

News story: An inspection of the Home Office's approach to Illegal Working

The ability of migrants who are not legally entitled to work in the UK to find paid employment is seen by the Home Office as key to why many migrants remain in the UK without leave or work here in breach of the terms of their leave. Equally, the belief that they will be able to find work is seen as a significant "pull factor" for migrants seeking to reach the UK.

Illegal working also raises other issues, for example migrants working illegally in the UK are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous employers, and businesses employing illegal workers can undercut and damage legitimate businesses, deprive HM Government of revenue in the form of taxes and national insurance payments, and adversely affect the employment prospects of others.

For these reasons, tackling illegal working has been a Home Office priority for some years.

Because of its hidden nature, estimating the size of the problem with any confidence has been difficult. However, since at least 2015, when I last inspected this topic, the Home Office has understood it to be "greater than our capacity to enforce it through traditional arrest activity".

My 2015 report noted a then relatively new shift in emphasis towards encouraging employer compliance through 'educational visits' by Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams, rather than continuing to rely primarily on enforcement visits to locate and arrest offenders. In this latest inspection, I therefore looked to see how this approach had developed, as well as at the measures introduced since 2015 under the umbrella of the 'compliant environment' to strengthen the powers of ICE teams and the penalties for non-compliant employers.

I found that efforts had been made to develop strategies and encourage partnerships and collaborations with other government departments and with large employers and employer groups in particular sectors, but there were no metrics to show what this had achieved. Meanwhile, 'on the ground' there was little evidence that the shift of emphasis trailed in 2015 had 'stuck', and ICE teams were doing (for the most part professionally and properly from what inspectors observed) what they had always done – deploying in response to 'allegations' received from members of the public, in the majority of cases to restaurants and fast food outlets, and with a focus on a handful of 'removable' nationalities.

The lessons from the Windrush scandal are the subject of an independent review, due to report shortly, and there is a compensation scheme for those affected. Therefore, I did not look specifically at how Windrush generation individuals had been impacted by Immigration Enforcement's illegal working measures. However, it was evident that Windrush had had a significant effect

on Immigration Enforcement, operationally (as a result of the 'pausing' of data sharing with other departments) and psychologically (with IE perceiving that other departments and agencies, employers and the general public were now less supportive, and that having dispensed with removals targets it was no longer clear, at least to ICE teams, what success looked like).

My report, which was sent to the Home Secretary on 6 February 2019, made six recommendations. The majority focus on improving the mechanics of illegal working compliance and enforcement but, while important and necessary, these are not enough by themselves to answer the criticism that the Home Office's efforts are not really working and may have had the unintended consequence of enabling exploitation and discrimination by some employers.

My first two recommendations are pivotal to changing this. I recommended that the Home Office should publish as soon as possible an updated (post-Windrush) strategy and Action Plan for tackling illegal working, supported by clear external and internal communications to ensure maximum buy-in cross-government, by employers and representative organisations, by the general public, and within the Home Office itself. I also recommended that it should capture, analyse and report the quantitative and qualitative data and information that demonstrates the strategy and actions are not just effective in reducing illegal working and tackling non-compliant employers but that they are sensitive to and deal appropriately with instances of exploitation and abuse.

The Home Office has accepted all six recommendations. However, it seems that implementation of the key recommendations remains some way off and, while it is entirely sensible for it to look to the various reviews of the immigration system, including of Windrush Lessons Learned, to inform the updated illegal working strategy, in the meantime the problems identified in my report persist, with little clarity about the Home Office's thinking or intentions.

Press release: Record employment is not enough – jobseekers need the chance of better work

After helping deliver record numbers of people into work, Amber Rudd, the Work and Pensions Secretary, will call for a new government focus on helping people better themselves in work, moving to higher paid, higher skilled roles.

Of those workers on low pay in 2006, just one in 6 had escaped that earnings bracket a decade later.

To tackle this, Rudd announced 2 new projects for jobcentres:

1. Building the ability to help claimants make good decisions about job switching. With evidence that changing jobs is often the best way to open up new opportunities and take on more responsibility, this project will help DWP staff assist workers to make informed decisions about new opportunities.
2. Boosting the capability of DWP's employer-facing staff to have effective conversations with local employers about progression and good quality flexible working.

Rudd also announced that the length of the maximum single sanction any benefit claimant could face will be reduced to 6 months.

After committing in February to publishing an evaluation into how the sanctions system supports people into work, Rudd expressed concern at the impact of the longest sanctions on some claimants' ability to support themselves.

While under 3% of eligible Universal Credit claimants are currently undergoing a sanction, where they have failed to meet their obligations like attending meetings and interviews without good reason, and with the average lasting only a month, the change will help to prevent claimants from facing long sanctions.

