Environmentally unsustainable migration in the UK

By Rosamund McDougall

This paper showed with clear facts and figures the impact of unsustainable migration levels on UK population growth, and proposed policies to reduce net inward migration. It was written in 2003, with various items updated by the author until 2008. Many of the policies recommended here (from 2003-2006) have become government policy. Net migration continued to climb until 2011. Population growth is also affected by changes in fertility rates and longevity, which have been addressed in other OPT papers. In 2011 the Optimum Population Trust adopted the campaign name Population Matters.

Key points

MINISTERIAL PLEDGE TO CAP POPULATION GROWTH

*OPT welcomes the long overdue reversal of government pro-population growth policies announced on 18 October 2008 by new Immigration Minister Phil Woolas in an interview with The Times: "This government isn’t going to allow the population to go up to 70 million...There has to be a balance between the number of people coming in and the number of people leaving."

*OPT has called for balanced [zero net] migration since 2003, as part of a policy to enable UK population to decrease to a long-term environmentally sustainable level. But on 19 November 2008 new figures from the ONS revealed near-record net inward migration of 237,000, up 46,000 on 2006.

*A population policy is not the same as an immigration policy, but has to include it. A sustainable population policy can be founded on sound long-term environmental, economic and social considerations. OPT’s recommended population policy has the aim of first stabilising UK population, then allowing gradual reduction (by not less than a 0.25% a year) to an environmentally sustainable level. It has three main components:

1. Zero net migration.
2. A reduction in unplanned pregnancies, especially among teenagers.
3. Encouragement to voluntarily ‘stop at two’ children.

ENVIRONMENTALLY UNSUSTAINABLE MIGRATION

In 2003 OPT called for UK population to be stabilised and allowed to decrease gradually to an environmentally sustainable level. As well as voluntary fertility measures, the population policies proposed included zero net (balanced) migration - that annual immigration numbers should be limited to no more than the number of people emigrating.

By autumn 2008, after years of procrastination and against the wishes of the majority of the electorate, it looked as if this policy would be considered by most political parties ahead of the General Election due in 2009 or 2010. A cross-party parliamentary group led by Frank Field MP (Lab) and Nicholas Soames MP (Con) launched its Balanced Migration report on 8 September 2008, calling for immigration to be brought "substantially lower until it is close to the rate of emigration".

This followed a 23 May 2008 House of Commons Treasury Committee report Counting the Population which confirmed flaws in official migration counting methods and suggesting ways of making overall population counting more accurate. On 23 October 2007 the 2006-based population projections released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had projected higher population growth than ever before - nearly 17 million more people (more than two Londons) to 77.2 million in 2050, with the major contribution coming from expected future net migration. How different the impact on our environment would be if action on UK population policy had been taken years ago.

The UK has a history of significant migration flows, both immigration and emigration, but today’s level of inward migration is unlike any witnessed in the last 100 years. A combination of factors, including mass international travel, the globalisation of labour markets, free movement within the European Union, people trafficking, government policy, and the incorporation into UK law of international human rights law, have combined to raise net inward flows to record levels, with environmental consequences that have yet to be properly addressed.

Under the current [2008] government’s migration policy, both gross and net inward migration continue at very high levels, and in spite of legislation to control the flow, there is little sign yet that this trend will significantly reverse.
Figures for the years 1971-2007 below show that half of all net inward migration since 1971 has occurred in the last decade. In the 1950s net natural change accounted for 98% of population change and net migration for only 2%. But with no confirmed policy intent by the government to curb migration, it is now projected, directly and indirectly due to its impact on the birth rate, to account for 70% of population growth from 2006 to 2031.

**UK MIGRATION 1971-2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Net inward migration</th>
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**NB.** The ONS sometimes retrospectively revises migration statistics. **Sources:** see ONS data on International Migration for more information. **Definitions:** An immigrant is defined by the United Nations and the UK government as a person arriving or returning from abroad to take up residence in the UK for a period of at least 12 months. An emigrant is defined as a person who leaves the UK (if it is their country of usual residence) to take up residence in another country for a period of at least 12 months. International migration includes all civilian migration flows to and from all countries outside the UK. Totals in ONS releases do not always reflect component figures due to rounding. Migration figures for several years between 1997 and 2005 were revised in an ONS release of 15 November 2007.

**Note [2012]:** Net migration continued to rise until 2010, when the net inflow during the year reached 252,000 (emigration: 339,000, immigration: 591,000). In 2011 the net inflow declined slightly to 216,000 (emigration: 350,000, immigration: 566,000).
Defining and counting migrants

An immigrant is usually defined as someone who enters a country intending to stay for more than a year, and net annual migration is the number of immigrants who enter in any one year minus the number of emigrants who leave, or vice versa. For many years, migration flows into the UK have been measured by the International Passenger Survey (IPS), a random sample of passengers entering and leaving the UK by air, sea or the Channel Tunnel. This method has been recognised as inadequate, and changes are under way at the newly independent UK Statistics Authority (ONS) which will make the counts more accurate in future. Among the migrants who enter each year are ‘long-term’ migrants planning to stay for more than a year and ‘short-term’ migrants who plan to stay for between one and 12 months. Short-term net migration also continues to grow, reaching 430,000 stays of, on average, 3.7 months in England and Wales in the year to mid-2006.

