



Post-Brexit Migration and Wales

Policy context

The UK Government plans to end free movement of people to the UK from EU countries and the proposed Immigration Bill will have significant implications for Wales' economy, society and population.

This briefing note provides an overview of the likely impacts of post-Brexit migration policies and identifies a range of ways in which the Welsh Government could seek to respond to the challenges and maximise the opportunities that the new migration rules will present.



Labour market shortages

A reduction in migration from the European Economic Area (EEA) will affect key sectors of the Welsh labour market. It will have most impact on sectors which currently employ substantial numbers of EEA migrants who are paid less than £25,600 per annum (the salary threshold which the UK government has specified for those wishing to come to the UK for work). These sectors include manufacturing, higher education, tourism and hospitality, culture and the arts, health and social care.

As well as varying between sectors, the UK government's post-Brexit migration policy will have different impacts on full-time and part-time workers, by gender and in different parts of Wales.

Other impacts

A reduction in the numbers of EEA migrants could lead to a reduction in the overall size of the working-age population in Wales. This would mean that a smaller number of workers have to support the growing number of people of pensionable age which could be a particular challenge in rural areas which already have ageing populations.

The UK Government's proposed Immigration Bill will have significant implications for Wales' economy, society and population.

Other risks that experts believe may need to be managed include:

- the potential for a deterioration in community relations and integration of migrants;
- delays in applications to the EU Settlement Scheme;
- a perception that the UK has become a less desirable place for migrants to work; and
- reciprocal restrictions on UK nationals working in the EU.

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic

As well as the ban on all non-essential travel to/from the UK and the suspension of visa and citizenship application services, the Coronavirus pandemic has raised public awareness of the value of 'low-skilled' key workers. Given that many EEA migrants to the UK currently work in these roles, it is possible that this may change public attitudes to migration.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government may want to consider establishing an expert group, similar to the Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population in Scotland, to advise on how to make the new migration policies work best for the economy and employers in Wales.

In addition, it could address the issues identified in this briefing by:

1. **Continuing to seek the UK Government's agreement to:**
 - Regional variations in the UK migration policy;
 - Sectoral schemes to ensure the supply of key workers in areas such as social care and agriculture; and
 - Measures to address the needs of rural communities.
2. **Advocating for UK-EU agreements to include:**
 - Mobility frameworks; and
 - Mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
3. **Using devolved powers directly to introduce:**
 - A migrant integration strategy for Wales;
 - Gender pay equality initiatives; and
 - Measures to support rural communities with declining working age populations.

Find out more

For our full report see Hepburn, E. and Bell, D. (2020). [**Post-Brexit Migration and Wales**](#). Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

About the Wales Centre for Public Policy

Here at the Centre, we collaborate with leading policy experts to provide ministers, the civil service and Welsh public services with high quality evidence and independent advice that helps them to improve policy decisions and outcomes.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government, the Centre is based

at Cardiff University and is a member of the UK's What Works Network.

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