Acknowledging the growing role of automation in the workplace, Amber Rudd said:

Automation is driving the decline of banal and repetitive tasks.

So the jobs of the future are increasingly likely to be those that need human sensibilities: with personal relationships, qualitative judgement and creativity coming to the fore.

And there is a clear role for government to help people take advantages of these changes, and to help businesses create high-quality jobs.

I don't underestimate the challenges ahead. Jobs are being made, remade and reshaped every day, as we find new ways to be useful to one another.

But I remain incredibly optimistic about what we can achieve.

Changing career, perhaps several times, in the midst of working life can be daunting – particularly if you have a family to look after. I know – that's the path I took.

The work we are doing across government, and particularly in my department, is designed to support people through this.

We want every person, no matter their background, to progress in the workplace and outperform what society says they should be able to do.

These values are at the heart of what I will do at the DWP.

While necessary for the integrity of the system, I believe long financial sanctions become much less valuable over time, and ultimately undermine our aim to help people into work.

That is why we will reduce the length of the maximum sanction to 6 months to make them more proportionate, and why I have already launched an evaluation to consider further improvements we can make.

Chief Executive of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), Neil Carberry said:

We are delighted to welcome Amber Rudd today. REC is all about brilliant recruitment, because it offers people opportunity and generates economic growth and prosperity. Building a progression nation is a vital part of this – addressing skills needs, gender gaps and regional disparities.

Recruiters across the country change people's lives every day by helping them develop their career. And the vast majority of people tell REC it is the most important life decision they make.

It is good to see the Secretary of State acknowledge this through her choice of venue today. We look forward to working with the government on these new pilots, ensuring that people get the opportunities they need to build their future.

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chance of better work

The government needs to help every worker outperform what society says they should be able to do, no matter their background, says Work and Pensions Secretary at the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

Speech: Secretary of State Steve Barclay's speech at the Future of Europe Conference at Sibiu, Romania

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Ladies and Gentlemen it is a pleasure to be here with you in Sibiu today, and thank you to our Romanian Hosts for the invitation.

As was just referenced, as the UK Brexit Secretary you'd expect me to be talking about a certain subject – one perhaps you feel you've heard rather a lot about of late – indeed you may feel you have heard too much about of late.

But I want to look today beyond the domestic issues in terms of the parliamentary vote in the House of Commons, to look beyond the current negotiations between the main political parties.

Because Sibiu is an opportunity for us to consider the sustainable future relationship between the UK and the EU, for as the Political Declaration itself says, we need to take account of the unique context between us. This relationship has to be informed by the global challenges we share as fellow Europeans and that's why the opportunity to have this discussion today is so important.

As a continent, we face threats to our security from hostile actors, and we know all too well about this in the UK from the recent events in Salisbury.

As a planet, the changing climate threatens our lands and livelihoods.

And as an economy, the weight of Europe compared to regions such as Asia continues to diminish.

These challenges we share are actually bigger than the issue of Brexit, they are more significant, more complex than the challenges we are looking at in the Brexit context. And they demand that we continue across Europe to work together in terms of our future relationship.

There is nothing new in terms of saying how do we meet these shared challenges.

Indeed I represent an area of the United Kingdom which was actually drained in the 17th century by Dutch engineers. The landscape of the Cambridgeshire Fens was shaped by European expertise. The constituency neighbouring mine is actually called South Holland, because of that European interest.

Nor in representing Cambridgeshire do I need to expand on the extent to which Cambridge University as an academic institution and a world leader in academic research has been shared by European intellectuals and academia.

I agree with the European Commission in its contribution to Sibiu when it says that we live in an age of transitions, although I would add that this will not be the first summit where such a claim has been made.

We must look not just within Europe, at how those transitions are being shaped, but also beyond.

Population growth in Africa means 18 million Africans will enter the labour market every year but at present only 3.7 million jobs are created. So we can't debate within Europe the challenge of migration without understanding such impacts and the Commission document correctly identifies these sorts of issues. Likewise we cannot safeguard against the challenges on security without shared conversations on regions such as the Sahel, or the growth of ISIS West Africa, and the risk that poses. Areas where again the UK have expertise, where the UK has a lot to offer.

So the UK has a role in terms of security, it has a role in terms of finance, it has a role in terms of technical expertise that goes beyond Brexit, not least as the only European country currently that meets both its NATO 2% target and the UN development 0.7% target. Neither of these commitments are shaped or limited by Brexit.

The threats we face in this time of transition are real and they do indeed need a collective response, and that's very much why I'm here in Sibiu today.

