



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**DERRY- LONDONDERRY
REPORT**

JUNE 2017

CONTEXT

Spanning the river Foyle, Derry-Londonderry is Northern Ireland's second largest city, with a population of about 95,000 and falls within the Derry and Strabane Council area. The economy of the area was based on the textile industry until the 1970s, with shirt-making employing more than any other industry. Production has now been relocated south Asia and most of the shirt factories lie derelict. In recent years and boosted by the peace process there has been considerable public and private investment in Derry-Londonderry's economy, with new IT employers. Tourism has also generated many jobs, boosted by the end of sectarian conflict. Nevertheless, the city still experiences high levels of unemployment and poverty. Just 59.6% of the working-age population of the Derry and Strabane council area were employed in 2015, compared with 68.4% in Northern Ireland as a whole and 73.6% in Great Britain, excluding Northern Ireland¹. Average earnings are also lower in the area than in most other parts of the UK.

Derry-Londonderry has become associated with the Troubles, the history of which is well-documented. Today about 75% of its population identify as Roman Catholic/Nationalist, while an estimated 23% are Protestant. The city itself is markedly residentially segregated by faith and political traditions. While those identifying as Roman Catholic outnumber Protestants/Unionists on both banks of the Foyle, the latter community tends to be more concentrated on the east bank. There are however, a number of Protestant/Unionist enclaves on the west bank of the Foyle, including the fenced-off Fountain estate, close to the city walls.

As in many parts of Northern Ireland, Derry-Londonderry has experienced considerable amounts of emigration at certain times in its history, as a consequence of economic decline and the Troubles. As with other parts of the UK, Derry-Londonderry has seen the arrival of migrant workers in the last 15 years, although at a much slower rate than in most other parts of the UK. Some 2.5% of the total population were born outside the UK or Ireland in the Derry and Strabane council area at the time of the 2011 Census, compared with 4.5% in Northern Ireland as whole and 13.3% for the UK. The largest country-of-birth groups are from Poland, Lithuania and India.

WHAT WE DID

A citizens' panel was held with ten members of the public recruited to represent a range of views on immigration, with the very hostile and very pro-migration filtered out through a pre-interview screening question. All panel members came from Derry-Londonderry. As with other panels in Northern Ireland, participants reflected the range of Northern Ireland's political traditions and faith communities. Further demographic information about the group is given at the end of this report, but it is significant to note that nine of the panel were of social grades C2, D and E. In part, this reflects the social composition of a working class city.

We were careful in choosing a neutral location for the citizens' panel, as we did not want it to be held in an area strongly associated with a particular side of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. The panel was held in a community centre, within the old city walls.

The citizens' panel also looked at securing a consensus, with participants asked about what needs to change in order to gain their trust and broad support for how the Government handles immigration and integration. The citizens' panel was also questioned about differences in attitudes to immigration between Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK.

KEY FINDINGS

Attitudes to immigration

The citizens' panel were asked 'on a scale of 1-10 do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, nationally and in your local community'. Their average score was 4.2 with a range from 1 to 8. As noted above, the panel recruitment process aims to screen out the minority of the population those with hostile or very liberal attitudes to migration – that is those score 1 or 2 or 9 or 10 to the above question. However, panel members sometimes change their minds between recruitment and when we hold the panel, which accounts for the range of scores.

Some of the panel were balancers, citing the benefits of migration alongside their concerns, which focussed in competition for social housing and employment.

"I work as a public servant and we've been affected very heavily by immigration. But I've another point of view, when we had our first child it was foreign people that saved my wife's life. She had a post-partum haemorrhage [names doctors]. So from a personal point of view, I agree there are a few problems that come, but there are positives, so two sides. The cancer centre would not work without them" (Citizens' panel participant).

However, at least half of those who attended the citizens' panel had strong views about immigration that were more negative, with pressures on social housing again emerging as a dominant issue.

"This place is one of the biggest unemployment hotspots in Northern Ireland, bar Strabane. They are coming here, they are taking our houses, taking our jobs. You know I have no problems if they have got jobs, whatever, but they can't come and be looked after by the state, it's all wrong. Then there is the terrorism.....I've no problems with people coming to work, just don't expect a free ride on housing" (Citizens' panel participant).

As we have progressed with the National Conversation on Immigration, it has become evident that the concerns that are held about immigration often reflect local pressure points. Where school places are in short supply, citizens' panels will often point out the pressures that immigration has placed on education. It was therefore not surprising that in Derry-Londonderry competition over access to social housing was the dominant concern, as Northern Ireland Housing Executive statistics indicate a considerable mismatch between the supply and demand for social housing in the Derry and Strabane council area, including for families in acute housing stress².

The panel felt that there were differences in the way that immigration was seen in Northern Ireland, in particular, that the numbers of arrivals were much lower than elsewhere in the UK, leading to fewer pressures on housing and public services. As with the other citizens' panels we held in Northern Ireland, panel members in Derry-Londonderry had direct experiences of migration, either their own emigration from Northern Ireland, or that of family and friends. This was referred to at times in the discussion, although it did not appear to engender greater sympathy to new migrants.

