

National conversation on immigration

Beyond the media debate on this issue, what do people in the UK really think about immigration?

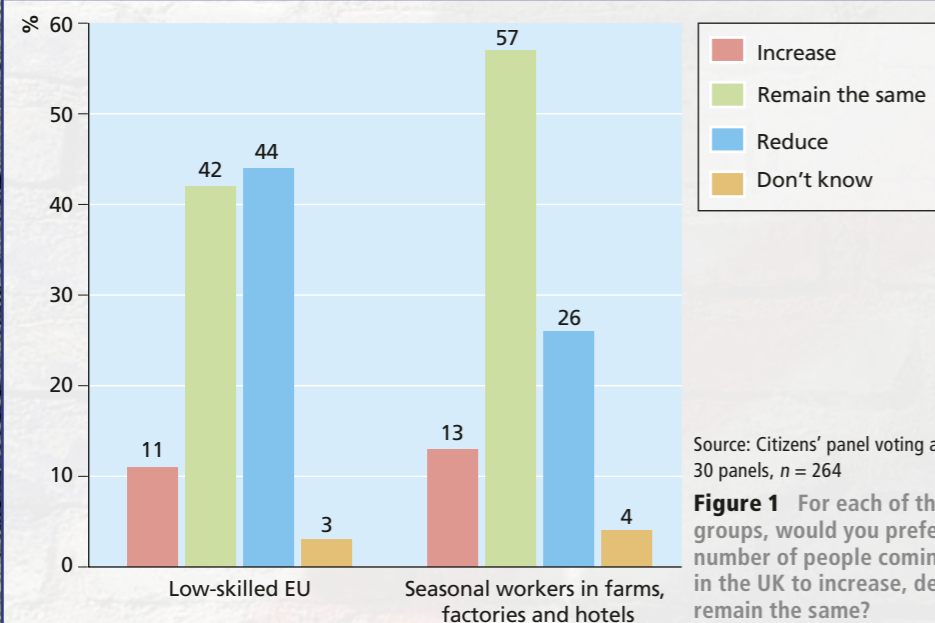
Citizenship panels' views on migration

Early in 2018 two campaigning organisations, British Futures and Hope Not Hate, got together to write a report for the Home Office called the *National Conversation on Immigration*. They conducted an online survey, but also eventually aimed to survey a representative sample of 4,000 people and hold 120 stakeholder meetings and citizenship panels in 60 different parts of the UK in 2018. You might think about how and why results might differ from an online survey and one conducted with a representative sample of the population. Their interim report covered findings from their first 30 site visits. Each citizenship panel involved ten 'broadly representative' local people. The interim report concludes that the UK public sees immigration on the national scale but also through a 'local lens' that reflects their everyday experiences. Getting immigration and integration working well at a local level is the key to building public support for the

handling of future immigration policy. In the three detailed sections shown here, we explore some of the interesting findings from these panel discussions.

The *National Conversation on Immigration* concludes that in face-to-face discussion most people in the UK do have nuanced and 'balanced' views about immigration. It is possible to have an informed conversation which does not reproduce the often-polarised media debate or descend into prejudice. It also claims that there is common ground for developing policies on immigration that can work for all. The challenge is how such a dialogue could be made more institutionalised — how this calm and mature national conversation might be adopted and taken forward by the British government in its future policy-making decisions.

Migration for work



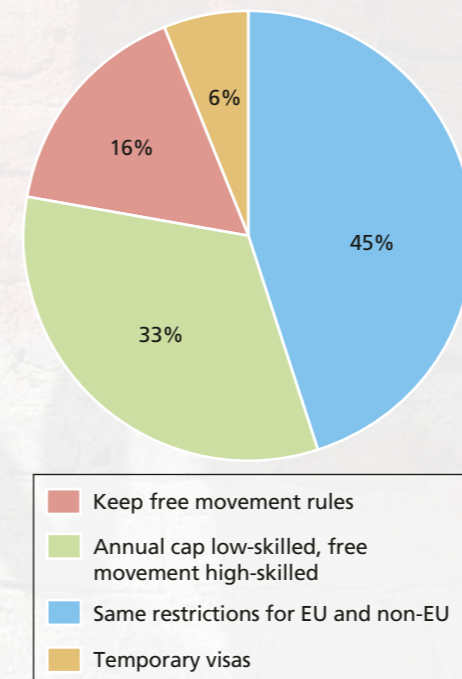
Almost everyone in the first 30 citizenship panels saw both the positive impacts and the challenges of immigration. Typically, participants described the benefits of migration in terms of the skills that some migrants bring and the jobs that they fill. Citizens' panels often talk positively about migrants working in the public NHS as characterising the best qualities of migration. Although there is opposition to low-skill EU migrants, when specific jobs are mentioned that British workers might be reluctant to do, such opposition also falls (see Figure 1).

Source: Citizens' panel voting across first 30 panels, n = 264

Figure 1 For each of the following groups, would you prefer the number of people coming to live in the UK to increase, decrease or remain the same?

EU migration to the UK

The majority of people in the panels do want changes to EU migration policy, as Figure 2 demonstrates. There is a small preference for a system that treats EU and non-EU labour migrants the same, even if this means more restrictions on British nationals living in the EU. Those who chose this option often felt this system would be fairer, as it treats everyone in the same manner, irrespective of their ethnicity or national origin. People's views were often generally expressed here in terms of questions of fairness and equality.

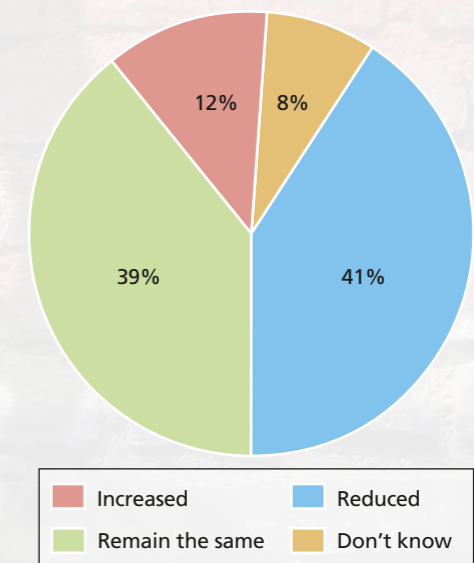


Source: Citizens' panel voting across first 30 panels, n = 264

Figure 2 Citizens' panel voting on future options for EU migration to the UK

Asylum seekers and refugees

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of panel participants voiced their sympathy for the plight of asylum seekers and refugees who might be fleeing war and persecution to come to the UK. The overwhelming majority believe that the UK should take in some refugees and that the government should do as much as it can to help refugees, particularly women and children. A 'compassionate but controlled' policy towards refugees was a common demand of many of the citizens' panels and a small majority of those involved favoured increasing or maintaining current levels (see Figure 3).



Source: Citizens' panel voting across first 30 panels, n = 264

Figure 3 Would you prefer the number of asylum-seekers and refugees coming to live in the UK to be increased, reduced or remain about the same?