



Institute for Public Policy Research

Challenging ideas for a fairer future

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# ippr ‘Communicating Migration’ Research: Findings

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# Introduction

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- ippr is conducting a major research project on public attitudes towards migration in the UK.
- The aim of this work is to open up the public debate on migration, gather detailed information about people's views, and suggest new ways to make the public and political debate more constructive.
- The research began in 2009 with a regional pilot study in the West Midlands, supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust. These findings are based on this pilot study.



# Background: Objectives

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- Not an opinion poll – this research doesn't aim to re-visit the question of what the British public at large think about migration.
- Not a focus group – the aim is not to test new policies or messages, or get public feedback on existing policies.
- The research seeks to gather detailed information about the views of the 'sceptical majority' in particular, and asks the following questions:
  - What are people's views on migration?
  - What drives people's views on migration?
  - How can people's views on migration be changed?
  - How can a new consensus on migration be built?
- The research seeks to provide a local and regional view as well as national perspective



## Percentage of people who agreed UK has too many immigrants 1999-2008

<b>Age</b>	1999 % agree	2008 % agree	Change in percentage points
15-29	44	67	+23
30-49	51	67	+16
50-64	64	71	+7
65+	69	78	+9
<b>Social class</b>			
Upper middle class (AB)	48	63	+15
Skilled working class (C1)	47	70	+23
Skilled working class (C2)	60	75	+15
Unskilled working class and those dependent on state pensions (DE)	65	74	+9

Source: Ipsos MORI



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Exclusive: Grim parade in our courts

## BRUTAL CRIMES OF THE ASYLUM SEEKERS

### INN-SANE

Refugees move from hospital ...to £6-a-night luxury hotel

### Under siege by refugees

Labour are accused as figures soar



### £10m for councils inundated with asylum seekers

## HI-HOAX?

Hijackers and hostages may be asylum seekers



## ASYLUM SEEKERS EAT OUR DONKEYS

Police hunt rustlers after 9 are snatched

## £32,000 A YEAR ASYLUM SEEKER COUNCIL TAX UP TO PAY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

### Asylum seekers push up taxes

Exclusive: Grim parade in our courts

## BRUTAL CRIMES OF THE ASYLUM SEEKERS

## OH NO! THEY ALL WANT TO STAY and we'll have to pay



## ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE REVOLTING

From Page One  
...over food and accounts  
The allowance 'grabbed as  
...spend on phone calls  
...to relatives in paid by



# Background: West Midlands pilot study areas

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- The research was carried out in three areas of the West Midlands:
- **Birmingham:** A major international city, with a long history of hosting immigrant populations, now experiencing fast changing inflows and outflows of migrants from all backgrounds and skills profiles.
- **Wolverhampton:** A smaller regional city, with established migrant communities, which has experienced new inflows of migrants and changing economic and social pressures.
- **Rural Worcestershire/Evesham:** Not traditionally an area of immigration, but has recently seen many migrants, most from the EU accession states, coming to work in industries such as agriculture.
- In each location, ippr held a public meeting and a private deliberative workshop.
- The aim of these events was to give people the chance to take part in an open and honest debate about the impacts of migration in their local area.



# Background: Migration in the West Midlands

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- Currently 8.8% of the population resident in the West Midlands is foreign born, with 4.8% of the population non-British nationals (ONS 2009).
- Outside of London, the West Midlands has the highest proportion of its resident population not in the "White: British" category:
  - West Midlands 15.9%
  - England 15.3%
  - London 41.8%(Government Office West Midlands 2009).
- In 2007 there were an estimated 9,171 asylum seekers and 76,000 refugees in the West Midlands (WMSMP 2007).



# Background: Attitudes towards migration in the West Midlands

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- Recently 42% of people in the Midlands were found to be very worried about a UK population of 70 million (YouGov 2009).
- When asked why asylum seekers came to the UK, the top response from nearly half the UK regions, including the West Midlands, was that they come because they think it is a "soft touch". This view is held by approximately seven out of 10 people. In contrast in London, asylum seekers are seen as looking for a "better life for themselves and their families" (Ipsos MORI 2003).
- Whilst people in London were most confident the Government has migration under control (54%), 86% in the West Midlands disagreed (Ipsos MORI 2003).