As the UK Prime Minister has said, "Europe's security is our security". Our commitment to this is fundamental and unconditional.

The UK will continue to work with and alongside EU Member States and other European nations in a range of fora;

Whether it's through the UN Security Council, NATO, the G7 or indeed smaller groups such as the Joint Expeditionary Force.

Through NATO, the UK will continue to prioritise strengthening the transatlantic relationship – and thus build a safer Europe.

But we also lead the Joint Expeditionary Force alongside eight European partner nations.

This arrangement has created a pool of high readiness-forces that can respond quickly in a crisis and provide a credible deterrent to our adversaries.

And we are learning from our partners in those areas where they are field leaders: such as Estonia with e-society and cyber security, Finland with it's civil resilience, or Norway for Arctic and Cold Weather Training.

And we will continue to use whichever is the most effective means, whether multilateral, smaller groups or bilateral relationships to safeguard our European security.

We can already see evidence of this across the continent.

Take the British contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence – which sees over 900 of our personnel rotate on a continual basis alongside Danish, French, and host nation Estonian forces.

As part of the Air Policing of the Black Sea, we stationed British personnel and Typhoon aircraft at the Constanta air base in 2017 and 2018.

And we also participated in the Vigorous Warrior 2019 Exercise held last month here in Romania – the largest military medical exercise in its history.

We also face common evolving threats, whether it be terrorism, extremism, organised crime or cyberattacks.

Again, issues that transcend the matter of Brexit.

These individuals and groups do not respond to borders nor do they respond to the specifics of where a future relationship sits.

The best way to tackle these threats is together, through close cooperation.

And we have worked with the EU and other Member States to build on our resilience.

A good example of that is in respect to the Europol Internet Referral Unit which was set up following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

It was strongly supported by the UK – with our own dedicated channel of communication between Europol and UK law enforcement.

And we are also working together on cybersecurity.

On a domestic level, the UK is bolstering our own cyber security capacity by investing £1.9 billion into our National Cyber Strategy.

And the UK was a key instigator in the creation of the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce founded at Europol in 2014.

By its nature, digital threats cross borders and so command a truly global response.

The UK, European institutions, industry, NATO, and third countries must band together to strengthen our global security capacity.

Likewise, another issue that is clear in the Commission's documentation ahead of security has been the need to address the urgent challenge of climate change and that indeed requires changes of behaviour but also financial investment in new technology. This is a huge, shared challenge not just for the UK, not just for Europe, but for all countries. And one for which the EU, and the UK, rightly have big ambitions.

The UK, like so many European nations, is already changing its own behaviour – last week was the first week since the industrial revolution when the UK went a week without generating any coal power.

We have also recently banned the sale of products containing microbeads, committed to the creation of 40 new marine conservation areas in our seas, and most recently agreed to a target of zero net emissions by 2050.

On finance, the UK has committed £5.8 billion in International Climate Finance from 2016 to 2020, we've established the World's first Green Investment Bank, and set the regulatory framework through the City of London to fund that investment through the global hub for green finance.

We will simply not deliver on the climate change challenge without sufficient pace through the global capital markets that London has to offer, and that combined with the expertise resident in London will allow the Paris Climate change objectives to be met much quicker in many member states.

Indeed, let me give you an example from my own region of the innovation within the UK on tackling climate change. Last year my own water company, in the Eastern region, became the first public utility company to issue a green bond, which is just one example of £19 billion in Green Finance Bonds issued by the City of London.

When it comes to tackling the global challenge of climate change – scale and pace matter. And so for that the global financial markets within the UK offer both.

My job title as was said at the start as Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, does not reveal what its real focus is, which is to help position the UK to meet its future challenges – and those challenges sit alongside and in common with those being addressed here in Sibiu.

We have always said we are not exiting Europe, but we share the same values, nor can we opt out of the challenges identified by the Commission leading up to this conference in terms of security, cyber and the environment.

Historically the UK has always been outward in its outlook.

More recently, when we were considering first joining the European Community there was a debate around the competing visions between a continent and the Commonwealth.

In more recent years some more established figures have been slow to accept that a new generation within UK politics wish to address the challenges of our age, the challenges we are looking at in this conference, like climate change, like economic growth, but to do so in ways that work with our neighbours whilst also offering scope for more flexibility and innovation.

We, the UK and the EU, face shared challenges, with shared values, but post Brexit will do so from a different starting point in which the UK is not part of the EU, but it remains a part of Europe.

Sibiu reinforces our shared analysis of the global challenges ahead. And I look forward to working with you as the UK continues to be an active partner in meeting those challenges head on.