

December 2011

Labour Market Implications of Migration. An interview with Eamonn Davern.

Tereza Blahoutová

Abstract:

In this interview, Eamonn Davern from British Jobcentre Plus describes labour market implications of migration in the United Kingdom. He is convinced that migrant workers should not be considered a danger for British domestic workers. He explains that the British Government is encouraging both, British and foreign workers, to be active in applying for job vacancies.

Could you please briefly introduce Jobcentre Plus¹, for whom you are working?

Jobcentre Plus is a public employment service that is a part of the Department for Work and Pensions. This ministry is responsible for welfare and pension policy in the UK. Jobcentre Plus has about 750 offices around the country; it supports people of working age from welfare into work and helps employers to fill their vacancies. The international unit I am leading is involved in the international discussions of employment and welfare questions and migration impact on the labour market in the UK and in other EU countries.

During your presentation at the Prague conference², you mentioned the British tier scheme for labour migration management³. When was the scheme implemented and what are its main characteristics?

The tier scheme was introduced in 2008 and it creates 5 categories of labour migrants – so called “tiers”. Tier 1 is dedicated to highly-skilled migrants, entrepreneurs and outstanding global talents. For Tier 2, employers may sponsor qualified migrants to work, in particular, in national economy sectors if they have been unable to secure a worker having advertised the

¹ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/about-dwp/customer-delivery/jobcentre-plus/>

² Eamonn Davern was one of the speakers at the international conference „The Origins of Migration Policies“ which was held on 14 - 15 November in Prague and organized by the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations in the Czech Republic.

³ <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/>

vacancy with the Public Employment Service (Jobcentre Plus) and through at least one UK trade journal. Tier 3 is intended for unskilled migrants, but it is currently suspended and will only be reimplemented if and when the Government identifies a shortage area which requires its use. There is a special Tier 4⁴ for students older than 16 years who want to study at British high schools or universities. And the last, Tier 5 had been set up for temporary periods of certain types of work in the UK, and amongst other groups covers sportspeople, creative artists, religious workers and charity workers.

The British government committed itself to decrease net migration from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands of migrants in 2014 – 2015. Is the tier scheme successful in attracting highly-skilled migrants to the UK and preventing low-skilled migrants from coming to the UK?

Yes, in reforming the employment route into the UK, we have ensured that we remain able to retain and attract the best and brightest. Jobs being filled under the general Tier 2 route must be first advertised through Jobcentre Plus; its vacancy database is linked to that of the other public employer services in the European Economic Area so that a European worker will first be able to apply for the job.

The decision about the need of foreign workers is taken by the Migration Advisory Committee consisting of academics, trade unions and employers' representatives, Government representatives and is open to any British citizen to comment. The Migration Advisory Committee defines the recruitment needs for every year and suggests to Government how the policy can be best applied in the wider economic and social interest.

What are the macroeconomic impacts of migration in the United Kingdom?

There is empirical evidence of the positive impact migration has had on GDP, inflation and interest rates. There is actually extremely little evidence of migrants displacing domestic workers. The current unemployment rate is quite high, about 8,1 %, and what's important is that there is a significant unemployment among younger people. The British government tries to encourage young people to do their best, work hard and be able to compete in the labour market. There are still large numbers of vacancies, with British workers not always taking advantage of job opportunities.

And what about the demographic impacts of migration in the United Kingdom?

Currently, we do not observe any large-scale migration from outside Europe to the United Kingdom. People of different cultures have long settled in the UK. History shows that migrant groups across the world, once settled, will adopt similar social patterns to the local inhabitants.

So for example, as their fertility levels and family sizes change to reflect those of the host country, we also see a significant number of ethnically mixed marriages in the United

⁴ <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/studying/>

Kingdom. Many British citizens have a mixed cultural background that assists in reducing or preventing social tensions or segregation between ethnic communities.

Though, we see differences between ethnic groups. For example, children from Indian or Chinese families are now out performing European children in school. The British government considers showing role models of people from particular communities to be a successful approach in empowering migrants. If there is a successful migrant, say, from Bangladesh, the government can provide funding for his/her community employment project in order to inspire other members of this community.

How do British people consider migration? Is it an issue for the British public?

Migration is usually mentioned in public opinion surveys as an issue. Some British are concerned about their cultural security. It is important to point out that the United Kingdom has always been a country of migration, so the British are used to living with people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, some people in areas that have no tradition of migration, perhaps even from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, may feel that their country is changing. Usually younger people, the more educated, and those living in cities and larger urban areas tend to be more open to migration.

In Prague, 14 November 2011

About the author

Tereza Blahoutová [seminars(at)mkc.cz] studied sociology and public economics at the Masaryk University in Brno. In her master theses, she has been dealing with the resettlement programmes of refugees and policy instruments for overcoming Roma's social exclusion in the Czech Republic. She works as editor of the migrationonline.cz.