

## 2.2 IMMIGRATION: HOW IT WORKS TODAY

Our system of immigration and emigration can be split into two parts:

- migration to and from countries inside the EU
- migration to and from countries outside the EU

This paper looks at each of these in turn.

### **MIGRATION TO AND FROM THE EU**

Migration within the EU is based on the principle of *free movement of people*. This is the principle that a person who is entitled to work in one EU country is entitled to work in any EU country.

Freedom of movement of people is one of the 'four freedoms' of the Single Market. You will find more details on this in Paper 1.2: Trade: How It Works Today. The Single Market includes Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein as well as the 28 countries of the EU. But we will keep things simple by referring to all of these countries as 'the EU'.

The free movement rules are very clear for people who have jobs. Any EU citizen who has a job in the UK is entitled to stay here. Any UK citizen who has a job in another EU country is entitled to stay there. These people are also entitled to in-work benefits and healthcare where they are living in the same way as the citizens of that country. For example, people from EU countries working in the UK can use the NHS and receive tax credits and child benefit in the same way as UK citizens can. People from the UK working in another EU country can use their services and receive their benefits. These people also pay taxes in the country where they live and work.

The rules are a bit more complex for people who don't have jobs:

- An EU citizen who moves to the UK (or another EU country) to look for a job can do so for up to three months. If they don't have a job after three months, they can be required to leave unless they have health insurance and can show that they have enough money to support themselves. EU rules allow a country to deport someone who becomes a burden on the welfare state.
- Someone who has a job but then loses it can stay for six months while they look for a new job. If they meet certain requirements, they are entitled to jobseeker's allowance during this time.
- Someone who doesn't have a job and isn't looking for one – such as a student or retired person – must be able to show that they have enough money to support themselves. Pensioners claim their pension from the country in which they last worked, which also pays for their healthcare.

It is up to each EU country to decide how they police these rules. In practice, the UK government does not pursue EU 'over-stayers'. This means that the UK chooses not to use all the immigration restrictions that it could.

## MIGRATION TO AND FROM COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE EU

The UK has full control over policy towards immigration from outside the EU – the EU does not have rules on this. The UK chooses to control immigration from outside the EU much more tightly than immigration from inside the EU.

There are three main categories of people from outside the EU who can apply to come to the UK: workers; students; and family members of people who are already allowed to live in the UK.

- **Workers.** People from outside the EU who want to come to work in the UK need to apply for a work visa. A total of 163,882 work-related visas were issued in 2016. Most of these were for skilled workers who were sponsored by a company. About a quarter were for short stays of no more than one or two years. Whether someone should get a visa is decided through a points-based immigration system. The more points a person gets, the more likely they are to be given a visa.
- **Students.** Students from outside the EU who want to come to the UK have to get a study visa. They must be sponsored by an educational institution such as a university or a college. There is no limit to the number of students who can come to the UK.
- **Family members.** Family members of people who are already entitled to live in the UK need to get a family visa if they want to move here. This requires a combined minimum income of £18,600 per year, plus more if they are bringing in children. Family members may also need to prove their knowledge of English by providing a qualification or taking a language test. The visa application costs £1,464 for each individual adult or child.

All of these visas require each person to pay a healthcare surcharge before they can use the NHS. This is £150 per year for students and £200 per year for everyone else. For example, someone applying for a 5-year work visa must pay £1,000.

If UK citizens want to move to a country outside the EU, they have to get a visa too. Each country has its own rules for granting visas. The requirements are harder to meet in some countries than in others.