# Findings: Framing the debate

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## How do people understand the issue?

- If question is posed in terms of 'pro' and 'anti', those we spoke to in the workshops would place themselves in 'anti' camp
- BUT this doesn't adequately describe their views
- People's first reactions on being asked their views were often hostile.
- But subsequent discussion revealed more nuanced and moderate views from most participants.
- People made clear distinctions: between different groups of migrants, between local and national issues, between their feelings about migrants and their feelings about wider issues.
- Concerns about migration were often linked to wider concerns about changes in the economy, society, or local communities
- Consensus was not hard to reach, and policy conclusions were surprisingly moderate in some areas



# Findings: Shaping the debate

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## Where do people get information on migration? Who do they believe?

- Conflicting messages and different interpretations/facts lead people to discount all voices in the debate
- General distrust: of government, of media, of statistics, of commentators on the issue
- National-level information not valued – people don't relate this to their local communities or personal experiences
- Most emphasis put on own observations, and anecdotes from others

*“There is always an angle on stats, whether it's Government releasing two lots of stats on one day or the papers have a slant on it. It's always actually brought back down to you and your experience. If I was redundant that would affect my opinion.”*  
[Woman, workshop in Wolverhampton]



# Findings: What are people's concerns?

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## What is the public's agenda?

- The issues people raised in the workshops were those of the 'anti' migration groups:
  - Control and management
  - Numbers
  - Contribution/fairness
  - Compliance/enforcement
- BUT, their views on these issues were clearly not those held by anti migration groups



# Findings: Immigration policy and control

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- Control a major concern
- Control mostly taken to mean management/ knowledge on the part of government, rather than ‘clamp down’ or reduction in numbers
- Clear feeling that government not in control of migration
- Differing views on whether control was possible



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- “We should set skills requirements for immigrants.” [Man, workshop in Evesham]
- “I don’t want illegal entry but I want to honour the rights of migrants.” [Participant, public forum in Wolverhampton]
- “I think we should be making distinctions and I think we should be welcoming people, bringing in people who are able to provide, to create wealth, to generate wealth. I don’t see the point in bringing lots and lots of people who don’t speak the language and don’t want to integrate, but who want to secure benefits for their next generation at the expense of the British tax payer.” [Man, workshop in Evesham]



# Taking the Agenda Forward

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- How can the debate about migration be changed?
- Not about changing policy - in fact constant changes in policy can give the impression that government is not in control
- BUT not simply about finding new messages to explain current policy – need to develop a substantive consensus
- Myth-busting won't be sufficient to shift the debate: too much distrust of information
- Tough talk or tough policy doesn't work: reinforces the sense that the system isn't working
- So what is needed?
  - An open debate
  - Better understanding of public views
  - New narratives
  - Building consensus



# Getting beyond a polarised debate: Building a progressive consensus

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- The following questions give a sense of the problems in the debate. The 'anti' migration view is clear, but because of the way the debate has been framed, the 'pro' migration view can all too easily end up being caricatured.
- In fact, there is a progressive consensus that could command mainstream public support.

Whose side are you on, the migrant or the British-born person?

What should be the extent of the controls on migration?

What level of migration would be ideal?

## Pro (caricature)

- migrant
- few or no controls
- more migration the better

## Progressive Consensus

- Fairness shown to both
- Managed migration
- Controlled flows

## Anti

- British-born person
- most restrictive controls possible
- net migration = none.



# Taking the Agenda Forward: Building consensus

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- Where are the areas of agreement?
  - A controlled and managed system, including enforcement
  - Benefits of migration (e.g. NHS, economy)
  - Fairness (e.g. public services)
  - Integration with multiculturalism
  - Migration in a wider context – (e.g. training, conditions of work)
  - Recognising and responding to negative impacts, particularly at local level





## Next steps: ippr work

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IPPR is actively engaging in the debate:

- Rapid response and briefing
- Coalition building
- Narrative development

IPPR is seeking funding for:

- More local studies
- A more ambitious national-level citizens' jury event
- International studies (in partnership with IOM)