21st Century Challenges

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Migration: skills and the job market

Challenge Overview Sheet

Migration is today, as it has always been, a hot topic of debate. Often fuelled by the media, it is a subject which is bombarded with statistics and percentages to prove and disprove a variety of arguments which essentially either support of refute the process of migration. This 21st century challenge aims to get students thinking about who it is that is migrating, impacts of migration and how the current financial crisis may affect patterns and volume of migration.

In his pro-migration speech, **Philip Legrain** explains how migration creates a mobile workforce which leads to a flexible economy encouraging growth and stability. Diversity and dynamism are key advantages to having migrants living and working in the UK and companies have access to the widest possible labour pool. In his speech he uses the example of elderly care to highlight the need for immigration. At present, elderly care is the fastest area of unemployment growth; the predicted figures of those aged over 80 and potentially needing care, set to double by 2050. However, there is already a shortage of suitable British applicants, so who is going to fill this labour gap? Filipino healthcare workers are an example of migrants who can ease the problem. Receiving wages higher than those in the Philippines, not only will they carryout the work but they also make a positive contribution both economically and socially. The often cyclical nature of migration is also highlighted by Legrain. Due to a falling Pound, less job opportunities in the UK and increasing job opportunities in Poland, Polish migrants are now starting to leave the UK and return home. This flexibility within the labour market not only reacts to supply and demand, but also, at this time of financial uncertainty, leads to lower unemployment numbers than if all the workers were British. In summary, Philip Legrain believes that the benefits offset the costs and that migration can only really be regarded as advantageous.

Khalid Koser opens his speech with the fact that global disparities in development, democracy and demography continue to fuel motives for migration across the globe. Highlighting the fact that migrants work across the skills range, it is likely that the current financial crisis will have an effect on international migration, although at present, no one is sure how or to what extent. He suggests that there might be a reduction in remittances, people returning to their country of origin or possible brain drain, particularly from countries like the USA and the UK. In the current climate, it is impossible to believe that the global financial crisis will have no impact on the migration. It is more likely that the impact will affect the rate, volume and nature of migration across the world.

Sir Andrew Green argues his case against migration and stresses the importance of migration policy to manage migration in the UK. Arguing the case for balanced migration, he suggests that the current scale of immigration in the UK is unsustainable and is putting increasing pressure on services and society. He cites that, as a result of migration, Britain will experience 70% growth and that in the next 10 years the British population is predicted to increase by 10 million; 7 million of which will be as a result of immigration. He believes that balance migration will stabalise the population and reduce the pressure on services and society. With the use of government figures he argues that there is no evidence of migrants being an economic benefit which is consistent with findings in the USA, Canada, Australia and Holland. His suggestion of a points system to manage migration would, he believes, reduce pressure on public services and the environment, encourage employers to train British workers and decrease the drain of skills from LEDCs.

Given the ever changing nature of migration it is likely that the debate for and against immigration will continue long into the 21st century. The challenge is to know both sides of the argument so that informed decisions can be made.