



Immigration

The immigration system is in chaos after years of incompetent management. The Government has failed to plan properly for new migrants, making it harder for people to integrate. We have no idea how many people are here illegally, and we don't even have exit checks at our airports to ensure people here on temporary visas go home on time. Liberal Democrats believe it would be wrong to try and "pull up the drawbridge". Britain has always been an open, welcoming country, and thousands of businesses, schools and hospitals rely on people who've come to live here from overseas. But we also understand you have to manage migration so it benefits Britain and is fair for everyone.

Immediately reintroduce exit checks – count people out as well as in. Over the years, the Conservatives and then Labour made a huge mistake: they abolished exit checks for people leaving the country, so we have no idea who is here and who isn't. We will reintroduce exit checks immediately.

Focus deportation efforts on criminals – let law-abiding families earn citizenship. It would take years and cost us £8bn to deport all those who are living in Britain illegally. Some of them are criminals and people-traffickers. Others are families who have been here for years, and just want to work and pay their taxes. Immigration officers are focusing on families because they're easy targets, letting criminals off the hook. We would allow people who have been in Britain for 10 years, speak English, have a clean record and want to live here long-term to earn citizenship. That way, immigration officers can spend all their time deporting dangerous people and checking up on employers to stop illegal working.

A regional points-based system to ensure migrants go where they are needed. Some parts of Britain, like Scotland, need and want more people to help the economy. Others, like the South East, are struggling to find enough water and homes for everyone. We'll change the rules so it's easier to get a work permit if you go and live in a part of the country that is short of workers, to encourage newcomers to live where they are needed.

UK Border Force. For too long, Britain's borders have been a soft touch. The steady flow of undocumented migrants into this country has undermined our historic liberal attitude towards immigration. The Government's stop-start, piecemeal approach has failed to get a grip on the problem, and their Border Agency lacks the powers necessary to do its job properly. Liberal Democrats would establish a strong, unified, co-ordinated National Border Force with police powers to protect our borders effectively.