

Why A Broader View is Needed

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Abstract

Political debates about migration in general and immigration in particular, not least in the 2010 General Election campaign and its aftermath, revolve narrowly around two concepts: 'numbers' and 'control'. In this paper, the author shows why a broader view is essential. Situating UK concerns within an assessment of global challenges, it looks at the causes of human displacement and how to address them, attending also to the consequences of migration - including its significant benefits. Climate change, conflict, economic inequalities, community cohesion, and participation are among the 'drivers' highlighted. Concluding with a positive alternative vision of people movements as a renewing factor in society, this paper includes links to further resources and analysis from Ekklesia, and from a range of other NGOs and expert agencies / institutions.

INTRODUCTION: A SHORTSIGHTED DEBATE

It was almost inevitable that migration would creep into (or possibly explode within) the 2010 General Election campaign. The BBC and other media outlets were predicting at the beginning that 'immigration' (it is usually reduced to one component, - rather than the wider phenomenon of migration, signifying the full variety of people movements) would be one of the top issues. Politicians say they hear concerns about it 'on the doorstep' all the time; Gordon Brown's fateful encounter with Gillian Duffy revolved around it; the extremist groups have tried to aggravate the 'issue' (singular) of immigration. Yet polls also suggest that it is by no means the biggest determining factor as to how most people choose to vote.

When they receive attention for their views about immigration, both the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) force all of the mainstream political parties to sound, by degrees, both liberal ('not like them') and tough ('no need to vote for them'). By and large, however, the matter gets tackled on the basis of a suffocating sameness that views it through the dual lens of *numbers* and *controls*. The cigarette paper of a difference between the parties is whether or not the numbers have been 'too high', what the 'optimum number' is, and at what skills level - as required for our economic growth given its fragile condition - the 'numbers' might be added to. The corollary question is then how 'we' can make sure that we keep out 'those people' who desire to come to Britain, but who allegedly do not contribute to the balance of skills and accruable economic benefits.

But if we are truly concerned for the wellbeing of migrants, and for settled populations too, we do not have to engage with 'the immigration debate' on these terms.

In choosing to vote for a party, or to push for political change after the election, we might instead consider a number of other matters which bear heavily upon the migration debate and which put abstract 'numbers' and artificial 'controls' into a much more realistic perspective.

What follows is a brief commentary on the key issues related to migration that have featured in the General Election campaign barely if at all. This is because of a commonly short-sighted view of 'the issue' imposed by a combination of political timidity, lack of bureaucratic room for manoeuvre, tabloid newspaper scaremongering, the constant repetition of 'the numbers game' as the only show in

town, and the popular – but usually ill-defined and questionably researched – perception that ‘most people’ are ‘worried about immigration’ and will view anything short of drastic reductions in ‘the numbers’ as ‘soft’.

Christians, people of other faith and those of good faith have a duty and an opportunity, born out of their own experience and concern, to challenge these stereotyped views which condition the entire ‘mainstream’ debate – and instead to take a necessarily broader view.

1. DEALING WITH THE CAUSES OF DISPLACEMENT

It is essential, first of all, to make a distinction between those who have no alternative but to move to another country and those who are doing so more out of a considered personal choice. So what matters in making this distinction?

(a) **Climate change:** This is a major cause of displacement and will be so for many years to come. However, the patterns of migration resulting from climate change will not be uniform. There will be some sudden and urgent humanitarian disasters, but there will also be the slow and continual erosion of a local or regional ecology that makes the environment in a particular place unsustainable. So in some instances people will be moving away gradually.

It is important that migration is factored into all climate change adaptation strategies. So we do not just need a climate change debate about emissions (important though that is), we also need to know what international contingency plans will be in place for those displaced by climate change in the short, medium and long term. The awareness and discussion about this is only just beginning. Yet it is a massive concern.

(b) **Conflict:** The most effective way of ensuring that refugees do not come to this country or to other countries is to stop the wars which create the refugees in the first place.

Besides reassessing the war in Afghanistan, the new government will need to undertake a defence review. An important issue in and beyond the election should be how to develop a coherent security policy, which protects citizens from danger and at the same time contributes to sustainable and lasting peace.

In the modern world, this requires skills for which traditional armies, navies and air forces are not equipped – like conflict transformation, mediation, civilian intervention, peacemaking and peace-building.

It should also be remembered that most refugees are fleeing low intensity conflicts in which small arms, hand-me-down weapons and drug-induced soldiering are the order of the day. Controlling and eliminating small arms is as important as reducing major weapons systems and nuclear arsenals.

We also require a security system which is based on defending the weak, protecting the human rights of all and enabling broad participation – rather than demonising particular groups. Muslims are not our enemy. They are part of us.

(c) **Economic inequalities:** 'Economic migrants' are much maligned. But the reality is that failing economies force people to move. So do developing economies.