Net inward migration together with its impact on natural increase, is the main cause of UK population growth now running at some 350,000 a year - adding to the UK a city larger than Cardiff - a capital city - every year. And the spiralling rate of inward migration has consistently been underestimated. The 2006-based population projection, released by the ONS on 23 October 2007, revealed expected population growth of nearly 17 million (more than two Londons) to 77.2 million in 2050, with net inward migration estimated at 190,000 a year for most of that period. This projection suggested substantially higher growth than the ones published in 2004 and 2003 - when assumed future net inward migration was 130,000 a year. In 2006, migration accounted directly for 54% of population growth of 349,000.

Indirectly, migration also contributes to population increase. Partly due to the younger age profile of immigrants, and partly due to differing cultural attitudes to family size, it has tended to raise the birth rate. In the year to mid-2006 21.9% of births in England and Wales (ONS) were to mothers born abroad - confirming the cumulative impact of large-scale immigration. In 1993 births to migrant mothers were less than 10% of the total. Another indicator is the number of non-UK born workers in the workforce: in the first three months of 2008 there were 3.7 million, making up 12.5% of total UK employment (ONS). Since January to March 1997 the increase in UK-born workers has been 1.4 million and the increase in non UK-born workers 1.8 million, 45% and 55% of the total increase respectively.

With net legal immigration projected to continue at between 190,000 and 256,000 a year between 2007 and 2017, estimates of population growth have been substantially revised. Unless action is taken to bring the numbers down, or the growing number of emigrants increases to bring inward and outward flows into balance, UK population is forecast to grow by another 10 million by 2030. And if the latest ONS High Fertility, High Life Expectancy and High Migration projection becomes reality, the UK could be squeezing in 109 million people by 2081.

UK population policy doesn't have to turn its citizens into battery chickens, devastating the country's natural resources and making it more dependent on imports of food and energy from abroad. With zero net migration (equivalent to natural change with balanced inward and outward flows), UK population might have peaked at 64 million in 2036, then gradually decrease to more environmentally sustainable levels.

How did this mass immigration happen?

Net immigration, mainly from outside the European Union, began to rise in 1993-4, after a rare year of balance in 1992-3. More recently flows into the UK have been exacerbated by free movement of labour within the European Union and the UK’s ‘open-door’ policy to the 10 accession countries which joined the EU in May 2004 and January 2007: in the first three months of 2008, there were an estimated 500,000 people from the eight 2004 accession countries working in the UK. Between 1 May 2004 and 31 March 2008 a total 845,000 Eastern Europeans applied for registration on the Workers Registration Scheme, of which 812,000 won initial approval. Applications peaked at 22,000 in July 2007 but in spite of an economic downturn, there were 12,000 applications in March 2008. These inward flows have risen to levels never previously experienced and which cannot continue, in OPT’s view, for the sake of all those now living in the UK, including generations of immigrants, including refugees already accepted as Britons.
In the years 1999-2003, asylum seekers made up a growing and large proportion of total immigration numbers, and an estimated 80% of these proved not to be genuine asylum seekers. The UK has a history of receiving and assimilating immigrants, especially refugees, of which it is rightly proud. The suffering endured by genuine refugees cannot be underestimated, and they can and should be welcomed. Belated government measures reduced the number of asylum seekers to 23,430 in 2007 - less than a third of the peak level in 2002, and there may be scope to increase this number in future if the number of economic migrants is reduced. However, the EU is unlikely to be able to take in a possible 50 million or more environmental refugees expected to be displaced by climate change - the solutions to this are immediate worldwide action to curb global warming and reverse population growth. Europe is already experiencing its own environmental stresses caused by climate change and is overshooting its capacity to regenerate natural resources.

Every country needs to consider its future. A range of environmental and economic factors, including climate change requirements and impacts, energy security and degraded and diminishing natural resources, make it unlikely that the UK will in future be able to support its current numbers. Studies based on ecological footprinting suggest that an environmentally sustainable population for the UK, assuming an equal share of world consumption of renewable resources, might be as low as 17 million. OPT maintains that it would be better for the UK and other countries to consider their environmentally sustainable levels of population and adapt population policies accordingly, alongside other environmental policies.

Government migration policy

The devastating environmental consequences of continuous UK population growth are becoming clear. If it continues, the effects will become worse - continued population growth at the 2000-2006 rate might require the building of some eight million extra homes by 2050. The Home Office UK Border Agency is the government department responsible for controlling migration levels. But neither the Home Office nor any other government department appears to recognise the environmental impacts of continuous population growth, or the significance of its migration component - now projected to account for 70% of future population growth when migrant fertility rates are taken into account as well as annual direct migrant inflows.
Some of those entering the UK are British citizens returning from abroad - themselves previous emigrants - but in 2006, 510,000 immigrants (86%) were non-British citizens. ‘Work-related’ reasons accounted for 40% of inward migration in 2006, and ‘formal study’ for just under 25%, with much of the rest due to family reunion.

The New Labour government’s first moves were to reduce illegal immigration, particularly from surging asylum applications in 2000-2003. There have yet to be explicit policies to reduce legal immigration. On 8 January 2003 the government’s UK Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 came into force. This and subsequent measures were believed necessary to stop widespread abuse of the asylum system, and asylum applications have decreased.

In February 2005 the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke laid out the government’s new detailed strategy for migration (Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain, Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate). The 2004-5 Home Office IND plans were followed by a consultation document Selective Admission: Making Migration Work, whose circulation list did not appear to include any environmental organisations. The Home Office’s revised policy of July 2006, Rebuilding Confidence in our Immigration System, emphasised the strengthening of UK borders with tougher checks abroad; fast-track asylum decisions; and better enforcement of compliance with immigration laws.

