



By Lora Nazarenko

With the referendum on Britain's EU membership only months away, much public discussion has focused on the issue of immigration. Indeed, concern about the level of migration from EU countries into the UK has been a major source of dissatisfaction with Europe. Immigration became a contentious issue in the UK following the EU's expansion into former communist Central and Eastern Europe in 2004, during the so-called 'big bang' round of accession. Since this moment there has existed a reasonably polarised debate between advocates of restricting immigration and proponents of free movement which has largely cohered around the question of Britain's EU membership.

Critics of the EU who focus on migration charge that the free movement of persons which the UK is required to uphold undermines the country's ability to control its borders. The consequences, they contend, include an oversupply of cheap labour (and decreased wages), a rise in 'benefit tourism', an increased security threat, and the dilution of national identity. Proponents of continued EU membership argue, in contrast, that migrants contribute more to the welfare system than they take out, that they contribute to the country's economic development, that their presence makes the national character more vibrant and interesting, and that there is no inherent link between security and immigration.

Of course, generalisations are difficult and do not capture the true variety of debate over immigration; many advocates of reduced immigration support continued British membership of the EU, and many critics oppose Europe for reasons not linked to migration. Moreover, the pattern of support for migration (and EU membership) does not follow the traditional left-right model of political contestation, since the left and right are both divided on the question.



Arguments in favour of Leaving

- Britain could re-gain full control over its borders and would be able to have a say in who is to enter the country and for what purpose.
- Brexit could restrict the supply of low-paid workers coming from the EU.
- The UK would be able to adopt policies for boosting the employment of UK born nationals.
- A greater proportion of national resources could be spent on British citizens, rather than on non-nationals.
- The re-imposition of immigration controls would increase national security and reduce the likelihood of terrorist attacks.

Arguments in favour of Remaining

- Migration into Europe from Africa and the Middle East can only be dealt with through coordination with other European countries.
- Britain is currently not a member of the Schengen Area and does not have any obligation to join this border-free area, so leaving would add very little.
- Non-nationals contribute more to health and social welfare than they take out, and bring much needed skills and investment.
- Britain can presently bar entry to individuals who present a security threat, even if they are EU nationals.
- If Britain restricted the ability of EU citizens to travel freely to the country, these countries may restrict the movement of British citizens in return.

