



HeadsUp Forum # 27

[www.HeadsUp.org.uk](http://www.HeadsUp.org.uk)

## Immigration and the UK: What effect has it had on Britain?

(29 September – 17 October 2008)

Immigration has increased the number of people living and working in the UK over the past decade. Young people are more likely to have had contact with people from other cultures, countries and continents but what effect has this had on communities, public services and the economy? These were the issues that young people debated in the forum.

A wide range of views and expertise were represented by the decision-makers who took part in the immigration forum. Their involvement and support was, as always, central to the success of the forum. The decision-makers involved included:

- **Damien Green MP** - Shadow Immigration Minister
- **Lord Lester of Herne Hill** - Member, Joint Committee on Human Rights
- **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Damer** - Spokesperson for Home Affairs
- **Lord Roberts of Llandudno** - Spokesperson for International Development
- **Jean Lambert MEP** - Member, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
- **Douglas Carswell MP** - Member, Joint Committee on Human Rights
- **Frank Field MP** - Co-Chair, Cross Party Group on Balanced Migration
- **Sir Andrew Green** - Chair, Migration Watch
- **Meg Hillier MP** - Home Office Minister

[www.headsup.org.uk](http://www.headsup.org.uk) is a safe, online space for under 18s to debate the political issues important to them. **Young people** share viewpoints with their peers and **decision-makers** up and down the country. Through the forums, HeadsUp develops **young people's** political awareness and promotes active citizenship so they can play an effective part in the democratic processes that affect them.

HeadsUp enables **politicians** to consult with **young people**, to find out their ideas, experiences and opinions. There is ample background information to prepare **young people** for the debates, as well as **teachers'** notes and activities.

# Immigration and the UK: What effect has it had on Britain?

## Forum Summary

The debate was split into three different forum threads addressing the significant issues in the wider debate about immigration. These were:

- Can our hospitals and schools cope with more people?
- What effect has immigration had on British communities?
- The free movement of people in Europe – how has it affected Britain?

There were 243 posts made in the forum from 70 HeadsUp users<sup>∞</sup>. The discussions on the forum were broad but the general themes and directions of the debate are highlighted below.

During the forum, the parliamentarians responded to issues that the young people had raised, clarifying points or adding new perspectives to the debate. They also provided statements before the debate explaining their varied viewpoints on immigration as well as their support for the HeadsUp project as a whole. Below is a snapshot of the dominant themes and arguments in the debate.

### Public Services

- Young people were keen that immigrants should pay their own way particularly in relation to public services.

*They **should** pay taxes before they can use our hospitals. People shouldn't use things they haven't paid for, that's the same as stealing from a shop, it's the same principles.*

*i think that immigrants have the same right to hospitals and schools as we do, as long as they contribute to our country/community.*

*The main problem with public services is that most immigrants don't speak much English. This can mainly be a problem in school because most of the kids who have immigrated speak English as a second language and this is unfair on other kids.*

- There was also an awareness that although immigrants could add to the overcrowding of public services they also helped by working in hospitals and schools.

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<sup>∞</sup> Includes: young people, moderators, teachers and legislators.

*People complain but some of those ' Useless immigrants' as some call them could be the doctor saving your life or the teacher even teaching you to become a doctor*

*Many people who move to the UK do important jobs which help the wider UK population, for example doctors and nurses. This fact alone shows that immigration is a good thing.*

**Baroness Miller** noted that many sectors could not survive without immigrant labour, particularly care homes and the agricultural sector, and encouraged a search for a consensus on immigration issues rather than political point scoring.

**Damien Green MP** highlighted the fact that issues with public services are often localised and that an influx of immigrants into a small area or community might cause difficulty with capacity for schools and hospitals.

### **Asylum Seekers**

- The young people were sympathetic to the plight of those that had suffered from persecution or ill-treatment in their own countries. They were clear that there should be provision for refugees and asylum seekers before economic migrants.

*it is a good thing that the government is letting people come in to our country because it gives different people a chance to have a new start to new lives.*

*It's understandable if that person is an asylum seeker who is in danger [they should have access to public services] but if it is just an immigrant then it is not right because they moved here they should be willing to face the consequences in this case its paying the tax...*

*People, often desperate to move away from their country, come to Britain in hope to find good work and lead good lives. I think that we should give everyone a fair chance to lead the life that they feel they should lead.*

*Assylum seekeers are coming into our country as they are unsafe in there own country if we stop people coming in we may be forcing them back to there own country and causing them to be tortured or in worse cases killed.*

Both **Damien Green MP** and **Baroness Miller** supported the young people in making the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants, stating that they were different issues to be debated.

### **Immigration Controls**

- Many of the young people were surprised at the difficulty of the British Citizenship tests.

*[About Citizenship Tests] We expect people who want to live in our country to know things that the majority of people that were born here don't know. Fair? I think not!*

Those citizenship tests are hard..I only got 5 out of 12 its amazing people actually get into this country when someone thats lived here all their lives cant answer some of these questions...

- ID cards were very popular with young people, particularly if they held information about criminal records.

*ID could be a good idea but it could cause many problems like, somebody could get a hold of yours and use it to do something bad but then you will be the blame.*

*i think that immigrants should either have a id card or have there data stored on a central computer. i think this would help because then people would know that the immigrants have been checked out and then people wont feel so insecure around them*

*i think that every person comin in to this country to visit 4 more then 6 mouths should get a id card*

- Some of the debate focused on Busta Rhymes, a US rapper, who was held by immigration officials over allegations of criminal behaviour in the US (that were subsequently proved to be false). Young people were concerned that celebrities should not get preferential treatment over ordinary immigrants who may be more in need of help.