The objective was to “boost Britain’s economy by bringing the right skills here from around the world”. A new Border and Immigration Bill was brought before Parliament in the 2006/7 session, however, and in October 2006, OPT was invited for the first time to contribute to stakeholder discussions with the Home Office.

Government strategy on migration continued to focus, however, on ‘managed migration’, filling gaps in the labour market, security, cohesion and social integration, without any consideration of limiting numbers. Nowhere in the Home Office Strategic Plan 2004-8, nor in any subsequent Managed Migration policy publication, was there been any mention of the environmental impacts of constantly rising population density in a crowded country. Neither the independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) nor the Migration Impacts Forum (MIF) set up in 2008 had members representing the nation’s need for environmental sustainability. So net migration inflows, along with permanent settlement, have continued to rise, driving up population growth.

In 2008 the government began to roll out its new “Points-Based” immigration system, but without any commitment to limit numbers. The new system divided potential immigrants into five tiers according to their skills, with easy routes to citizenship for Tier 1 and Tier 2 migrants and no settlement rights for low-skilled workers from outside the EEA. Ministers have consistently ducked OPT’s questions about the government’s apparent pro-population growth policy. But following a cabinet reshuffle in September 2008, new Immigration Minister Phil Woolas gave the first indication that the government may finally accept that “there has to be a limit.”

Adding to the UK’s perpetually rising population

The ONS Mid-2006 based official UK population projection indicated even faster population growth than those published over the three years before. (Historically, population projections have tended to overestimate fertility rates and underestimate mortality changes and migration flows.) These population projections were not underpinned by any clearly stated government target to reduce migration or total population size to genuinely sustainable levels. No overpopulated country can viably reduce its population size without tackling the issues of fertility (see OPT’s Youthquake report) and migration - and the health, employability and productivity of its existing workforce (see Ageing and hidden unemployment).

Excess immigration exacerbates internal flows

UK population growth is causing widespread local population growth and rising densities, and therefore increasing urbanisation. International and internal migration are not, however, areas to which equal treatment can be applied. All nation states have borders, and in order to maintain their independence as sovereign states, they impose border controls and laws governing the numbers of people who can enter for the purpose of settlement. In democratic nation states there are usually no legal restrictions on internal movement and settlement - this is considered one of the freedoms that come with citizenship of a democracy.
Internal migration is a normal and continuous process in the UK for a wide variety of reasons - some people leave rural areas for cities to find jobs and excitement, often southwards from Scotland and the north of England, while others move out to rural areas in search of unspoilt landscapes and tranquillity - but find that less of it remains each year.

By driving up overall population growth and urban development, however, a combination of natural increase and increased immigration has exacerbated internal migration flows in the UK. As cities become overpopulated, city dwellers spill into the suburbs, then have to move into wider commuter belts, then in greater numbers into a dwindling number of rural areas. In doing so they turn the countryside they value into yet more urban sprawl, as separate settlements expand and merge into one another (see Countryside, Development and Housing.)

Regional imbalances are exaggerated by these population flows, and international migration into London, where already one in four people are foreign born, is likely to cause further pressures. England passed the 50 million population threshold in mid-2004 and has been most affected by international and internal migration. Displacement of London's population to surrounding areas is a key factor behind unrelenting urban expansion into the suburbs and countryside. By 2002, the population of rural England (14.1 million) was increasing by 100,000 a year, and has since risen further. Rejuvenation of rural areas can be brought about by small-scale or temporary exchanges of population - large and permanent influx and settlement are not necessary to achieve diversity or innovation. In Scotland, population began to rise again in 2004 after falling to nearly five million. The population of Wales rose by 0.5% in the year to mid-2004 and has grown by about 5% over the last 20 years, with the growth coming mainly from English incomers.

The numbers are still too high

Far from reversing naturally, and in spite of measures to control the illegal component of migration, large inward flows looked set to continue well into 2008, with the possibility that economic recession might stem the flow in 2009. Categories of migrant according to the new points-based system put into action in 2008 are:

- Short-term temporary categories - visitors, business visitors and students;
- Employment categories - work permit holders and a range of permit-free categories;
- Family categories - for marriage or to join parents or children.

For full details of the rules for various categories of migrant admissions to the UK see Home Office UK Border Agency. Here are brief summaries [up to 2008]:

1. Categories of immigrants

Legal immigrants are defined as those who enter the UK with the purpose of staying for more than one year, and who have permission to do so (annual figures are based on the International Passenger Survey).

