



Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Campaigning for justice in immigration, nationality & asylum law & policy since 1967

2017 General Election: An Opportunity for Immigration Reform

On 8th June 2017, the UK will go to the polls in a general election, the results of which will have a crucial bearing on the UK's future. During the five-year parliamentary term until 2022, we will negotiate our exit from the European Union and establish a new role for ourselves on the global stage. In the coming weeks, candidates from all the political parties will tell us what they think Britain's place within the world should be, and how they think migrants should be treated in a post-Brexit society. This will be a chance to press our future representatives in Parliament on their views on immigration, and scrutinise their promises and threats.

This document is a resource for those attending and speaking at political hustings and debates in the run-up to 8th June. It offers JCWI's vision for an immigration system that benefits UK citizens and migrants alike.

Hustings questions for candidates

1. Will you commit to keeping the UK outward-looking and open after Brexit, instead of trying to cut immigration at all costs?
2. Will you work to ensure that the UK's immigration rules treat migrants coming here in the future with humanity, dignity and respect?
3. Will you guarantee a right to remain for existing EU citizens in the UK?
4. How will you ensure the benefits of migration benefit all communities in the UK?

JCWI's view for GE2017

Throughout recent history we have benefited from the ideas and energy brought by people from across the globe. The contributions made by migrants have helped the UK to be a rich, vibrant society as well as a strong economic and political power.

But increasingly, migrants have been subject to hostile public debate and increasingly aggressive policies which have reduced their rights and security in the UK. Our politicians have not always been open about the vital contribution made by migrants, and nor have they invested in the resources needed to help immigration work for everyone. These failures have led to concerns among business, the public, and migrants alike about the way immigration is being handled.

The upcoming negotiations with the European Union and other countries around the world will be crucial. Unless there is proper debate about the shape of the UK's approach to



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immigration, our society, economy and culture could be compromised for years to come. We want GE2017 candidates to commit to keeping the UK outward-looking and internationally-connected, and above all to ensure that migrants coming here are treated fairly and equitably.

We call on them to particularly endorse the following:

1. Abandon the net migration target

The UK now needs to reposition itself on the global stage. We need an immigration policy that is pragmatic and positive about the contribution made by migrants here. The unachievable net migration target should be replaced by objectives which will enable us to retain the UK's attractiveness to international talent, and embed a welcoming and humane approach within all policies dealing with foreign nationals.

2. Ensure that the immigration rules are fair and humane

The current immigration rules for non-EEA nationals have embedded inequality and hostility within the system. This will be further exposed after Brexit, when EEA nationals are brought under immigration control. **To avoid further inequity, new rules for both EEA and non-EEA nationals to work, study and be reunited with family should be introduced**, with migrants from all countries being treated equally. These rules should be fair and effective, and deliver positive outcomes for the UK as well as for those who come here.

3. No community should be left behind.

The economic benefits of migration should be shared amongst us all through reinvestment in communities, infrastructure, jobs, and education. A fair and sustainable immigration system must attempt to balance both benefits and pressures among communities, and ensure that the contribution of migrants to the UK economy and society is felt by all. We must also recognise that different regions have different migration needs. Policymakers cannot continue to impose a one-size-fits-all immigration system on diverse regions in the UK. There may instead be a place for a regional mechanism by which areas of the UK, major cities, and devolved administrations can feed back to central government about the migration needs in their local areas.

4. Address inefficiencies in current immigration law and processes

The UK's tangled immigration laws and overstretched system is not delivering a good service to migrants or to many businesses or universities attempting to navigate it. After Brexit, a new cohort of EEA nationals will be brought into this system, creating significant problems unless reforms are made. We propose that the Government should frontload investment now with the aim of increasing the capacity and skills of Home Office and border control staff, to ensure that a decent service is available for all who use it.



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5. Increase the accountability of Home Office decision-making

Immigration decisions have been uniquely targeted by cuts to independent appeal rights in recent years, enabling poor decision-making to go unchecked as the Home Office in most cases reviews its own decisions (through a process called administrative review) and there is no right of appeal for the individual.

After Brexit, the demand for independent review of decisions is likely to increase, with a new wave of legal claims against the Home Office. We urge candidates to champion the right of appeal in the independent immigration tribunals which were established for this purpose. We also want the next Government to facilitate reasonable access to legal advice for both EEA and non-EEA nationals, to ensure widespread understanding of new rules and improve the quality of applications. It must also ensure Home Office decision-making is improved to avoid incorrect decisions, delay and costs for migrants and taxpayers.

6. Rethink the ‘hostile environment’ strategy

Immigration enforcement is increasingly dependent on community-level controls, with the cost and responsibility passed onto doctors, landlords, teachers and employers. We argue that this approach invites discrimination, whilst undermining wider integration strategies aimed at building cohesive communities.

In the context of a new post-Brexit immigration policy, the new Government should move away from the hostile environment approach. Enforcement should occur at properly managed borders and by immigration officials, not in our communities. Community involvement should instead be in the form of a local integration strategy which aims to reach out to, rather than intimidate, migrant communities.

7. Tackle the causes of irregular migration

In embarking upon Brexit, the UK will need to take a fair and pragmatic approach to avoid a significant increase in the undocumented migrant population. If it introduces rules with retrospective effect – for example in relation to the 3.6 million EEA nationals already resident in the UK – or which are particularly demanding for future applicants, a greater number of people will inadvertently fall outside the system.

Systems put in place to allow EEA nationals to prove their entitlement to be in the UK will need to be simple, cheap, and fair. All new post-Brexit immigration rules should be proportionate and clearly communicated, to avoid a further increase in irregular migrants. The Government could also take this opportunity to consider how the status of the UK’s existing 650,000 plus undocumented migrants could be resolved, and thereby reduce the need for in-country enforcement.

Contact JCWI’s policy team for further information, or to let us know your local candidates’ position on immigration. Call 0207 553 7457 or email policy@jcw.org.uk

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