*people who been denied entry feeling that they have been treated unjustly in comparison to "Busta Rhymes" who was let in simply because of his celebrity status.*

*Famous people, unless for a better reason, should not be able to swap countries as they wish however people escaping war or terrible conditions should be able to find a safe place to live, work, be treated medically and provide their children with good education. Human rights should come before fame!!!*

*people who have had to leave there countries due to war should get priority over celebrities*

*celebs shoul'n't be treated any diffrent from us regular people, just because they have fame and money it shouldnt reflect on the way they get treated, they havnt got any more rights than the rest of us.*

- There were disagreements over whether a criminal record should be a barrier to immigration into the UK.

*I think that not allowing ppl into the U.K because of their criminal record is unfair, as every1 shuud have the right to have a second chance*

*i think that ppl with a criminal record shouldnt be let into this country just in case it leads 2 any more crime or they are a posibal threat*

*yes we should stop those with criminal conviction entering the country, although they might have done their time, they could still be unstable and dangerous (but i'm not saying that all criminals are all dangerous, just the ,more risky ones like rapist paedophiles murders junkies ect,)*

## Employment

- Lazy people that didn't want to work were not tolerated by young people whether they were immigrants or British citizens.

*they [immigrants] are making our country progress, and doing all the jobs that lazy british people are not willing to do, therefore we think they should be let in and helped because of this.*

- Immigrant workers were seen to keep British workers on their toes and were willing to do the jobs that British people didn't want to.

*Would any child in middle school aspire to be a cleaner or Dustbin man...NO!*

*Many of our builders are eastern european men who work for less than britons would. I think all the people that complain that they are 'taking our jobs' are just looking for an excuse not to work.*

*i think that the increase of immigration has made british communities more determined to work, as jobs were just handed to people before, whereas now, british people need to work extra hard to get jobs like plumbing, building and carpenting.*

Some of the young people suggested that immigrants only be allowed into the UK if they can prove they were able to get a job in their home country. However, **Jean Lambert MEP** pointed out that needing to have a job in the country you are emigrating from in order to get a visa for the UK would be an unfair policy to some immigrants who were not able to find work in their own country.

## International Development

- Some suggested that more money should be put into developing countries so that people would have more opportunities in their own countries and wouldn't need to move for economic reasons.

*instead of the goverment trying sohard to manouever laws so mmigrants can come freely into the country i think they should just try nd donate certain amounts of money to overly poor ledc countries so that the more people would want to stay in there own countries*

*If the people of Britian complain that it is unfair for these immigrants to enter England because they are taking their jobs etc..., then it is extremely important for Britian to make an effort to help these other countries. Nobody likes moving away to another, foreign culture at first so we should make sure that they don't have to.*

## Attitudes to Immigration

- Some of the users did feel that immigrants sometimes got a better deal than British people and thought that the Government should pay more attention to its citizens.

*i was born and bread here some was my perents and i have agree with the bnp but if we get rid of some of these imigrents because there geting treated better ten most british people*

*Labour.. stop being so "politicaly correct" We British people come first before others. We cant be scared to criticise.*

- Race and the problems of immigrants being abused or bullied because of British people's frustration at immigration policy was also an issue that was highlighted by some users.

*With Racism level going down in europe ( apparently) immigrants have been more welcome. But if we bring in to many immigrants people would get annoyed and may racially abuse some of those coming in.*

*I was also born and bread in this country along with my parents but the only difference between us is our skin colour and once again remember we are all human.*

- Cultural benefits were also seen to be a positive outcome of immigration and gave people a broader view of the world without actually having to leave the country.

*I think immigration is a good thing it allows people who have never left the country to experience what people are like outside of britain. It introduces people to new cultures, food and ways of living.*

*I think that people's attitudes towards people from other countries coming to stay here has changed over time; because a little while ago, people would have noticed changes to economy; but nowadays, currys and pizza are considered to be normal food, and there a lot of people over here who can't speak English.*

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## **Political Context**

The topic of immigration was a particularly timely and relevant one to be addressed by the forum. Issues of migration, multi-culturalism and immigration controls were continuing in parallel in the weeks leading up to the debate as well as during the forum.

The week before the forum Frank Field MP and Nicholas Soames MP launched a report suggesting that the best way to control immigration was to bring emigration and immigration rates closer together whilst limiting applications for permanent citizenship. Shadow Home Secretary Dominic Grieve MP, also suggested in an article in *The Guardian* a few days before the forum opened, that embracing immigrant cultures had some negative effects on the indigenous British population, leading to a lack of British identity. After the forum closed, Phil Woolas MP a Government Immigration Minister, also criticised some of the Government's past immigration policies, particularly spending money on translating documents rather than helping immigrants to learn English.

The scale of debate, both within Government and between the political parties, shows the importance of immigration issues and therefore the need for young people to have their say. The young people's first hand experiences, particularly of services such as education, highlights the importance of their involvement in the forum. Being involved in this forum gave young people both the opportunity to learn more about the key questions and arguments in the immigration debate, and to lead a discussion of the issues important to them.

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**The HeadsUp team would like to convey our thanks** and appreciation to the legislators, young people and teachers who got involved in this important debate. We would also like to extend an invitation to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, interested NGOs, academics and journalists to respond to the findings.

Responses and requests for further information should be directed to:

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