2. Illegal immigration

All non-EEA citizens who travel to the UK need a valid visa to enter and remain legally in the country, and a normal tourist visa usually lasts for only six months: see UK Visas. But because the UK has abandoned embarkation border controls - checking people out as they leave the UK, no-one knows how many people remain in the UK illegally. Illegal immigrants include: non-working students who have completed their courses and breached visa limits; people who have applied to 'bogus' colleges to acquire visas; other visitors who have outstayed their visas, rejected asylum seekers who have not left the UK; and illegal workers using false identity documentation. It is not known how many illegal immigrants are still present in the UK, but a recent official estimate was some 500,000.
3. Asylum seekers

In 1982, there were just 4,223 asylum claims in the UK. The figures began to rise in the 1990s as international travel became easier, and rose sharply after the incorporation of international human rights legislation into the UK Human Rights Act in 1998, followed by an increase in international people trafficking. Not until 2003 did applications begin to fall from their peak of 80,130 in 2002. Permanent settlement rights were modified from 1 April 2003, with Exceptional Leave to Remain being replaced by Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave, and in 2007, following stricter enforcement of asylum rules by the Home Office, applications (excluding dependants) were down to 23,430, with removals of failed asylum seekers at 63,140. Including dependants, however, there was a 14% rise in applications in the first three months of 2008 compared with the same period in 2007. As a component of a population policy aimed at stabilising UK population and allowing gradual decrease, a choice can be made between welcoming more asylum seekers and fewer economic migrants and whether to restrict the flow of workers from the European Economic Area (EEA) or from outside the EEA, or from both. [Note: For statistics on the numbers and distribution of asylum seekers within the EU, see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.]

4. Legal immigration: students

There are several categories of legal immigrant, including legitimate students, immigrant workers with bona fide short-term work permits, and genuine asylum seekers whose claims have been accepted. Home Office estimates suggested (2005) that up to 5,000 illegal immigrants a year were entering the UK by enrolling at universities without intending to study, but this may have been reduced by checks and other measures since introduced, including a new visa category of 'Student Visitor' (from 1 September 2007) for students who come to the UK to join courses lasting no more than six months.

Legal student immigration, however, looks set to continue to rise, mainly because the government has set no limits to legal migration from the EU/EEA and because non-EEA overseas students bring in higher fees for UK universities than British students do. Students must intend to leave the UK when they have completed their studies, except for those who complete a UK degree who are allowed to stay on for a year to work without getting a work permit. Student au pairs fall into a separate category, since they come to the UK for a maximum of two years to combine household help with children with study, and are usually accommodated in existing family homes. In 2007 an estimated 358,000 non-EEA students were admitted to the UK in 2007, 16% more than in the previous year.

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Source: UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). These figures do not include enrolments at further education institutions, language schools and secondary schools. Figures for student emigration not available.
The effect of rising student inflows on long-term population growth depends on the extent to which they are able to remain in and/or work in the UK, and the extent to which they intermarry with UK citizens and become permanent settlers. The recent expansion in student numbers has already contributed to actual and projected population growth, and an increase in the number of non-UK students taking up citizenship or settlement rights after graduation would cause even greater population growth. No estimate of the environmental and economic costs of such expansion - including greater pressure on land prices, housing and infrastructure, and higher demand for imported energy - has yet been made. Some universities are already expanding building development on green belt land. Financial benefits have accrued to universities and their employees, but the environmental costs of large-scale expansion will have to be met by all UK taxpayers. There have also been generous grants of extensions to stay for international students in the UK - to nearly 100% of students from certain countries in 2001-2003, compared with only 2% of foreign students in the USA seeking extensions to stay in that period.

5. Legal immigration: settlement rights and citizenship

On 14 July 2008 the government published a draft Immigration and Citizenship Bill, but, as expected, did not say whether its aim was to reduce migration and settlement levels. The number of people allowed to settle indefinitely in the UK, excluding European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, doubled from below 60,000 in 1997 to 124,855 in 2007. Of the 2007 total, employment-related grants of settlement were 41% lower at 37,210 in 2007 than in 2005 - reflecting a change in the qualifying period for settlement from four to five years in all employment-related categories in April 2006. This level of settlement, and the number of settlers who are granted citizenship, is one of the main components of migration-related population growth.

Citizenship of the UK brings the right to permanent settlement for individuals and all their descendants in perpetuity, granting benefits that generations of Britons of all backgrounds have worked for, yet until recently citizenship has been given away (with few exceptions) as if it were worthless. By January-March 2008 there were 3.7 million non UK born workers in the UK - 12.5% of total employment. Migrants needed to work in the UK for only four years to become eligible for automatic settlement rights (in April 2006 this was extended to five years, and the new points-based immigration system for has curbed settlement rights for low-skilled workers). So the granting of citizenship has been increasing steadily and shows little sign of abating in spite of the tougher qualifications and fees imposed by the government in 2005-7 which led to a fall in applications from nearly a quarter of million in 2005 to 160,980 in 2007. In 1997 only 37,010 British citizenships were granted. Ten years later, in 2007, resulting from years of high inward migration flows, a record 164,635 people were granted citizenship, with 53% granted to people already resident in the UK, 18% due to marriage, and 25% to children.

[Graph showing British Citizenship applications and grants from 1997 to 2007]
6. Legal immigration: work permits

The number of work permit holders and their dependents being granted entry to the UK by the government has also been growing steadily. In 1998, 68,385 immigrant work permit holders and their dependants were granted entry to the UK. In 2004, a total 181,432 (4,204 training and work-based + 16,858 sector-based + 160,370 business and commercial work permits) were issued, more than double the 1998 figure. (These are issued to non-EU citizens, excluding dependents).

[Source: Worker Registration Scheme and Work Permit figures published, Home Office, 22 Feb 2005]. By enabling more economic migrants to gain work permits, bring in dependants and extend their stay or remain permanently in the UK, these trends increase the certainty of further population growth.

7. The 'perpetual spiral' labour effect of excess immigration

Far from solving labour market requirements, excess immigration appears to have made them worse - by increasing the base population requiring services for which there may already be an inadequate supply of labour. If more people enter than leave, and the inflow is excessive, a perpetual spiral of demand for further immigration can be created. Population growth of about 250,000 a year from 2001-2004 has not solved the 'problems' of skills shortages. It has instead created additional demand for goods and services which employers claim they need to import yet more labour to satisfy.

