

Exodus: immigration and multiculturalism in the 21st century

Ellie Gunningham reviews a *recent public lecture* at LSE during which Professor Paul Collier discussed his new book **Exodus: immigration and multiculturalism in the 21st century** which focuses on the increasing rate of migration from poor to rich countries.

It is not globalisation, but rather a “temporary disequilibrium of epic proportions” in the income gap between rich and poor countries, which is driving the accelerated migration that we see in the world today. Professor Paul Collier was keen to point this out at the start of his lecture, proposing that if migration is left uncontrolled there will be “an exodus of people from poor countries”, and these countries will empty.



Paul Collier proposes that those who flee war should be given timed asylum rights which would end once the conflict is over

Is this a problem? Can there be too much migration as well as too little? Collier argues that there is an optimum rate of migration, both for countries of origin and host countries.

For developing countries, emigration can drive but also stunt political, social and economic growth.

On the one hand, people who migrate are often those most likely to challenge political power structures and drive regime change. On the other hand, students who emigrate to be educated in developed countries relay back new skills and attitudes gained, including ideas of democratisation. Collier warned not to over-emphasise the importance of migration for political reform. He cited Eritrea and Cape Verde in Africa as two countries with the highest rates of emigration, and yet according to the Mo Ibrahim Index for African Governance the impact of this on good leadership is conflicting. Cape Verde tops the list, while Eritrea trails at the bottom.

Economists have looked at emigration as causing a “brain drain” or “brain gain” for the country of origin. A “brain drain” refers to the high rate of educated and/or skilled people who leave for better jobs, education or quality of life abroad. Collier gave the example of Haiti, which suffers from the loss of 85% of its educated young people – greatly debilitating the country.

A similar concept is that of a “motivation drain”, introduced by George Akerlof, on the premise that people emigrate to work in an effective organisation which can harness their skills. They tend to be more motivated individuals since they actively seek out these opportunities. This leaves behind a workforce in which motivated employees are in the minority. Indeed, Collier pointed out that many countries in Africa suffer from unmotivated teachers, for example in Tanzania the average teacher teaches for only two hours a day.

The prospect of emigration can encourage more people to get an education, in the hope that this will increase their chances of working abroad. When a higher proportion of people then end up staying rather than leaving, this is known as the “brain gain”. Collier explained that it is in large countries where the rate of emigration is relatively modest, such as China and India, that “brain gain” occurs.

For developed countries, Collier urged that it is the effects of immigration on social diversity which are important. The effect on wages are often dwelled upon, when there is no evidence that immigration reduces wages. Rather, the group whose wages do get lowered are the existing immigrants because they are in competition with each other.

Immigration increases social diversity, which stimulates innovation and variety due to new flows of ideas. However too much social diversity weakens co-operation and social cohesion. Collier believes that, similar to migration, there is an optimum amount of diversity. What eases these problems is the rate of absorption of immigrants into society, and therefore integration policy is crucial. When the rate of absorption is slow, the number of Diaspora grows, and this in turn accelerates migration and leads to more diversity.

Some migration is unambiguously better than no migration. In the country of origin, emigration produces the political and social feedbacks that promote change at home, the “brain gain” effect, as well as remittances, which outstrip development aid in their sum. Yet there can be too much migration, and countries can become stuck with a “brain drain”, like in Haiti. In the host country, immigration produces a more diverse society, but uncontrolled migration would eventually take diversity to a level in which it is excessive and problematic.

So what are the implications for migration policy? Where is the control point?

The only control point is the rate of immigration into high income countries, and the issue is not whether we should have immigration controls, but how these immigration controls should be designed. Collier noted a number of errors in current immigration policy:

- Student emigration from low income to high income countries

Britain has been squeezing down the numbers of international students, and yet it is clear that student emigration is beneficial for low income countries, and this therefore should be massively scaled up.

- Legalising illegal immigrants

It is impossible to police immigration controls due to the high levels of illegal immigrants in high income countries. There are fears that legalising current illegal immigrants would incentivise the flow of immigration, but at the moment nothing can be done about this flow because it cannot be properly policed.

- Emigration from countries in conflict

Re-building post-conflict countries is the ultimate challenge for development and yet their biggest resource, human capital, has fled the country and taken up asylum elsewhere. In “Exodus”, Collier puts forward two proposals. One is that high income countries must have a more generous policy on asylum. However, the second is that asylum rights should be timed and related to conflict conditions in the country of origin, so that when the conflict ends so do the rights for asylum.

According to Collier, the “tragedy is that [immigration controls] are disastrously mis-designed”. They are set by pressure from the media rather than any sensible analysis. The aim of “Exodus” is to move toward a more useful discussion of immigration controls. There can be too much and too little migration, and policy needs to respond to this in order to reach the balance.

Watch Paul Collier's lecture entitled *Exodus:immigration and multiculturalism in the 21st century*.

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