

**APRIL 2008**

**MIGRATION**

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**DEBATING MATTERS**  
**TOPIC**  
**GUIDES**

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**MOTION:**

**“WE SHOULD HAVE  
AN OPEN BORDERS  
POLICY  
FOR MIGRANTS”**

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## KEY TERMS

Asylum seeker

Brain drain

Economic migrant

Immigrant

Immigration

Migrant

Migrant worker

Migration

Refugee

Remittances

# INTRODUCTION

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# NOTES

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The arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe after the expansion of the EU in 2004 prompted a heated debate about immigration [Ref: Answers.com]. Since then around half of the one million EU workers who came to the UK have returned home [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. However, migration flows continue to break records [Ref: [BBC News](#)], and 40 years on from Enoch Powell’s apocalyptic prediction of the consequences of mass immigration in his infamous ‘rivers of blood’ speech [Ref: [BBC News](#)] it remains a highly contentious issue. A House of Lords report [Ref: [BBC News](#)] found that immigration makes little contribution to economic well-being, although this has been contested. The government has refused to set a limit for immigration [Ref: [BBC News](#)], but recently introduced a points-based system [Ref: [BBC News](#)] designed so that only skilled workers are allowed into the UK from outside Europe. It is a debate in which the claim that society can’t cope with mass immigration is met with the charge that anti-immigration arguments are often racist. Immigrants are variously presented as benefit cheats or as decent people seeking to improve their lives. The consensus view is that large-scale immigration poses serious economic and social problems. Many countries take in limited numbers of asylum seekers [Ref: [BBC News](#)] and recognise the importance of migrant workers to their economies; few are prepared to consider a policy of open borders. A firm distinction is drawn between the small number of asylum seekers who are genuine refugees [Ref: [BBC News](#)] and ‘bogus’ economic migrants [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. However, as opposition to immigration mounts, a radically different position in the debate has also gained ground. Advocates of open borders – who include supporters of a global free market in labour and campaigners for immigrant rights – argue that we should abandon the idea of setting limits on immigration because of its damaging economic and social consequences. Both sides agree that a country’s policy on immigration says a lot about how it regards itself.



### Should the movement of people be as free as the movement of goods and money?

While globalisation is characterised by increasing flows of goods and money, there are significant barriers to the movement of workers, with immigration policies tending to become more restrictive rather than less. Advocates of open borders argue that governments can't possibly calculate the number of new workers that should be let in, and that this should be left to the market. Opponents of open borders say that the market has to be regulated and argue that people are very different to goods, bringing their families with them, consuming resources and taking advantage of welfare support.

### Would an open borders policy be a recipe for anarchy?

Yes say opponents. If immigration restrictions were dropped huge numbers of people would move, increasing pressure on housing, damaging the environment, putting security at risk and making densely populated countries even more crowded. Supporters contest this. Emigrating is expensive and requires people to leave their families and culture. Furthermore, they argue, it is tight immigration controls that lie behind the huge market in illegal human trafficking and explain why immigrants tend to settle permanently. Open borders, which would still be monitored and have passport controls, would provide legal routes for migrants and allow temporary migration, with people earning money and then returning home.

### Are the economic effects of immigration positive or negative?

It depends on who you listen to. First, there is the contested question of whether immigrant workers take jobs from local workers and lower wages. Some studies say this is the case; others suggest that immigrants mainly take jobs like seasonal fruit picking that local workers refuse to fill. Second, there's the equally contested question of whether immigrants are overall contributors to the economy or a burden. Third, there's a debate about whether immigration is a solution to the problems caused to developed societies by ageing populations. Finally, what is the effect of migration on the developing world? On one side of the equation are concerns about a brain drain [Ref: [BBC News](#)] from developing countries, while on the other side there are the remittances [Ref: [BBC News](#)] sent home by migrant workers, which exceed the sums that developing countries receive in foreign aid.

### Is immigration a threat to our culture and national identity?

Immigration is about far more than just economics, and many economic debates are inconclusive, so the fundamental issues are moral and social. Opponents of open borders argue that a nation is defined by its right to police its borders and decide who it allows in. Advocates argue that free movement is a basic right: we wouldn't stop people moving around within a country, so what's the justification for stopping them moving between countries? At a social level, concerns about immigration focus on how it changes a country's culture, and the claim that ignoring people's fears about immigration creates tensions between

## THE MIGRATION DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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different communities. While some say this is based on fear of change, blaming immigrants for problems that have other sources and ignoring the positive contribution immigrants make, many see this as an urgent problem.