Back door population growth

Some visas or work permits are issued for categories of work which encourage cultural exchange (for example student schemes and au pairs). Work permits are also issued to fill gaps in the labour market - particularly in high-skilled areas where it takes years to train a new recruit, and in international companies where diverse linguistic talent or cultural knowledge are vital. If these migrant exchanges are very specifically targeted at skills gaps and the overall migration numbers are (numerically) balanced, they need not increase population pressure on the environment.

The government views levels of migration as a matter to be dealt with mainly by market forces, with 'no obvious upper limits' to inward migration. Once granted, however, citizenship is an open-ended commitment, valid for the lifetimes of the original applicant and his or her descendants. Market forces do not effectively measure long-term environmental impacts and economic obligations against short-term benefits to the economy, which are usually not considered for more than a few years ahead. Applying a market forces policy to the granting of citizenships is the equivalent, in economic terms, of matching a 5-year asset against an obligation extending for thousands of years.

OPT POPULATION POLICY PROPOSALS: WORK PERMIT AND VISA QUOTAS

Zero net immigration (effect) quotas can be set on work permit levels and expiry of permission to stay needs to be rigorously enforced. Sectors can be chosen according to priority skills - the supply of cheap labour for conferencing and corporate and public sector entertaining could be curbed, for example, and the supply of construction workers for unnecessary and environmentally destructive demolition and mass-housebuilding schemes, many of which are to accommodate expected future migrant flows. There should be stricter conditions for the granting of Indefinite Leave to Remain and UK citizenships, so that this does not have a population growth effect.

No remaining case for mass immigration

Since the UK government came to power in 1997 migration has added more than a million people to UK, yet in 2007 the government still had a pro-growth policy. Its economic case for this appeared to be based on a Treasury/Home Office report on the economic benefits of migration: a research study by the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate with the Performance and Innovation Unit and the Institute for Public Policy Research [The migrant population in the UK: fiscal effects, RDS Occasional Paper 77, Gott & Johnston, published 22 February 2002]. This study cites a £2.5 billion a year fiscal benefit from immigration.
The basis of this calculation has been been criticised as flawed by Cambridge University Professor of Economics Robert Rowthorn, and the assumed economic benefits of excess immigration by Professor Rowthorn and Oxford University Professor of Demography David Coleman in their 2004 paper The Economic Effects of Immigration into the United Kingdom [Population and Development Review 30(4), 579-624, December 2004]. Finally, the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs demolished the case for excess immigration in its report The Economic Impact of Immigration, published on 1 April 2008.

Economic arguments in favour of excess immigration include the proposition that increasing numbers of young people, including immigrants, are needed to support an ageing population: however, like all young people, immigrants, if they settle and/or become citizens, in turn grow old and require support. (According to the 2001 Census 4.8% of people aged 85 or over in England & Wales were born outside the UK.) A further flow of immigrants would then be needed to restore the balance, leading to unlimited population growth. A United Nations Population Division study, Replacement Migration, UK Scenario V, 2000, demonstrated that for the UK to retain as a constant its 1995 support ratio of working-age people to older dependants (4.09), it would need to import 59.8 million immigrants between 1995 and 2050. This would involve inward net migration of more than a million people every year and more than double UK population to 136 million by 2050. There are other solutions to the economic ‘problems’ caused by ageing. See Ageing and hidden unemployment.

- Another argument is that cheap immigrant labour is needed for jobs that Britons are not prepared to do. Counter-arguments to this are that cheap immigrant labour exploits both immigrants and the existing workforce by lowering wages to subsistence levels or below; that the existence of a pool of cheap labour creates new jobs; that Britons cannot do these jobs because population growth has exacerbated house price rises in regions where jobs are available - an unemployed worker from the North of England (who might be a Briton of Pakistani descent) cannot afford to live and work in London on minimum wages, or finds the jobs already taken by new immigrants (who might be Eastern Europeans).
- Excess immigration does not necessarily grow the UK economy by improving productivity - it can simply transport economic activity from one country to another.
- If it leads to permanent settlement, excess immigration may worsen the UK’s balance of payments. Immigrants who work in export-related industries such as international financial services may contribute to export revenues, as may overseas students attending UK universities for a strictly limited period - but if their numbers increase overall population size, they will also create more demand for imports. The unskilled jobs created by access to large flows of cheap labour contribute little to exports.
- Excess immigration is sometimes justified as a necessary ‘temporary inward flow’, where it is stated that inward flows will automatically reverse to flow outward in similar numbers in the future. This has not been the case for the last 20 years, and by 2008 there was still no sign of any ‘natural’ reversal. If an inward flow is greater than an outward flow each year (alongside natural increase) total population will continue to grow.
- Calculations of ‘benefit to the economy’ based on tax and other revenues from immigrants, do not take into account the mounting environmental costs of population growth. If excess migration (together with natural increase) causes population growth, it raises the costs of congestion, speeds up environmental degradation and places additional strains on housing, infrastructure and energy supplies. Governments’ unsustainable housebuilding and supporting infrastructure programmes might not have been necessary if a zero population growth policy (zero natural increase plus zero net migration) had been implemented a decade ago. It would not be necessary to build up to six million additional homes in England alone by 2050 - and their supporting infrastructure - if a population stabilisation and gradual reduction policy had been implemented before 2005.