Three other views emerged in throughout the discussion. First, there were concerns about competition for jobs between migrants and local residents. This is not surprising, given that panel members had experiences of unemployment.

Second, the majority of the panel felt that migrants found it easier to claim benefits than British citizens. The availability of benefits was seen as a pull factor, with panel members making reference to migrants and refugees travelling across Europe to come to the UK because of the perceived generosity of the benefits system.

Third, terrorism emerged as a concern and was explicitly linked to the flow of migrants across Europe. National coverage of recent terror attacks in the UK meant that immigration had become an issue that was discussed to a much greater extent with family and friends.

"It's more talked about now, like the girl said because of the terrorist attacks. If these attacks were not happening, it [immigration] would be less talked about, but because these attacks happen everyone talks about it" (Citizens' panel participant).

EU migration

There was an expectation that the numbers of EU migrants arriving in the UK would level off when the UK left the EU. The citizens' panel then voted in favour of their preferred option for rules covering EU migration after the UK leaves the EU. Two panel members wanted to keep the present free movement rules – in order to keep future options open for those who might want to leave the UK. The rest of the panel was split between having the same rules for everyone, or caps and visas for EU nationals who came to fill low-skilled jobs in the UK. There was some support for short term visas for EU nationals, until they “prove themselves” by working and paying tax. Other panel members, however, feared that short term visas would not be well enforced and would result in EU nationals overstaying their visas.

Participants were then asked about immigration control and the UK-Ireland land border after Brexit. The panel comprised a mix of those who had voted Leave and Remain in the EU referendum. There was a great deal of anxiety about the impact of leaving the

EU on Derry-Londonderry, in relation to the economy, EU grant aid, as well as how the UK-Ireland border would be managed without jeopardising the peace process. While a few panel members felt that a hard border was inevitable, most did not, explaining how it would affect their daily lives. Overall, panel members felt they were being given very little information about the Brexit process and this was contributing to their anxiety about future developments.

“Nobody knows what will happen with Brexit...It’s not helping, not having a Government in Stormont” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Non-EU Migration

The panel had little awareness of non-EU migration for work, study or to join immediate family and these migration flows were not seen as being a problem or issue in Derry-Londonderry. We described the rules governing family migration and asked if any panel members knew of such restrictions on family migration, in particular the minimum income threshold for a UK citizen who wanted to bring in a spouse or civil partner. No panel members knew of the rules covering family migration. There was a consensus that those who wanted to bring in family should be able to support them, but the current income threshold of £18,600 was felt to be too high if it did not take into account a spouse or partners’ income.

The majority of panel members were happy for the numbers of highly-skilled migrants from outside the UK to be increased.

Although panel members referred to the Australian Points Based System at points in the discussion, no-one knew that the UK had a similar system governing migration for work. Some panel members had relatives or friends who had emigrated to Australia, and its immigration system was perceived as being well-managed and able to screen out criminals.

“The thing is, our people here, if they are going to Australia or America and they’ve got a criminal record, they don’t get in” (Citizens’ panel participant).

To date, participants in all the citizens’ panels that we have held have made reference to the Australian Points Based System. It is worth reflecting why this policy appears so popular with the public, who often have comparatively little detailed information about how it works in practice. Nearly 1.3 million people born in the UK³ now live in Australia and many UK families have relatives who live in Australia. Emigration from the UK, as well as family visits mean that a significant proportion of the UK population has visited Australia, more so in areas of high emigration such as Northern Ireland. This means that many people in the UK have had an experience of applying for a visa, or entering Australia a visitor. The visibly high levels of bio-security at ports of entry into Australia – searches, x-rays and

detector dogs – also gives an impression of tight border control than in the UK. These factors may contribute to a desire for the UK to adopt an Australian Points Based System.

Asylum seekers and refugees

There was some sympathy for refugees who had fled war, but many in the panel were sceptical about refugees who crossed Europe to come to the UK. It was felt that those who were doing this were being drawn to western Europe by a generous benefit system. Panel members referred to Calais at various points in the discussion, arguing that traffickers were exploiting those who lived in Calais who wanted to come to the UK.

Border control

As noted above, there was discussion about how the UK-Ireland land border might be managed after Brexit. There was also some discussion about clandestine entry to the UK (the panel included a former haulier who volunteered anecdotes about this issue). There was little confidence in the UK government to exclude foreign offenders and to deal with clandestine entry. At the same time most panel members were not willing for a small increase in taxation to enable the Home Office budget for immigration control to be increased.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same, with the results given below and generally showing support for highly-skilled migration. The importance of food and farming to the Northern Ireland economy may account for support for keeping seasonal migration at the same level. Just one person had heard of the net migration target, and was concerned that the Government had repeatedly failed to meet it.

