

# MYTHS ABOUT MIGRANTS

HOW much of what we know about immigration is fact and how much is fiction? A new Commission on Migration and Health formed by University College London and medical science journal *The Lancet* aims to blow the lid on myths that some people – including British politicians – still believe about immigrants. What is the truth about people who move from poorer countries to wealthier ones? In this Special Report, we take a look at some of the popular claims and stereotypes about migrants, and the evidence that the commission has uncovered.

A migrant who arrived in Spain last week on an inflatable boat carrying 185 people

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## CLAIM: “MIGRANTS DAMAGE ECONOMIES”

A large amount of evidence says migrants have a positive effect on a country’s economy. The commission says that, in developed economies such as the UK, each 1% increase in migrants in the adult population lifts the country’s GDP (gross domestic product) per person by up to 2%. Gross domestic product is the total value of all products manufactured and goods provided during a period of time, and is a key way of knowing how strong a country’s economy is.

The UCL-Lancet report also found that migration helps distribute wealth around the world. In 2017 some \$613 billion (£480 billion) was sent by migrants back to their home countries.

## CLAIM: “MIGRANTS ARE A BURDEN ON HEALTH SERVICES, SUCH AS THE NHS”

Migrants fill a lot of healthcare jobs in many wealthy countries. In the UK, 37% of doctors received their medical qualification in another country. They provide medical care, teaching, social care for older people, and support understaffed services. The NHS currently has 100,000 staff vacancies, so some health experts have called on the Government to relax immigration rules in order to get medical staff from overseas in.

In terms of whether migrants use health services more, the UCL-Lancet Commission says a study of 15.2 million migrants from 92 countries found they had a lower death rate compared to general populations across most conditions, including heart disease, mental illness and lung disorders.



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Nijam Uddin Mohammed, who arrived in England as a refugee 17 years ago, works as an interpreter for the NHS

## CLAIM: “MIGRANTS CARRY DISEASES AND SPREAD THEM IN OUR COUNTRIES”

The report states that there is no link between migration and the arrival of infectious diseases in a country. The evidence also shows that the risk of transmission from migrants to local citizens is “generally low”.

According to the commission, recent cases of diseases spreading have been caused more by travel, tourism and the movement of livestock rather than migration.

It is true that infections such as viral hepatitis, tuberculosis and HIV cause more deaths among migrants than host populations. But the risk of transmission of these diseases is higher within the migrant community itself, rather than in the host population.

## CLAIM: “MIGRANTS GIVE BIRTH TO LOTS OF BABIES”

This is a stereotype that has spread in recent years. The claim is often used to argue that local populations “will soon be minorities in their own country”.

The myth has trickled down to the general public: a 2016 survey found that, on average, Brits think EU citizens make up 15% of the total UK population, when in reality it’s 5%.

The Lancet-UCL Commission says that data from several long-term studies shows that birth rates among migrants in six European countries are actually lower than among the host populations. Several long-term studies show birth rates among migrants averages 2.1 babies per woman, which is the rate at which a population is kept steady, but doesn’t increase.



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Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage has said immigrants put pressure on the NHS, and that the UK shouldn’t accept people with HIV

## HOW MANY MIGRANTS?

Wealthy countries like the UK and France have seen their migrant communities grow from 7.6% of the total population in 1990 to 13.4% in 2017. However, most of these are students or labour migrants who contribute to the economy.

There’s been a big increase in the number of refugees in Europe in recent years, but they still make up a larger proportion of the total population in poorer countries (0.7%) than in richer ones (0.2%).