

Why immigration is an economic and human rights issue
Submitted by [Vaughan Jones](#) on 13 April 2010 - 12:35am.

In what amounts to a less than subtle clue to the way in which politicians and the media have been constructing the public 'debate' on migration, Labour's new manifesto has a large section entitled: "Crime and Immigration".

As if the two somehow belong together by default.

It declares: "We understand people's concerns about immigration – about whether it will undermine their wages or job prospects, or put pressure on public services or housing – and we have acted. Asylum claims are down to the levels of the early 1990s and net inward migration has fallen. We will use our new Australian style points-based system to ensure that as growth returns we see rising employment and wages, not rising immigration – but we reject the arbitrary and unworkable Tory quota."

There will also be an "English Language Test" for all public sector employees, we are promised.

Contrary to the popular distortions which the main General Election contenders are colluding in and perpetuating, immigration is an economic and human rights issue.

Crime and Immigration are both the responsibility of the Home Office so it is possible to understand why they are linked together in the manifesto. However, the authors should have been considerably more aware of the impact that will have on the reader.

Many migrants are victims of crime, through those who profit from the trafficking of people and those who exploit their vulnerability. There is no need for 'dog whistles' which attach attributes to people which they do not deserve.

There is a logic and far greater transparency within the points-based system. However, it is based on a philosophy which treats the human being (i.e. the migrant) as a commodity within a 'just in time' supply chain.

Well-intentioned though it be, the points based system lacks the flexibility and capacity for compassion which makes it prone to cause human rights abuses. In turn, these then need correcting through time-consuming and costly legal interventions.

The points system is also too blunt a weapon and is in danger of undermining the social and cultural value of migration by keeping out faith leaders, academics and cultural workers.

No-one denies the importance of English language as the *lingua franca* (so to speak!) of the public sector. It is vital that there are opportunities for people to learn and to improve their English. This does require a new approach to developing communications skills through access and in-service courses in communication skills for people for whom English is not their first language.

It has to be said these skills are also needed by many native speakers who still find it hard to communicate well in their mother tongue. English language tests should not be used to penalise and exclude, but rather as a spur to new investment in up-skilling all workers. It is not easy to learn another language so it will need to be accepted that there will always be some, especially the more vulnerable people, who need to communicate through interpreters.

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