Don't fear immigration from Romania and Bulgaria [1]

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Barely a week goes by without some politician or newspaper warning of an imminent immigration apocalypse after the expiration of temporary immigration controls on Romanian and Bulgarian workers in 2014. They predict unprecedented strains on housing, welfare and the NHS ? not to mention a coming ? crime wave [3]?.

Examining the profiles of migrants from these two countries currently living in the UK, as well as survey evidence from potential EU migrants, it becomes clear that such doomsaying simply isn?t accurate. As is typical for new migrant groups, Romanians and Bulgarians already in the UK are predominantly young and have small families; as a consequence of this demographic profile, they are statistically far less likely to ? have a significant impact on health services as a whole [4]?.

The demographic make-up of potential Romanian [5] and Bulgarian [6] future migrants is, according to a BBC survey conducted earlier this year, extremely similar. Research also strongly indicates that EU immigrants are significantly less likely to claim benefits or social housing compared to UK natives [7].

As for the numbers themselves, several factors point to some of the more outlandish predictions [8] as being without factual basis. Remember that it is not just the UK, but the entire EU, that will have lifted previous restrictions for 2014. As the Oxford Migration Observatory explains [9], ?the UK might not be uniquely attractive to migrants who would have similar labour market access in other major EU economies like Germany and France?.

Indeed, historically, the UK has not been a strongly favoured location for Romanian and Bulgarian migrants, who often prefer the cultural similarities and pre-established personal networks in countries such as Spain and Italy. The falling unemployment trends in both Bulgaria and Romania weaken claims that joblessness will be a major factor in encouraging migration from these two countries to the UK.

Immigration is a net fiscal benefit to OECD countries [10]; the hysteria directed at potential Romanian and Bulgarian migrants to the UK is counter-productive in the extreme.

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