Population growth is not just a migration issue

As already stated, immigration is only one component part of any population policy with the aim of long term economic, environmental and social sustainability. Seven out of 10 people say that Britain is already overcrowded. Yet the government still has no minister responsible for overall population policy, nor any stated view on what levels of population are sustainable or desirable for the UK now or in the long term. To the best of OPT’s knowledge no government department has conducted any studies of the effects of overpopulation or continued population growth on the environment. Reports on the impacts of economic growth on the environment tend to brush aside the underlying issue of population growth and deny the effects of long-term compound growth. It can only be concluded from the government’s actions, therefore, that although it has curbed illegal immigration, its deliberate population policy, corroborated by the UN in its World Population Policies 2007 report, is still to encourage higher inward legal migration and therefore continuous population growth.
EU Migration policy

2008 EU policy under the presidency of France is designed to reduce illegal immigration into the EU, but there is no clear intention to restrain internal movements of legal migrants within the EU. EU policy has become more important as the EU has taken powers from national governments to control the flow of people within EU borders, while exercising more centralised powers to curb illegal migration into the EU from outside EU borders. Although the flow of non-EU migrants into the UK still outnumbers arrivals from EU member states, there was a sharp rise in the numbers of Eastern European migrants to the UK from 2004 to 2007, which has only recently shown signs of abating. EU Directives looked set to increase population pressure on the UK - such as the Services Directive (allowing EU citizens from the accession countries to set up businesses in other member states), and Directive 2004/38/EC, which would allow complete freedom of movement within the EU for EU citizens and the automatic right to settle in another member state after five years. See ‘Free movement and residence rights for EU Citizens’, European Commission.

Proposals for a UK balanced migration policy

A population policy with clear targets and limits to growth should be the responsibility of government. As far as the immigration component is concerned, the government has firmly stated its wish to curb illegal immigration, but its 2005 five-year plan maintained a ‘no upper limits’ policy on legal immigration which remains unchanged. Government policy still favours net (excess) inward migration and therefore continued overall population growth, with no clear limits set. We hope that a ‘zero net migration’ policy will be the next step, after fuller consideration of the environmental and economic costs of further population growth. Of the measures proposed by OPT below in 2003-2005, some have been introduced, and it is now clear that significant numbers of would-be illegal migrants and ineligible asylum seekers have been prevented from entering the UK. The number of legal immigrants, however, continues to grow.

Migration measures proposed by OPT 2003-2006

Zero net immigration effect quotas should be set on work permit levels and expiry of permission to stay needs to be rigorously enforced. Sectors can be chosen according to priority skills - the supply of cheap labour for conferencing and corporate and public sector entertaining could be curbed, for example, and the supply of construction workers for unnecessary and environmentally destructive demolition and mass-housebuilding schemes, many of which are to accommodate expected future migrant flows.

There should be stricter conditions for the granting of Indefinite Leave to Remain and UK citizenships, so that this does not have a population growth effect.

Solutions to curb population growth by excess immigration and the excess granting of work permits and citizenships can be chosen according to which are the most effective and acceptable to legitimate British citizens, with consideration for those refugees suffering genuinely life-threatening state persecution, and allow scope for accepting more genuine asylum-seekers, providing that there is a compensating reduction in the flow of economic migrants.

1 Clearer interpretation of UK obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and if necessary the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, to prevent further abuse of the EHCR by economic migrants seeking a way to enter signatory countries by claiming asylum. Note: the government has said it wants to renegotiate the ECHR to enable terrorists to be deported, and Conservative Party policy includes considering withdrawal from the 1951 Convention on Refugees.

2 Reintroduction of UK border controls, with computerised logging of all those entering and leaving the country, with intra-EU cross-checking of passport and visa details to check validity. Note: the government’s five-year strategy for asylum and immigration includes the introduction of electronic checks on all those entering and leaving the UK.

3 More severe penalties, and enforcement of them, against people traffickers.
More severe penalties for solicitors who dishonestly assist illegal immigrants to obtain legal services or documentation, or otherwise knowingly assist in fraudulent asylum claims.

**Note:** The government now requires immigration advisory services (usually legal firms) to register, and is planning to set up pilot services of its own to investigate methods of abuse such as the overcharging of asylum seekers, economic migrants and taxpayer-funded claims and appeals systems.

Limits on the automatic rights of the 73 million citizens of 10 new countries joining the EU on 1 May 2004 to work in the UK.

**Note:** When the UK labour market opened to citizens of the eight new EU accession countries on 1 May 2004, economic migrants from the 'A8' were required to join a work register on their arrival in the UK, with rights to benefits allowed only after a full year's work has been completed. In the period from 1 May to mid-2006, an estimated 600,000 entered the UK to work, compared with a forecast figure of 5,000 to 13,000. In October 2006 the government decided to restrict access by migrants from Bulgaria and Romania.

Introduction of secure identity cards incorporating biometric data (fingerprint or iris recognition) for UK citizens and/or temporary immigrants - if these are to be used for the purpose of controlling and reducing immigration numbers. There is deep concern, however, about intrusion into personal privacy and state control of private information: identity cards, should incorporate essential identity data only, such as name, address and national insurance number, and should be protected by legislation from the addition of other personal data without the consent of the individual or of parliament.

