand, and second, migration increasing productivity in the economy, both of which would tend to increase economic output and thus the number of jobs to go around.

All other things being equal, immigration could be expected to bring just enough demand into the country to enable immigrants to be employed without any overall negative effect on the employment of those already here.¹⁵ But all other things are not equal: in particular, the direct effects of increased competition may be concentrated on some sub-sets of the labour force, while the indirect positive effects of increased demand are more broadly distributed. For example, it should be a concern to progressives if the negative effects of competition were concentrated on young job seekers, at a time when youth unemployment is becoming a chronic problem for independent reasons.¹⁶

A different kind of potential effect on economically vulnerable groups, one where the evidence is more supportive of the 'common-sense' view, is that immigration depresses wages among the lower paid. This is an example of the kind of effect which is missed by many of the broader economic metrics discussed above, since the negative effect on the wages of lower-paid workers can be offset by a positive effect on the wages of higher-paid workers, and so not affect GDP per capita (or even median incomes).

Median real wages stagnated after 2002. There is no evidence that this was primarily, or even significantly caused by migration: the best economic evidence shows only small wage effects of migration on low-skilled workers, in some sectors more than others. It does seem plausible that the high levels of immigration in the decade running up to 2008, resulting in part from a relatively liberal immigration policy, may have reduced the incentive which employers would otherwise have had during a period of economic growth to increase pay (or invest more in training). What is certainly true is that progressives should have been far quicker to take seriously the possibility that, in some areas or some sectors, immigration was exacerbating the wider problem with real wages, and if so, to examine how that could be mitigated.

Beyond the economically vulnerable groups of the unemployed and low paid workers in certain sectors, migration may have negative impacts on vulnerable communities in particular geographical locations. For example, if housing (or particular types of housing) is in short supply in a particular area, migration might have negative impacts on vulnerable families by increasing rents. Similarly, rapid migration or population 'churn' might have negative impacts on communities already struggling with multiple problems.

15 We are grateful to Ian Preston of CREAM for this formulation.

16 See the recent report of the Migration Advisory Committee 2012. It generated a great deal of comment in virtue of being the first officially sanctioned report to find any statistical link between immigration and employment. But a more sensible interpretation of its results is that it confirms the very limited nature of any such link: the relation was weak, only related to some types of immigration, in particular only short term, and only in periods of economic downturn (see Cavanagh 2012).

A migration policy that seeks to reduce or mitigate negative impacts on vulnerable groups need not and should not mean a migration policy held hostage by special interests. It means a migration policy that is mindful of effects on vulnerable or high priority groups, and which is joined up with other areas of policy which affect them.

In the labour market examples given above, even if the negative impacts of migration on specific vulnerable groups were clearly demonstrated, it seems unlikely that changes in migration policy would be the most effective way to help them. Assuming that the wider economic effects of immigration remain positive, a more effective way of mitigating the effects on vulnerable groups would be to offer direct support to young job seekers or the long-term unemployed (for example via the provision of a jobs and training guarantee, as IPPR has argued elsewhere) and to intervene in the labour market to increase pay or to require or encourage employers to provide more training, job security and career progression. Similarly, if housing problems or community cohesion issues in certain areas are exacerbated by migration, the best solution will often be through housing policy or wider interventions in 'community resilience'. Proposing policies outside the immigration system is not to deny the negative effects of migration on some groups, it is simply a recognition that other policies may be a more effective response. However, if for whatever reason those other policy solutions are not available, this could provide progressives with a reason to change their position on migration policy.

Principle 8: Look beyond the UK – seek to increase net benefits in developing countries

The final principle in this section on objectives is that the UK's migration policy should consider impacts on the home countries of migrants from the developing world. For progressives, a migration policy that recognises the benefits of offering migration opportunities to individuals in developing countries should be made coherent with a development policy that seeks to better the lot of the majority who remain.

