

David Cameron talks tough over European migrants' benefits

[COMMENTS \(787\)](#)

Europeans will have to prove they are "genuinely seeking employment" to claim UK jobless benefits for more than six months, David Cameron has said.

The prime minister said it was among measures to ensure people came to the UK "for the right reasons" after it became a "soft touch" under Labour.

Number 10 was unable to say how many people the changes would affect.

Labour warned against overblown rhetoric and said there were already rules in place to tackle abuses.

Migrants from the European Economic Area - the EU member states plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway - currently have to show they have a "reasonable chance" of finding a job to receive unemployment benefit for more than six months.

Downing Street said they would now face a more rigorous test to assess whether they had a "realistic prospect" of getting a job, with the ability to speak English one of the criteria.

'Mainstream'

In his speech in Ipswich, the prime minister said there were "concerns, deeply held, that some people might be able to come and take advantage of our generosity without making a proper contribution to our country".

"These concerns are not just legitimate; they are right and it is a fundamental duty of every mainstream politician to address them."

No 10 was unable to give any figures on the scale, cost and numbers of so-called benefit tourists, although DWP figures suggest 17% of working-age UK nationals claim a benefit, compared with 7% of working age non-UK nationals.

Restrictions on Bulgarians and Romanians working in the UK are due to be relaxed next year.

The countries joined the European Union in 2007, but under "transitional arrangements" their populations faced limits on their rights to work in the UK.

Since 2007, Bulgarians and Romanians have been able to come to the UK to live and have been able to take jobs either via a work permit system, or by being self-employed, or in a variety of jobs from domestic work to seasonal agriculture.

According to the Office for National Statistics, in July 2012 there were 94,000 Romanians and 47,000 Bulgarians resident in the UK.

The end of existing controls will give Bulgarian and Romanians who want to work in the UK the same rights for welfare and NHS care as foreign nationals from the other 24 EU nations.

Eastern European migrants and employment, 2004-09

	A8 country* migrants		Native population	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employment rate	90.4%	74.2%	78.3%	71.1%
Claiming benefits or tax credits	12.4%	23.7%	24.2%	55%
In social housing	6.5%	7.7%	15.9%	18.3%

*CZECH REPUBLIC, ESTONIA, HUNGARY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, SLOVENIA, SLOVAKIA, AND POLAND. NOTE: EMPLOYMENT RATE REFERS TO % OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION. SOURCE: [CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION](#)

Mr Cameron said: "We can't stop these full transitional controls coming to an end. But what we can do, is make sure that those who come here from the EU - or further afield - do so for the right reasons: that they come here because they want to contribute to our country, not because they are drawn by the attractiveness of our benefits system, or by the opportunity to use our public services."

The prime minister added: "Under the last government immigration in this country was too high and out of control. Put simply, Britain was a soft touch."

The prime minister added: "Under the last government immigration in this country was too high and out of control. Put simply, Britain was a soft touch."

He said immigrants in future would be "subject to full conditionality and work search requirements and you will have to show you are genuinely seeking employment - if you fail that test, you will lose your benefit".

He said: "And as a migrant, we're only going to give you six months to be a jobseeker. After that benefits will be cut off unless you really can prove not just that you are genuinely seeking employment but also that you have a genuine chance of getting a job.

"We're going to make that assessment a real and robust one and, yes, it's going to include whether your ability to speak English is a barrier to work."

'Very concerned'

Mr Cameron said changes to health care would be introduced, with the UK getting "better" at "reciprocal charging", charging foreign governments for treatment provided to non-working overseas nationals.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt told MPs that there was no way of knowing how much free treatment was wrongly being given as the system "disincentivised" hospitals from finding out if people were not entitled to free care.

He said that if a patient was not entitled to free care hospitals "have to collect the money themselves, but if they don't declare the person as not entitled [to free care] then they get paid automatically [by the NHS Trust]".

In his speech, Mr Cameron also said action was being taken to tackle illegal immigration, including making private landlords responsible for making sure their tenants were legally in the UK - and facing fines if it turned out they were not.

He also said immigrants would be kept off council house waiting lists in England for at least two years, under plans for councils to introduce a residency test.

Local authorities can already set their own criteria, but many do not.

Mr Cameron said: "We can not have a culture of something for nothing. New migrants should not expect to be given a home on arrival."

But the Local Government Association said it was "very concerned", and councils should decide how to meet housing need.

Jonathan Portes, director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, told the BBC that people "coming from outside the UK, and especially people coming from outside the European Union, are significantly less likely than British nationals, and people born here, to claim benefits".

For Labour, shadow immigration minister Chris Bryant said: "The test of the prime minister's speech is not whether he can make overblown promises or ramp up the rhetoric. It is whether he can stop this government's growing list of practical failings in the immigration system - especially on enforcement and illegal immigration."

On Friday Lib Dem leader and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg gave a speech on immigration in which he called for £1,000 deposits to be demanded for visa applicants from "high-risk" countries, with the money repaid when they leave the UK.

[Your comments \(787\)](#)

Comments

[Sign in](#) or [Register](#) to comment and rate comments

All posts are [reactively-moderated](#) and must obey the [house rules](#).

[Editors' Picks](#) [All Comments \(787\)](#)

380. Paul

2 HOURS AGO

-11

Immigration has an overwhelmingly positive effect on the UK, for thousands of years we've been an island of immigrants and all the better for it.

Purely fiscally, immigrants contribute far more in tax than they receive in terms benefits. They also provide our society with diversity and richness of culture.

The rhetoric and scaremongering over immigration is xenophobia and racism pure and simple.

284. kaybraes

2 HOURS AGO

+17

284. kaybraes**2 HOURS AGO** **+17**

It is inconceivable that he claims to be "sorting out " benefits when he is in effect inviting the world to come for 6 months paid holiday. Tinkering with the problem of unskilled , unwanted immigration from the EU, Africa and Asia is an exercise in futility. A total ban on immigration by unskilled people from anywhere is called for. UKIP here I come.

219. rr6**2 HOURS AGO** **+11**

If you go to work in a middle-eastern country, you have to pay for everything (health, education, etc) and if you are not employed, you have to leave. It should be no different here.

207. pique**2 HOURS AGO** **+10**

Should be a blanket ban on all benefits for non nationals. We welcome those who want to come and add to our society, we don't want those who see our country as an easy way out.

The EU should have a cross nation policy that every country pays for its own citizens. If non nationals are looking for work in the UK, it should be their own country that pays for their upkeep in the UK.

132. CityBoyCityBoy**2 HOURS AGO** **-17**

Did the xenophobes here not look at the data? Natives are twice as likely to be on benefits as immigrants. Meaning that on average the immigrant population is a net PAYER of taxes and a contributor to the system. Disappointing populist measure from Cameron, presumably to appease the UKIP crowd.

Unfortunately, the problem is closer to home. Benefits should be lowered in general.

Comments 5 of 7[Show More](#)

[Sign in](#) or [Register](#) to comment and rate comments

All posts are [reactively-moderated](#) and must obey the [house rules](#).

[More Politics stories](#)



[Border agency condemned over backlog](#)

The UK Border Agency is still plagued by backlogs of unresolved immigration cases, says the Home Affairs Committee of MPs.

[Proposals on England-only law votes](#)

[MI5 chief to step down next month](#)