	Increased	Reduced	Remain about the same
High skilled workers from the EU	6		4
Low-skilled workers from the EU	1	4	5
Seasonal workers employed in farms, food factories and hotels		3	8
High-skilled workers from outside the EU	7	1	2
Asylum-seekers and refugees		7	3

Non-British immediate family members (e.g. spouses, children under 1)	3	2	5
Overseas students coming to UK universities	3	2	5

Impact of migration

As already noted, panel members were most concerned about the impact of immigration on access to social housing. Compared with other places where we have held panels, there was less concern about the impact of migration on school places and the NHS. However, two participants were concerned that new migrants had preferential access to free nursery education places

"I put a 4, but our children cannot get nursery places..they get preference over our children. it's the unemployed first, foreigners next and us last" Citizens' panel participant.

In Northern Ireland, all three year olds receive 12.5 hours per week of free nursery care during term time – fewer hours than elsewhere in the UK. Some school nurseries also offer free nursery education places to two year olds in Northern Ireland, but have their own admissions systems to prioritise children according to their social needs. Children from low income households and those that do not speak English have been prioritised for free early education in many cases. While there are many good reasons for taking such an approach, it can be seen that such a practice can cause resentment, particularly if there is no explanation about why this happens.

Panel members compared the impact of immigration in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK at various points in the discussion, expressing the view that there has been a much greater negative impact of immigration in Birmingham and London.

Integration

The discussion about integration was more nuanced and was not characterised by strongly held views that verged on hostility. Panel members believed that it was a duty for new migrants to learn English. Some felt that Muslims who lived in Northern Ireland were better integrated than elsewhere in the UK. More so than in many other panels, integration was seen as a two-way relationship, with local communities also have a duty to welcome new arrivals. There was also an acceptance that it is human nature to want to socialise with people who are similar in

background, with fewer concerns about social segregation than in other panels that we have held outside Northern Ireland.

Schools were seen as institutions that were successful in promoting the integration of migrants, and panel members wanted their children to be exposed to different cultures. There was a view that sectarianism and racism would diminish across the generations.

Participants were asked if there were particular issues in Northern Ireland where migrants would have to integrate into a segregated society. Panel members felt that some new migrants might not be aware of the history of the area where they were living or the symbols and signifiers of different communities. Many Polish and Lithuanian migrants are Roman Catholic and the panel felt that eastern European Roman Catholics were seen differently from Irish Catholics within Northern Ireland: *“Its different, they are not seen as a threat.”*

Regaining trust in the immigration system

Participants were asked about the changes they would like to see brought in to enable greater confidence in the immigration system. The demands of the Derry-Londonderry panel were similar to other panels, in that they wanted to see greater vetting of migrants before they arrived, particularly in relation to checking for criminal records. The panel also wanted tighter border controls and great immigration enforcement to prevent undocumented migration, although, as noted above, they were unwilling to pay more for it through taxation. The other key demand was for more information and greater transparency from the Government *“we would like to know policy in black and white.”*

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the panel had strong views about immigration and particular concerns about competition for jobs and social housing, which may be an outcome of socio-economic conditions in Derry-Londonderry. The majority of participants wanted to end free movement for EU nationals after Brexit, although there was no clear view about what system should replace it, as long as it brought control over numbers and greater criminal vetting.

This was our second citizens' panel in Northern Ireland and it is clear that there are some differences in the way that immigration and integration are viewed here. As numbers are lower, immigration is a less topical and contested issue, although more terrorist atrocities may change this. Panel members had fewer concerns about social segregation than elsewhere in the UK. In contrast, there were more concerns about the impact of leaving the EU than in the panels we have held in England, Scotland and Wales, in relation to the peace process, aid and the economy in Derry-Londonderry.

Appendix

Demographics of the citizens' panel

Gender	Age	Occupation	Ethnic and religious identity
Female	40	Pharmacy assistant	White British/ Protestant
Female	41	Cleaner	Polish/Roman Catholic
Female	45	Clerical worker	White British/ Protestant
Female	38	Office worker	White Irish/Roman Catholic
Female	53	Home care worker	White British/ Protestant
Male	52	Council refuse collector	White British/ Protestant
Male	72	Taxi driver	White British/ Protestant
Male	19	Student and sales representative	White Irish/Roman Catholic
Male	37	Civil servant	White British/ Protestant
Male	48	Ambulance driver	White British/ Protestant

Endnotes

- 1 Annual Population Survey.
- 2 Department for Communities Northern Ireland (2016) Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2015-2016, Belfast: Department for Communities available on <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/ni-housing-stats-15-16-full-copy.pdf>
- 3 2016 Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

About

The National Conversation on Immigration is a project run by British future and HOPE not hate.

British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank seeking to involve people in an open conversation which addresses people's hopes and fears about identity and integration, migration and opportunity, so that we feel confident about Britain's Future.



We want to ensure that we engage those who are anxious about cultural identity and economic opportunity in Britain today, as well as those who already feel confident about our society, so that we can together identify workable solutions to make Britain the country we want to live in.

HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate uses research, education and public engagement to challenge mistrust and racism, and helps to build communities that are inclusive, celebrate shared identities and are resilient to hate.

Hate is often the consequence of a loss of hope and an articulation of despair, but given an alternative, especially one that understands and addresses their anger, most people will choose HOPE over hate.



Our job is to expose and undermine groups that preach hate, intolerance and division whilst uniting communities around what they have in common.

We aim to take a part in building a society that celebrates rather than scapegoats our differences.