The difficulty with this principle is that, while the benefits of migration to people from developing countries are clear, the impacts on countries of origin are less clear, and often contested. To the extent that this issue is discussed at all in the UK migration debate, it is usually in terms of 'brain drain', in which migration to the UK is seen as robbing countries of origin of the skills and talents they need to succeed. Although this is no doubt true for some countries and in some circumstances, this may be another case of falsely assuming that migration is a 'zero sum game' (our gain must be somebody else's loss). In fact, the same migration flows can bring economic benefits to both sending and receiving countries. Evidence suggests that on balance migration has brought huge benefits to developing countries, as shown by IPPR's recent 'Development on the Move' research (among others).¹⁷

However, not all migration brings benefits to developing countries, and some is actively harmful to development. The UK should take steps both to increase the benefits to developing countries (for example by encouraging circular migration in order to increase knowledge and skills transfers, and investment and remittances) and to reduce the costs (for example by ensuring that active recruitment of health workers is not carried out in a way that damages developing country health systems).

It is unrealistic to think that increasing the benefits of migration for developing countries will ever be the primary objective of UK migration policy (nor should it be). However, where

¹⁷ See Chappell et al 2010

benefits to developing countries can be increased without negative consequences for the UK, a progressive migration policy should aim to do so. Where the interests of the UK and developing countries of origin are not aligned, those trade-offs should be identified, transparently discussed and debated, and steps taken to reduce the costs to developing countries (something that can often be done without sacrificing much benefit to the UK).

REALISM ABOUT OUTCOMES

MIGRATION NUMBERS, AND THE LIMITS OF MIGRATION POLICY AND POLITICS

The eight principles outlined above set out the foundations of a fair and democratic migration policy, and the objectives that we believe should shape a progressive version of such a policy. However, there is a risk that an approach to migration policy that focuses too much on objectives and aspirations, particularly when these are defined broadly to include a wide range of measures, loses touch with the core metric that concerns the public: how policy affects migration flows. There is equally a need for politicians and policymakers to be realistic about the degree to which they can affect migration flows. A good migration policy must be not only democratically accountable, but also workable.

Principle 9: Accept that numbers matter – the pace and pattern of migration flows are important

We are clear that setting a numerical target or objective for migration policy is unhelpful. This does not, of course, mean that we are in favour of open borders or uncontrolled migration. Indeed, the discussion above is premised on the idea that the government can and should manage and control migration. More than this, though, a fair and democratic migration policy must recognise that numbers do matter. It is not enough to set the migration rules and then take no view on the pace and pattern of migration flows that result. Even those who believe that migration has generally been a good thing for the UK should accept that this does not mean that more migration would be even better: both costs and benefits are non-linear.

All sides of the immigration debate, including progressives, should agree that (as we argued above) accurate and timely data on the scale, nature and pattern of migration flows are vital to that debate, both on policy and politics; and should agree that this is something the UK currently lacks, and that this should be rectified as soon as possible.

As we have already made clear, total overall inflow or outflow are not the only numbers that matter: the pace and pattern of migration are also important. As noted above, it seems likely that above a certain level or speed, the net cultural and social impacts of migration are almost certain to be negative, simply because there are limits to the pace of change that can be managed successfully by communities and societies. To some extent, the same logic can also be applied to migration's economic and fiscal and public service impacts: there must be a level of migration after which adjustment costs and congestion outweigh economic benefits, at least in the short to medium term.

So why then do we reject the government's net migration target? The first reason is that, from the point of view of both the economic and social or cultural arguments discussed above, national net migration is simply not a good metric to target. If immigration of 10 million a year was matched by emigration of 10 million a year then net migration would be zero, but the effects of the resulting population 'churn' would very likely be negative. Similarly, if London received net international migration of one million and Scotland received net international emigration of one million in the same year, then net migration would be zero but the consequences for both London and Scotland would likely be negative.

A single overall net migration figure can also hide massive differences across different migration routes: for example falling work migration offset by rising family migration. Student migration – most of which is temporary – can inflate short term net migration figures, giving a misleading picture of longer-term trends, and creating a perverse incentive to clamp down on what is one of the most economically beneficial, and least

controversial, categories of immigration.¹⁸ Politicians and policymakers need a much more complex and nuanced picture of the pace and pattern of migration, across the different routes, than a simple net migration figure allows.