## ESSENTIAL READING

The case for opening Europe's borders wide to migrant workers  
Philippe Legrain vs Michael A. Landesmann *Europe's World*  
Summer 2007

Viewpoints: Should borders be open?  
*BBC News* 13 April 2004

An open debate on open borders: reply to Stephen Castles  
Liza Schuster *openDemocracy* 29 December 2003

A fair migration policy – without open borders  
Stephen Castles *openDemocracy* 29 December 2003

Migration fantasies: how not to debate immigration and asylum  
Ali Rattansi *openDemocracy* 29 May 2003

The folly of mass immigration  
Anthony Browne *openDemocracy* 1 May 2003

## FOR

Ending global apartheid  
Kerry Howley interviews Lant Pritchett *Reason Magazine*  
February 2008

Why we need an open-door policy  
Nathalie Rothschild *spiked* 17 January 2008

The new common sense  
Teresa Hayter *New Internationalist* 1 October 2002

## AGAINST

Devastating demolition of the case for mass immigration  
Andrew Green *Daily Mail* 31 March 2008

A state of influx  
Frank Field *Guardian* 21 September 2006

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Never have we seen immigration on this scale: we just can't cope  
Robert Rowthorn *Daily Telegraph* 2 July 2006

## IN DEPTH

At the immigration rally  
Peggy Noonan *Opinion Journal* 13 April 2006

Myths of the stranger at the gate  
Kenan Malik *The Times* 7 March 2005

Open borders: a future for Europe, migrants, and the world economy

Nigel Harris *openDemocracy* 12 June 2003

Why borders cannot be open  
David Coleman *Population-Environment Research Network* 24 August 2001

## BACKGROUNDEERS

Contrasting views on EU migration

Mark Easton *BBC News* 30 April 2008

What impact have EU migrants made to the UK?

*BBC News Have Your Say* 29 April 2008

Powell's 'rivers of blood' legacy

*BBC News* 18 April 2008

Shifting the debate on immigration

Hugh Pym *BBC News* 2 April 2008

How ruthlessly is Britain prepared to battle with those who want a slice of its wealth?

Deborah Orr *Independent* 2 April 2008

The case for open Immigration: A Q&A with Philippe Legrain

Melissa Lafsky *The New York Times Freakonomics blog* 17 October 2007

Migrant workers: What we know

*BBC News* 21 August 2007

The borders of liberalism

Alan Wolfe *Guardian* 10 July 2007

Head to head: Migration amnesty?

Keith Best vs Andrew Green *BBC News* 14 June 2006

Viewpoints: US illegal immigration

*BBC News* 23 May 2006

Q&A: US immigration debate

*BBC News* 1 May 2006

Migrant world

*BBC News Have Your Say Special* 24 May 2005

Ask the experts: Should there be open borders?

*BBC News* 2 April 2004

An open door to disaster?

*BBC Radio 4 Analysis* transcript 18 March 2004

People flow: Migration and Europe

Theo Veenkamp, Alessandra Buonfino and Tom Bentley  
*openDemocracy* 1 May 2003

Stalker's guide to international migration

Migration

*Globalization101.org*

Manage migration for Britain

*Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

Destination UK

*BBC News In Depth*

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## ORGANISATIONS

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

MigrationWatch UK

No One Is Illegal (NOII)

UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency

## IN THE NEWS

England to be most crowded in Europe

*Daily Telegraph* 6 May 2008

New immigration rules announced

*BBC News* 6 May 2008

Protesters nationwide seek immigrant rights

*MSNBC* 1 May 2008

Half EU migrants 'have left UK'

*BBC News* 29 April 2008

'Acres of fruit left unpicked'

*BBC News* 7 April 2008

Borders policing body begins work

*BBC News* 3 April 2008

Brown rejects cap on immigration

*BBC News* 1 April 2008

Immigration 'small benefit' to UK

*BBC News* 1 April 2008

Immigration points system begins

*BBC News* 29 February 2008

UK growth 'helped by immigration'

*BBC News* 18 December 2007

EU open-borders agreement threatens a 'wave of migration and crime'

*Daily Mail* 20 November 2007

Record trends in UK migration

*BBC News* 15 November 2007

EU worker restrictions to remain

*BBC News* 30 October 2007

Migration 'causes pressure in UK'

*BBC News* 17 October 2007

Call for immigrant amnesty in UK

*BBC News* 16 July 2007

Reid calls for immigration debate

*BBC News* 21 June 2007

Hodge attacked for 'BNP language'

*BBC News* 25 May 2007

Migration 'tipping point reached'

*BBC News* 21 April 2007

'No open door' for new migrants

*BBC News* 20 August 2006

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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
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INTELLECTUAL  
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