



Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), Oxford University
PRESS RELEASE for immediate release

Beyond the immigration cap: Reducing Britain's growing reliance on migrant workers requires changes in a wide range of public policies

Today's Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommendations for an upper limit of 43,700 working visas for non-EU skilled workers in 2011-2012 is intended to help reduce overall net-migration to the "tens of thousands", and to counter what the Government previously described as an "over-reliance on migrant workers" in some sectors. But reducing Britain's growing reliance on migrant workers requires a wide range of policy changes that go beyond changes in immigration policy, according to experts at Oxford University's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS).

"Reducing the number of working visas without dealing with some of the fundamental reasons employers feel the need to recruit migrant workers is a bit like fixing a puncture on your bike without bothering to mend the brakes," said Dr Bridget Anderson, a Senior Research Fellow at COMPAS and co-editor of a major new book *Who needs migrant workers?* (Oxford University Press, 2010) which analyses the demand for migrant workers in the UK, and that considers how government policies can contribute to growing demand.

"There are many ways in which government policies that are not directly related to immigration lead to an increase in demand for migrant workers. For example, without more training for British workers and incentives for taking on new recruits, it is often more cost effective for companies to bring in ready-trained and experienced migrants. Equally, if the provision of certain public services – such as care for the elderly – continue to rely on low-waged employees prepared to work antisocial hours then recruiting British workers will continue to prove very difficult. Declining budgets for local councils and the promotion of direct payments for care are likely to contribute to a growing demand for migrants in certain professions such as care assistants."

The MAC was only asked by the government to assess limits for Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the Points Based System – which deals only with skilled and highly skilled workers from outside the EU. In 2009 this covered around 50,000 new migrants - less than 10 per cent of the overall number of migrants entering the UK that year. The MAC report notes that to reach the government's targets for overall net-migration, student and family migration, which have not been assessed by the MAC, would also have to make substantial cuts.

Dr Anderson added: "Regardless of whether you support the idea of a cap on labour immigration or not, one thing is certain, which is that on its own it will not reduce Britain's growing reliance on migrant workers. Reducing demand for labour migrants requires substantial changes, readjustments and trade-offs in different areas of policy, business and society. The bottom line is that reducing Britain's demand for migrant labour requires a lot more than just changes in immigration policy."

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Notes for Editors:

Who needs Migrant Workers? Labour Shortages, Immigration and Public Policy, is published by Oxford University Press. See <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/research/labourmarket/a-need-for-migrant-labour/who-needs-migrant-workers-labour-shortages-immigration-and-public-policy/>

A summary of the main findings in Chapter 1:

http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/13/9780199580590_chapter1.pdf