Second and more importantly, the reason that numbers matter is because they change the effects of migration on the economy, the public finances and services, communities and UK society. This is essentially because those impacts are non-linear (if the impact of 50,000 migrants is net positive, that does not guarantee that the impact of 100,000 will be twice as positive, or even net positive at all). But the net migration target is an ineffective means of managing these impacts. Our argument is that a migration policy based around the principles set out above must also and necessarily be based on a clear understanding of how the policy would feed through into actual migration flows. Progressive politicians and policymakers should be unafraid to argue that the pace of migration is too rapid (or too slow), and to act accordingly. Indeed, this has arguably been the case in the UK (or in parts of the UK) in the years since 2004.

Third, the ability and capacity of the UK to manage migration flows successfully is contingent on a range of changeable factors – the nature and state of the economy, the structure of public services, the geography and social position of communities – that make it even less sensible to focus migration policy on a single number. Besides their sheer variety, many of these factors are, from the point of policymakers, endogenous, so the ability and capacity of the UK to manage migration flows can be affected in important ways by public policy. Change policy in certain ways, and the ‘right’ number for migration policy would go up or down.

We are not suggesting that it should be an objective of policy to equip the UK to cope with ever higher levels of migration (although some realism is needed about global trends – see below), although in general we believe that a dynamic, open, tolerant and socially just country will be able to manage (and benefit from) a higher level of migration than a backward-looking, closed, intolerant and socially-unjust one. An optimistic progressive vision for the UK can more easily accommodate reasonable and realistic levels of migration than the pessimistic and regressive vision implicit in the account of many migration sceptics: both ‘migration pessimism’ and ‘migration optimism’ can be, to an extent, self-fulfilling.

Principle 10: Be realistic – understand what governments can and can’t control, and don’t make promises that can’t be kept

Having accepted that numbers are important and that progressives should sometimes act to slow (or speed up, or change) migration flows, it is also important to recognise that the policy debate must reflect a realistic sense of how much power government actually has to do this.

Even with effective and competent implementation and administration, some policies are simply unworkable. Policy changes do have a real influence, and so does the way policy is implemented. However, other factors have an equally strong (or stronger) influence: global migration trends and flows, political factors elsewhere in the world, economic factors both elsewhere and at home, social and cultural factors, and history. And yet people on all sides of the UK migration debate often suggest or imply that migration is determined solely by immigration policy. Anti-migration campaign groups place all the blame for rising immigration on government policy; governments encourage this by

¹⁸ See Cavanagh and Glennie 2012

implying that their policies allow them to select precisely how many, or what kind, of migrants they allow into the country.¹⁹ This picture bears little resemblance to reality.

An example is the big increase in asylum claims around the turn of the millennium. The UK media and political debate tended to present this as a uniquely British crisis; in fact it was part of a wider European and global trend. Policy decisions, along with other factors, were relevant to the way the crisis unfolded, and to the way it was eventually brought under control. But in terms of why and how the crisis started, policy decisions were marginal relative to other factors. The other obvious example is increased migration from within the EEA after 2004: the UK media and political parties (including Labour after 2010) present this as if it was entirely a result of the UK government decision not to impose 'transitional controls'. In fact, the impact of this decision, while undoubtedly significant in the short term, is in danger of being exaggerated at the expense of a wider discussion about the underlying drivers of migration within the EEA, which will remain outside UK government control for as long as we remain members of the European Union.

More broadly, the reasons why the UK is an attractive destination for migrants – either asylum-seekers or economic migrants – include factors entirely beyond any government's control, including our history and the global role of the English language, as well as factors like the state of our economy, our flexible labour market, and the rule of law. None of these are things that any government would want to change for the sake of the effect on migration.