Compulsory presentation of such documents for entitlement to taxpayer-funded health, education and other public services in the UK.

**Note:** although presentation of biometric identity documents to gain access to public services is not yet proposed, the government has announced plans to curb abuse of medical services by overseas visitors and people with no legal right to be in the UK. On 1 April 2004 hospital regulations were amended to deny free access to certain groups of overseas visitors, and on 14 May 2004 a consultation paper was issued proposing that GPs (General Practitioners) be required to ask their patients for documentary proof of identity and entitlement to free healthcare. Spouses and other relatives of foreign long-term workers in the UK (for example, wives about to give birth), will not be entitled to free NHS care. Emergency cases will continue to be treated. There are serious public concerns about the type of data to be included on ID cards and about protection of privacy of information.

A centrally cross-checkable system of names, addresses, date of birth, national insurance numbers and work permit details for all UK residents, with strict data protection legislation. Like the proposals for identity cards, however, to which the register would be linked, this has caused deep disquiet about privacy and abuse of personal information.

**Note:** a national population register is being planned by the Office of National Statistics and a central online registration of births, deaths and marriages is to be introduced.

Clear guidance for employers, including those using agencies and subcontractors, on how to check documentation to ensure that employees are not illegal workers, with penalties for employers of illegal migrants.

**Note:** this has now been done, and more secure categories of documentation, such as passports or full birth certificates, have to be presented to employers. Fines of up to £2,500 per illegal employee will be levied on employers of illegal labour.

Raising of fees for work permits to a level which restores incentives for employers to recruit Britons instead of importing foreign workers. **Note:** in April 2007 new immigration fees were introduced for those coming to work, study or applying to remain in the UK.

Further reductions in quotas for immigrant workers from outside the EU, to compensate for expected inflows from within the EU and prevent ‘poaching’ of trained staff from developing countries.

**Notes:** (1) Construction workers: one suitable case is quotas for construction industry workers. There is surplus commercial property capacity in the UK and much of proposed housebuilding is to accommodate future excess inward migration. (2) Health workers - Doctors: while recruitment of overseas doctors continues, many newly qualified British doctors were reported in mid-2005 to be unable to find jobs. Nurses: in August 2004 the UK and South African governments backed a voluntary agreement to curb poaching of trained South African nurses by the UK private health sector. (3) Teachers: In September 2004 the UK government and more than 20 Commonwealth countries agreed to restrictions on the recruitment of overseas teachers by agencies, by the awarding of a 'quality standard' which can be removed on non-compliance. (4) Catering and hospitality workers: this appears to be the least necessary employment category and the most open to abuse, and in June 2005 the government closed the Sectors Based Scheme for non-EEA nationals, stating that it could be filled by workers from EEA countries.
There should be no further amnesties for illegal immigrants, and all should be deported. An amnesty was granted to 50,000 asylum seekers in 2003 and a report by the parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee published on 26 January 2004 recommended that no more amnesties should be granted.

**Note:** The then Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged in September 2004 to increase removals of failed asylum seekers, still below the number of new asylum claims each month.

Non-EU immigrants currently have to live in the UK for five years before they can apply for citizenship. Since citizenship once granted cannot, and morally should not, be revoked except in extreme circumstances such as terrorist threat, the period could be extended and become dependent on a minimum contribution having been made to the UK in the form of taxes and national insurance.

**Note:** In April 2006 a requirement was introduced for migrant workers to have lived in the UK for five years instead of four before seeking permanent settlement rights. From April 2007, migrants have had to pass English language tests to become UK citizens. Low-skilled workers will no longer have rights to settle permanently in the UK.

Penalties for marriages of convenience (‘sham marriages’) made to secure citizenship could be more severe. Before recent regulation changes there were estimated to be 10,000 bogus marriages a year. **Note:** on 22 April 2004 the government announced measures to stop this malpractice, estimated to account for 3,000 - 15,000 marriages. These have now come into effect: non-EU nationals marrying EU citizens in the UK will have to marry at specially designated registry offices.

Language schools and other education institutions which arrange entry permits (student visas that allow students also to work for up to 20 hours a week) for immigrant students under false pretences can be closed down.

**Note:** Some action has now been taken - an accreditation scheme and monitoring scheme for colleges will be operating before the end of 2004. Foreign students will only be allowed to register for courses with accredited education providers. By mid-June 2004 more than 100 bogus colleges had been identified, one in four of those visited by immigration officials, but few of the illegal 'students' have been traced.

Universities could be encouraged to raise the fees they charge to overseas students to a level which reduces the inflow of students while maintaining total fee income.

**Note:** students from the EU 25 member states pay the same fees as UK students (currently £1,150 a year), while non-EU students pay higher and variable fees. In 2005 the government raised the cost of visa extensions for non-EU students wishing to continue their studies in the UK to up to £500.

A quota system for work permits should be introduced, with measures - such as a delay period - to encourage employers to search harder for UK employees before using work permits to import fresh labour. This will become increasingly necessary if underemployed Britons (older people, the disabled and underemployed ethnic minorities) are to find work. In 2004 the number of non-EU citizens given work permits under different employment schemes rose 8.6% from 2003, to 181,432.

The Working Holidaymaker scheme, which allows Commonwealth citizens aged 17-27 to enter the UK for two years with some working rights, could be restricted to lower numbers and/or the term limited to one year, and switching from short-term work permits to long-term categories should be discouraged.

