

Press release

The public deserves to know why it is difficult to cut migration

Successive governments have failed to explain to the public the huge challenges they face in cutting migration, a new book by Sarah Spencer CBE, one of Britain's leading thinkers on migration and equality issues, has concluded.

The Migration Debate, published by The Policy Press, argues that by glossing over the complexities of managing migration and the implications of stricter entry controls for other policy areas, governments have created an environment where the public feels betrayed. The author, Sarah Spencer, is Deputy Director at Oxford University's ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS).

The book raises the concern that the public has been given no explanation why governments do not simply shut the door, nor been given a say in the tough choices to be made. An honest dialogue needs to take place to build greater consensus on what the objectives of migration policy should be.

"We need an open debate on the options and the costs – including the implications for the tourist industry, for business, for families divided or unable to find a carer for an elderly relative; for UK students hoping to go to university, for refugees and for the UK's reputation abroad" says Sarah Spencer.

With more than 100 million people arriving at UK borders each year, there are also practical challenges to be faced in managing their entry – and, for those with no right to stay, their subsequent departure from the UK.

Opposition to the Government's plan to limit labour migration and the number of foreign students has exposed competing economic pressures. But mobility of people from abroad is also necessary for other reasons - like Government plans to attract 4 million additional visitors to the UK in the next four years to generate a £2 billion boost to the economy and 50,000 jobs – for which it says easier access to UK visas will be necessary.

"Both the costs of migration and the costs of curbing migration need to be clear. The Government's freedom for manoeuvre is constrained by conflicting objectives. But there is no debate about what these are; nor is the public given a choice, based on clear pros and cons, on what the priorities should be" Sarah Spencer says.

The Migration Debate argues that it is the impact of migrants once they are in the UK that fuels public concern. Yet successive governments have had no strategy to foster the integration of newcomers, with the exception of refugees. Sarah Spencer argues:

"The lack of an integration strategy for newcomers is a surprising gap. Many migrants participate fully in society but others face barriers that employers and the voluntary sector could do more to address. Government could help to make this happen".

The Migration Debate considers a raft of migration policy issues from asylum, labour migration and international students through family migration and irregular migrants to policy on integration and citizenship. Among other points, the book recommends:

- Steps to curb the causes of employer demand for migrant workers
- Civil penalties for minor breaches of immigration rules to enable law enforcement to focus on worst offenders
- Review of family migration to ensure that people are not separated from loved ones
- Integration of migrants as a shared ethical responsibility in the 'Big Society'
- A stronger evidence base to underpin informed public debate on the tough choices to be made

Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, says:

'This is a daring book. At a time when public debate is mired in ignorance and extremism, Sarah Spencer offers her readers a rational and comprehensive survey of policy and its effects. Sober, realistic and intelligent.'

Andrew Geddes, Professor of Politics at the University of Sheffield, says:

'While migration is a topic that can generate more heat than light, this book provides an indispensable guide to the key issues that shape debates about migration. The range, depth and clarity of the analysis makes this book a must-read for anyone interested in this important subject.'

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- Published by The Policy Press, released on Wednesday June 29th, 2011, for £14.99. The title is currently available for a short period with a 20% discount.
<http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847422859>
- The Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration. COMPAS is core funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.
- **Links:**
Sarah Spencer: <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/people/staff/sarah-spencer/>
COMPAS: <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/home/welcome/>
ESRC: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>
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