There is no doubt that *diaspora* communities contribute significantly to the development of home countries. Bear in mind that this is true of the United Kingdom as well.

Britons living abroad send more to the home economy in remittances than overseas nationals living here. But trouble-free movement of peoples between countries will only really be possible and mutually beneficial when there is much greater parity between economies.

As long as injustices exist within trade and finance, and global corporate capitalism functions as it does to the benefit of small elites and the hindering or marginalisation of many, then migration will be a fact of life – because livelihoods and economic survival depends upon it.

We are foolish to ignore all this, and to blame those who move, rather than addressing the reasons why it makes sense for them to do so.

2. DEALING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

(a) **Community cohesion:** There are a number of factors which inhibit the effective settlement of new migrants. Migration needs to be factored into local and regional planning, for example.

There are very specific issues for London and other major metropolitan centres. There is a natural gravitation towards these centres from dispersal regions and from areas that employ people in very exploitative and seasonal work.

New forms of accommodation are needed and a better system of recording the number of migrants in a locality between censuses is also required.

Ultimately the issue of cohesion is not an issue of migration. Many areas of high immigration are also very cohesive. However, the issue remains one of equalities and valuing diversity.

Multiculturalism is no longer a fashionable word, but it is a noble and exciting aspiration. The big issue is to how to learn to adapt to populations made up of those who stay, those who go and those who arrive – culturally, socially, economically, politically and spiritually.

Gathering and dispersal will be continuing factors in a 'globalised' environment. People, resources and finance are on the move, all the while we search in different ways and in different geographic and habitation environments for sustainability, security and stability. The overriding task here is human and ethical.

(b) **Participation:** Migration gives an opportunity for renewal of our society and many other societies. Faith groups, among others, are already invigorated by new communities, as are our health service and schools. We should value the participation of new communities in local and political leadership.

The presence of the BNP, UKIP and the English Defence League are anxious, defensive and aggressive throwbacks to an era that has past. We should now be looking forward to building a very different society.

While no one should advocate the displacement or subjection of one culture, faith, community or society by another, the stimulus which migration brings can revitalise and energise depressed communities, if handled well.

To make immigration and emigration work effectively for much-needed societal renewal we need decent leadership and involvement from politicians and civil society. ?Sadly, the 2010 General Election seems by-pass all of these opportunities, as well as the challenges set out above. But this democratic event is but one space in which individuals and civil society groups can steer the country (and what has been a stunted debate) in a new, just, hopeful and energising direction.

3. FURTHER ANALYSIS AND RESOURCES

from Ekklesia

- * News category tag - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/immigration>
- * Busting in the myths about immigration - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/11729>
(Ref: Migration Parliamentary Group; LSE, Home Office; Shelter; OECD; UNHCR; Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration (University College London); Centre for Economic Performance; Department for Work and Pensions (HMG).)
- * Why the 'immigration debate' is so misleading - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/12015> (29 April 2010)
- * Getting real on migration - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10981> (11 January 2010)
- * The BNP, migration and the misuse of Christianity - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10485> (29 October 2009)
- * ONS population figures thwart anti-migrant propagandists - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10132> (28 August 2009)
- * Humanity and justice is 'modern liberty' for Christians - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/8859> (3 March 2009)
- * The migration 'debate' has lost its humanity - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/8059> (25 November 2008)
- * Are immigration controls moral? - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/research/280405immigration> (research paper, 28 April 2005, updated 2009)

from other sources

- * Migration, Equalities and Citizenship – Institute for Public Policy Research (<http://www.ippr.org/research/teams/project.asp?id=945&pid=945>). Papers: Asylum

and Migration Fact Files; EU Enlargement Bulgaria and Romania - migration implications for the UK; Irregular Migration in the UK; Migration and Health in the UK; Asylum in the UK; Labour Migration to the UK; EU Enlargement and Labour Migration; Exploring the Roots of BNP Support (<http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=743>).

* Migration Policy Institute (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>): 'Securing Human Mobility in the Age of Risk: New Challenges for Travel, Migration, and Borders' (April 2010)

* International Migration guide – OneWorld.Net (<http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/migration?gclid=CJC8jtP8saECFQZsIAodinU8Aw>)

* Migration – Carnegie Endowment for Peace (<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/topic/index.cfm?fa=list&id=423&gclid=CK...>)

* Centre on Migration, Policy and Society: COMPAS (<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/>)

* International Migration Policies – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_33931_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

* National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: NCADC (<http://www.ncadc.org.uk/>)

* Bail for Immigration Detainees: BID (<http://www.biduk.org/>)

* Outcry: End Immigration Detention of Children – The Children's Society (http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/all_about_us/how_we_do_it/campaigning2/OutCry!/19866.asp)

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