

The costs of population growth

There have been various studies of migration arguing that migrants that come to the UK make a net contribution, paying more in income tax and National Insurance than they receive in benefits. These studies ignore the wider picture and do not look carefully enough at all the budgets involved. They are not based on a very pleasant premise when they imply we only want the migrant if they do "make us a profit". It is a pity their calculations are also simply wrong.

When we invite someone into our country we wish them well and want them to live to a decent standard of living reflecting the society they have joined. This means they do need adequate housing, their children need school places, the family requires access to an NHS surgery and if necessary an NHS General Hospital. If just one or two migrants arrive there is sufficient slack in the system, but when 250,000 additional people a year turn up the country has to get on and build the extra homes, schools, surgeries and other facilities they need. We also require extra roadspace and railway capacity. I see this in my own constituency where we have had to provide extra schools and surgeries as the new homes are built.

None of these items comes cheaply. A migrant couple will need a flat or house which will cost say £200,000 to build and provide. They may need a school place for two children. That could have a capital cost of £45,000. We are currently spending massive sums on increasing rail capacity in London and on HS2, and are beginning to spend more on road capacity. Some part of this is the result of an expanding population.

The figures calculated on revenue costs are based on the fact that public spending does transfer money from working age people to the elderly in more need of pensions and NHS care. It also transfers money from people without children to those with children at school. Migrants who work here for a few years, have no children and then move away may indeed make a net contribution to the revenue budget, but they will need expensive housing and transport capacity on capital account which needs to be put into the calculation.