**Note:** this has been done, effective from 8 February 2005, with the term restricted from two years to one year with curbs on switching into employment in certain categories.

Visa-holders should be checked out of the UK as well as checked in, and to deter visa abuse those who overstay visa periods could be penalised by not being allowed to return to the UK, except for compassionate and exceptional reasons, for 10 years.

**Note:** At the Labour party conference in September 2004, the then prime minister pledged to reintroduce passport embarkation controls.

Some of these measures, and others, have now been introduced [2007]. Almost any measure the government chooses to take will cause difficulties; efforts to implement them need to be carried out humanely. But a failure to act now, in OPT's view, can only lead to severe problems in the future. Illegal immigration has been shown to cause exploitation of migrant workers, and increasing legal immigration is causing unprecedented population growth. Population growth is causing severe pressures on the environment and making the quality of life progressively worse for the existing citizens of the UK, including established immigrant communities. Those who argue for continuous population growth will not answer the question of when and at what level it should be stopped. The latest official projection points to as many as 108 million people in the UK by 2081.
Consistent public opposition: can everyone be wrong?

Opposition to excessive immigration has been consistent and overwhelming in the UK for more than five years, but until recently debate has been stifled by unfounded accusations of xenophobia and support for far-right politics against the majority of those opposed. Given current public opinion and a mounting body of evidence against the benefits of mass immigration, it is difficult to understand why the government, and some opposition parties, continue to pursue their ‘no upper limits’ immigration policies. Below are the conclusions of just a few polls:

How many migrants?

- Three out of four Britons (76%) think there are too many immigrants in the UK, 83% believe that migration policy makes it too easy for migrants to enter the country legally, and 46% believe that immigration has had a negative impact on the country’s economy. In the EU, 83% of people polled in France, Germany, Italy and the UK believe their governments do not have immigration under control: see Harris Interactive Poll, October 2006..

- Of those interviewed in an August 2006 Ipsos MORI poll, 76% said that the government should set a strict limit on the number of immigrants allowed into Britain each year, 63% said that laws on immigration should be much tougher, and 12% that it should be stopped altogether. Those who answered ‘Yes’ to the question ‘Do you think the government should set a strict limit on the number of immigrants allowed into Britain each year’, were also asked what the limit should be. Those who were asked the question without a preamble answered with a mean figure of 338,356 immigrants a year - which would under current circumstances allow a gradual decrease in UK population (Sunday Times Ipsos MORI Poll).

- In a YouGov poll 69% of respondents (7 out of 10) said that Britain was already overcrowded; and 76% agreed that there must be an annual limit to the number of immigrants allowed to come to Britain. See YouGov Poll, 3 April 2006.

- In an ICM poll [BBC Newsnight, 14 February 2005] 82% of respondents said they wanted stricter controls on immigration.

- A YouGov poll [Mail on Sunday, 6 February 2005] found that: 49% of respondents believed that immigration and asylum were among the three most important issues for this country; 78% said the present government’s policies on immigration and people who seek asylum in Britain were not tough enough; 69% disagreed that increased immigration is necessary because foreign workers are needed to perform jobs that Britons cannot or will not do; and 71% supported strict annual quotas on numbers of refugees and economic migrants. Asked the question ‘How many immigrants do you think should be allowed into this country each year?’, the responses were None (21%), Up to 10,000 (31%), Up to 50,000 (8%), Up to 100,000 (3%), up to 250,000 (1%), Unlimited (4%), Don’t know (30%). [More than 500,000 migrants arrived in the UK in 2002, including returning Britons.]

- A MORI poll conducted for the Financial Times [as reported in FT, 20 August 2004] indicated that 30% of people believed immigration [and race relations] was ‘one of the most important issues facing the country, compared with 14% in June 2001 and 3% in June 1997.

- A YouGov poll conducted for the Mail on Sunday [4 April 2004] revealed that three in four people believe that Britain is already overcrowded [overpopulated]. More than a quarter - 27% - believed that no new immigrants at all should be allowed into Britain, with 30% agreeing to up to 10,000 immigrants, 10% up to 50,000, 3% up to 100,000, 1% up to 250,000, and 4% supporting unlimited immigration. A quarter of those polled “don't know”. In this poll, immigration had risen to the number one political issue. (Note: population growth = natural increase + net migration. More than 500,000 immigrants arrived in the UK in 2002, including returning Britons.)

- Polls also reveal some reasons for emigration:

- A poll conducted for the Prudential [7 June 2004] suggests that nearly 15 million Britons would like to move abroad on retirement. (Reasons were not given, but population growth in the UK, with resulting congestion, overcrowding and stress, is likely to be a factor.)

- A poll conducted by the Centre for Future Studies for Alliance & Leicester International [2 June 2004] showed that one third of Britons were considering emigration, of whom 39% were looking for a better quality of life. Many were highly skilled professionals, and work-related stress was cited as a major factor. About one million Britons have already retired abroad, and 850,000 work overseas.
Conclusion

LITTLE CHOICE FOR THE UK ELECTORATE

Before the May 2005 General Election, for the first time in history, voters for mainstream political parties had a clear choice of migration policies and could decide which was most likely to help to halt population growth. Conservative party policy proved overwhelmingly more popular than those of the other parties, and since the election the Labour government has adopted some Conservative policies, such as the introduction of a points-based immigration system. No party, however, had by 2008 addressed the issue of the environmental impacts of UK population growth or the potential benefits of gradual decrease to a sustainable level.

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