

Migrants do not affect jobless levels, say researchers

National Institute of Economic and Social Research report in sharp contrast to claim by Migration Watch

Alan Travis, home affairs editor -The Guardian, 10 January 2012

Immigration to Britain has had little or no impact on the overall levels of unemployment, even during the recent recession, according to research published on Tuesday. A report by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research comes in advance of the results of an official inquiry by the government's migration advisory committee on the impact of migration from outside Europe on the economy and public services in Britain.

The NIESR report, which uses national insurance registrations by foreign nationals for the first time to analyse the impact of immigration on the UK labour market, says it found no link between migrant inflows and the overall level of those claiming jobseeker's allowance.

"In addition, we tested for whether the impact of migration on claimant unemployment varies according to the state of the economic cycle. We found no evidence of a greater negative impact during periods of low growth or the recent recession."

The findings confirm existing research which has generally found little or no impact on average of immigration on unemployment in Britain, with at most "a generally modest impact on the less skilled". The NIESR report concedes that it is not known whether a fall in the number of low-skilled jobs in Britain is being masked by a balancing increase in the number of more highly skilled jobs.

The research is also in sharp contrast to a five-page report published by Migration Watch on Monday, which campaigns for "zero net migration" to Britain, which claimed to find a direct link between rising levels of youth unemployment and an increase in migration from eastern Europe.

The pressure group published figures claiming to show that there were 600,000 more workers in the UK in the third quarter of 2011 from Poland and the seven other eastern European states than there were in 2004 before they joined the European Union. It notes that youth unemployment rose by

almost 450,000 over the same period and argues that "it would be a very remarkable coincidence if there was no link at all between the figures".

Sir Andrew Green, of Migration Watch, said: "Correlation is not, of course, proof of causation but, given the positive employability characteristics and relative youth of migrants from these countries, it is implausible and counter-intuitive to conclude – as the previous government and some economists have done – that A8 [eastern Europe] migration has had virtually no impact on UK youth unemployment in this period.

"We hear a great deal from employers about the value of immigrant labour, especially from eastern Europe, but there are also costs some of which have undoubtedly fallen on young, British-born workers."

But Matt Cavanagh, of the Institute for Public Policy Research, said the report was "just conjecture, disingenuously presented as research" and youth unemployment began rising before the 2004 arrival of workers from Eastern Europe.

"To try to make our youth unemployment problem look like it is only or mainly an immigration problem – as this report does, by selective use of dates, and a methodologically bogus juxtaposition of aggregate A8 migration with aggregate rise in unemployment – is a profound mistake, and an irresponsible one at that," Cavanagh said.