Regulating labour immigration: Enduring challenges and new questions

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Overview

• What are the goals? In whose interests?
• Preferential access to the national/local labour market
• Measuring skills and shortages
• Responding to shortages: Is immigration the ‘best’ answer?
• Temporary or permanent: What rights for migrant workers?
• What is new? ‘systemic resilience’; ‘strategic approach’
What are the goals? In whose interests?

- Economic growth
- Distribution
- Social effects
- [Resilience]
- Migrants
- Countries of origin

➡ Representation and governance?
Preferential access to the national/local labour market

• Who and why?

• Tensions with employers

• How?
  - Resident labour markets tests
  - Shortage occupation lists
  - Labour market regulations
  - Quotas, Taxes
  - …
# Shortage occupation lists, e.g. UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation code</th>
<th>Job types included on the shortage occupations list</th>
<th>Areas of the UK where there is a shortage</th>
<th>Annual salary (80% of going rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1181</td>
<td>Health services and public health managers and directors – all jobs</td>
<td>England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland</td>
<td>80% of going rate: £30,720 (£15.15 per hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1242</td>
<td>Residential, day and domiciliary care managers and proprietors – all jobs</td>
<td>England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland</td>
<td>80% of going rate: £21,360 (£10.53 per hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2111</td>
<td>Chemical scientists – only jobs in the nuclear industry</td>
<td>Scotland only</td>
<td>80% of going rate: £21,360 (£10.53 per hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2112</td>
<td>Biological scientists and biochemists – all jobs</td>
<td>England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland</td>
<td>80% of going rate: £23,760 (£11.72 per hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2113</td>
<td>Physical scientists – only the following jobs in the construction-related ground engineering industry: engineering geologist</td>
<td>England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland</td>
<td>80% of going rate: £29,200 (£14.40 per hour)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem with ‘skills’ and ‘shortages’

Skills:
• Conceptually and empirically ambiguous
• Credentialised vs non-credentialised; experience; ‘hard/soft’
• Demand for employees with specific personal characteristics and ‘attitudes’ (good ‘work ethic’, ‘compliant’, ‘cooperative’)

Shortages:
• No universal definition; employers often demand more workers at prevailing wages
• “Why not let wages rise?”
• Some employers prefer migrant labour
Responding to ‘skills needs’ and ‘shortages’: Key role of system effects

In principle, alternative responses:

- Raise wages and/or improve working conditions to attract more domestic labour
- Reduce labour intensity of production processes e.g. automation
- Relocate production to countries with lower labour costs
- Redirect business toward less labour-intensive goods/services
- Employ more migrant workers

Employers don’t make these decisions in a ‘vacuum’:

- Key role of institutional framework and wider public policies
Temporary or permanent? What rights for migrant workers?

Key ethical dilemma between global and domestic justice (Bauboeck and Ruhs 2022)

=> ‘fair representation’

=> how to represent migrants’ interests?

Source: Ruhs 2018
Systemic resilience: Policy implications?

• From national to trans-national systems
• From short-term to long-term
• From protecting the employment of citizens to protecting the resilience of essential services

Sources: Anderson, Poeschel and Ruhs 2021
References


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