A more realistic sense of how much power government has to control migration flows would help break the vicious circle of politicians over-promising and under-delivering, a dynamic which at present undermines public trust in politics and government, and risks feeding alienation and resentment among those who are most concerned about immigration. As an illustration, recent surveys suggest that around three quarters of the population approve of the Conservatives' pledge to cut net migration to the 'tens of thousands', but an equally strong majority don't trust them to deliver on it.²⁰ There is clearly a risk that the net migration target, which was set in part to send a message that government can control migration if it puts its mind to it, will have exactly the opposite effect if the target is missed or proves to be unsustainable.

A more realistic debate about the practicality of 'control' of migration would also enable the public to confront some of the real trade-offs involved in migration policy. An example is border security, where there is a fairly straightforward set of trade-offs involving spending (staff levels and technology), passenger convenience (including queue times), and security (including the level of checks). In opposition, politicians often prefer not to acknowledge these trade-offs, choosing instead to imply that any problem at the borders is entirely down to incompetence or lack of political will. One of the questions facing progressive politicians (and Labour in particular at the moment) in opposition is how far they enjoy their turn to exploit the same kinds of stories at the government's expense. While this is tempting, a more strategic, as well as more progressive approach would be to offer to cooperate with the government in building a more realistic narrative, one which forces people to confront the real trade-offs that exist between control, convenience, and cost.

19 It is true that the opposite argument is also sometimes heard: some, on both the 'anti' and 'pro' sides of the debate, argue that government policy has no real effect on migration at all. This is clearly not true, particularly in the short to medium term. But the fact that the debate includes both participants who assume that government has total control of migration and others who assume that it has none is one of the reasons why it often fails to get anywhere.

20 See Kellner 2012

So migration policy should be based on a realistic assessment of the degree of control that government can have over migration, and migration politics should be based on communicating that same assessment to the public; resisting the temptation to make unachievable promises or commitments, or to score short-term political points at the expense of building a healthier public debate. Which brings us back to where we started, with a plea for a better migration politics, as a vital step on the way to producing better policy.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has set out 10 principles that we believe could provide the basis for a UK migration policy that is fair, democratic, progressive, and workable.

Foundations for a fair and democratic migration policy

- Establish clear democratic accountability for migration policy
- Ensure that migration policy and its implementation are governed by the rule of law
- Put human rights and equality at the heart of policymaking
- Focus on delivery and competence – for its own sake, and for public confidence.

Progressive objectives for migration policy

- Measure what can be measured – policy should aim to increase net economic and fiscal benefits
- Take account of what is less easily measured, but still crucial – cultural and social costs and benefits
- Remember that distribution matters – avoid policies which exacerbate inequality, and manage the impacts of migration on vulnerable groups and communities
- Look beyond the UK – seek to increase net benefits in developing countries.

Realism about outcomes

- Accept that numbers matter – the pace and pattern of migration flows are important
- Be realistic – understand what governments can and can't control, and don't make promises that can't be kept.

As we emphasised at the outset, it has not been our objective to set out rules which will always give a final answer on any given question of policy. Indeed, there will sometimes be unavoidable tensions between the principles proposed here: migration policies that are necessary to secure or protect the rights of migrants may reduce the economic benefits of migration, while migration policies that would increase economic and fiscal benefits may impose social or cultural costs, or disadvantage vulnerable groups, or increase inequality, and so on.

Aside from some issues that should be 'red lines' for progressives (including some human rights issues), we have also made clear that the process of designing and implementing a new migration policy for the UK will be a matter of democratic debate and choice, and in many cases, choosing what position to adopt in the face of a number of trade-offs. Ultimately, the importance of democratic accountability means that such questions must be seen as inherently open to argument and debate, as part of a healthy democracy. The principles outlined in this paper are intended to inform that debate, and to provide progressive politicians and policymakers with a framework that can be applied to policies to assess the extent to which they meet progressive values.

IPPR will set out its own proposals for a fair and democratic migration policy for the UK in the coming months, based on the principles set out in this paper. In keeping with our first principle, those proposals, like this paper, should be seen as a contribution to the wider democratic debate about migration.

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