

29 January 2008

Sir Andrew Green K.C.M.G.
Chairman, Migrationwatch UK
[address]

PROPORTION OF IMMIGRATION FROM OUTSIDE THE EU

Following your letter of 17 December and our discussion earlier this month, we have looked into the first point in your letter – the proportion of net immigration that is from outside the EU.

I enclose a table from an ONS News Release of 15 November 2007 which shows that in 2006 some 68% of net, non-British, migration was from outside the EU. This is consistent with the analysis in your letter.

You point out that figures quoted by a Home Office minister on 17 July included British citizens and gave a substantially different impression – that the EU component was around 48%, and by implication that the non-EU component was around 52%.

We understand why you prefer to omit the British migration component, but feel that here are two ways of looking at the issue. One is that British citizens are EU nationals coming and going from the country like other EU nationals – which appears to have been the Home Office perspective at the time of the statement made in July – or one can argue, as you do, that British Citizens are not relevant to the debate about control of immigration and should be excluded.

If British citizens are to be included in the calculation then we would favour using the in-migration figures only, as ONS did in the text of the News Release of 15 Nov 07¹, not the net migration figures. To use the net figures could give a misleading impression of the balance of EU and non-EU immigration, not least because there is a net out-flow of British citizens. Including British citizens but only considering in-migration makes the non-EU component some 58%.


In summary then, we understand your preference to exclude British citizens and would regard the figure of 68% (for 2006) as a valid estimate for the non-EU component on that basis. The most relevant estimate including British citizens looks to us to be 58% (on an in-migration only basis).

¹ *Emigration from UK reaches 400,000 in 2006*, News Release, Office for National Statistics, 15 November 2007. See Table 1. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/emig1107.pdf>

I regret that as I explained in my earlier letter, for reasons associated with the imminent closure of the Commission, we are not in a position to look at the other aspects of your letter. The Office for National Statistics has however provided us with some notes and we enclose these. We also understand that the Home Office is preparing some further material and we will forward that to you if they do not send it directly.

I am copying this letter Liam Byrne MP, Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, at the Home Office; to Karen Dunnell, the National Statistician; and to Sir Michael Scholar, chair designate of the Statistics Board.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Rhind". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'R'.

DR-464

ONS Comments on the Letter from Sir Andrew Green to Professor Rhind

(dated 17 December 2007)

The proportion of immigration from the EU

1. The letter raises issues about how a cap might be set on migration from outside of the EU, and how data might be used in that process, and whether statements made by Liam Byrne were misleading in this respect.

2. Sir Andrew's letter begins with the statement that "The statistical picture [on migration flows] is unclear" which is disappointing. ONS produces two main migration releases:

- The News Release in November of each year which provides the most up-to-date data (2006). The link is here:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/emig1107.pdf>

- The Annual Reference Volume "International migration" and web tables which provide more detail. A link is provided here:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/MN_no32.pdf

In the News Release, Table 1 provides a clear breakdown of inflows, outflows and the balance by citizenship group (for the United Kingdom and England and Wales separately) for each year from 1997 to 2006.

3. The statistics in the News Release show that in 2006 the majority of immigrants were neither British nor EU citizens. The annual volume provides tables by country of last or next residence and by country of birth (but for 2005) and these provide a similar message.

4. Sir Andrew's concern appears to come from the use of the statistics, rather than with the statistics themselves, and in particular the problems associated with the use of net migration figures. The original 2005 figures (before they were revised to take account of the recent methodological changes in November 2007) showed:

- An overall net inflow of 185,000 for all citizenships;
- A net outflow of 107,000 for British citizens;
- A net inflow of 89,000 for other EU citizens;
- A net inflow of 203,000 for non-citizens.

If there had been a net inflow of zero, rather than 89k, for non-British EU citizens, the resulting overall net inflow would have been 96,000 (48% less).

5. When analysing migration, ONS seeks to avoid using percentage splits of net migration, instead preferring to quote percentage splits of immigration and emigration data separately. The reason for this is illustrated quite well by Sir Andrew's example that the net inflow of non-EU citizens is greater than the net inflow of all citizens;

effectively, if the net inflow of non-EU citizens had been zero, we would have had a net outflow for “all citizenships”.

6. Similar concerns could also be levied at Sir Andrew’s alternative proposal of excluding British citizens. For example, how much of his quoted EU net migration percentage (30%) is accounted for by A8 countries? The problem is that, in any year, there may be positive and negative net migrations from individual EU countries and, as a consequence, you could potentially find a smaller group of EU countries whose “net migration” was greater than the EU total as a whole.

7. There are other reasons why “net migration” proportions may not be suitable for the purpose of a cap. If the aim is to control immigration, then there is an argument that the immigration, rather than the net migration, figures are the most appropriate to use because they relate directly to what you are trying to control. Also, immigration and emigration data by citizenship are not unrelated - high immigration levels for a few years can lead to high emigration levels a few years later (for example, we might expect to see more Polish citizens leaving the UK in the next few years because of the high levels of immigration from Poland in recent years). As a result of the inevitable delay between arrival and return migration, net migration figures during a period of such change can give a misleading impression of the underlying trend and could potentially cause difficulties when it comes to deciding upon what level of cap might be appropriate.

8. In summary, we would not recommend the use of proportions of “net migration” in this way.

9. In relation to the comments on migration data from the International Passenger Survey by main reason/purpose for visit, these data are in the public domain (with a time series) and can be found here:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/IPS_Cit_by_RFM_91-06.xls

The percentages shown are standard error percentages.

10. The concerns that Sir Andrew has in this area appear to relate not to the data themselves but again to their potential use in decisions on a “cap”. For example, he notes the data cover work-related reasons (definite job, looking for work) in the numerator but not dependents. Users should note when using figures by purpose of visit from the IPS that they do only relate to “main reason for visit” (which the Minister does on this occasion). So, for example, there will be people who come for another main reason, such as to study, who work as well.

11. If you need further points of clarification, please do get in touch.

Guy Goodwin
Director, ONS Centre for Demography
January 2008