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UK General Election and Immigration

A Fragomen Manifesto Compendium

June 2017

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Thank you for taking a look at our guide to the UK's 2017 general election and immigration.

The Prime Minister's decision to call an election for 8 June seemingly came as a surprise to everyone but a shock to nobody. Negotiating Brexit was always going to be the centre piece of Theresa May's tenure in 10 Downing Street and she took the view that the negotiations would be smoother if she could go to the polls and gain a larger parliamentary majority.

Fragomen will not be offering a view on the merits of any particular political party but we do want to ensure our clients understand what is being proposed on immigration. Proposals by the Conservative Party, widely considered favourites to win the election, would see an increase in costs for businesses sponsoring non-EU workers. The Labour Party has paid particular attention to cracking down on 'unscrupulous employers'. The other parties also have a lot to say.

This compendium summarises the immigration components of the manifestos published by some of the UK's political parties. We have also provided some information about the parties and their leaders and a simple timeline that runs from last year's EU referendum through to the day the UK is likely to leave the EU.

Compiling manifesto commitments is not as simple an exercise as it may seem. Politics matters, people care deeply and views can differ enormously from one person to the next.

The big question was which manifestos should be summarised in our compendium – who should we define as the UK's main political parties? We decided to go with the parties most often represented on TV election debates: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, UK Independence Party and the Green Party.

There is still a short while to go before the election and we will be in touch with clients as we get closer to 8 June with updates and practical advice. For now though, we hope that our summary is a useful way to understand what is being said about immigration.



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Who's who: UK party leaders

Unilaterally deciding if a political party is left wing, right wing or anywhere in between is never a good idea. The parties themselves might not even agree on that. But we wanted to ensure that readers from overseas have some sense of where a party naturally sits. Our answer? We went to Wikipedia, arguably one of the most auditable and publically accountable sources of information on the internet.



Who? Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom since 2016 and Member of Parliament for Maidenhead since 1997.

What? Currently the governing party, having won a majority of seats in the House of Commons at the 2015 general election.



Who? Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party since September 2015 and Member of Parliament for Islington North since 1983.

What? A party that grew from the trade union movement and socialist parties of the nineteenth century. Labour was last in government between 1997-2010 under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.



Who? Tim Farron, Leader of the Liberal Democrats since July 2015 and Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale in 2005, 2010 and 2015.

What? A liberal political party, they won 57 seats at the 2010 general election and agreed to join a coalition government with the Conservatives.



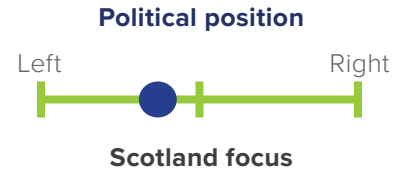
Who's who: UK party leaders

SNP



Who? Nicola Sturgeon, Leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), current First Minister of Scotland and member of the Scottish Parliament since 1999.

What? A Scottish nationalist and social-democratic political party in Scotland. The SNP supports and campaigns for Scottish independence.



Plaid Cymru
Party of Wales



Who? Leanne Wood, Leader of Plaid Cymru and member of the National Assembly for Wales (AM) since 2003.

What? A social-democratic political party in Wales advocating for Welsh independence from the United Kingdom within the European Union.



Who? Paul Nutall, Leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) since 2016 and MEP for North West England.

What? A Eurosceptic populist party that promotes a British unionist and British nationalist agenda.



Green Party
Plaid Werdd

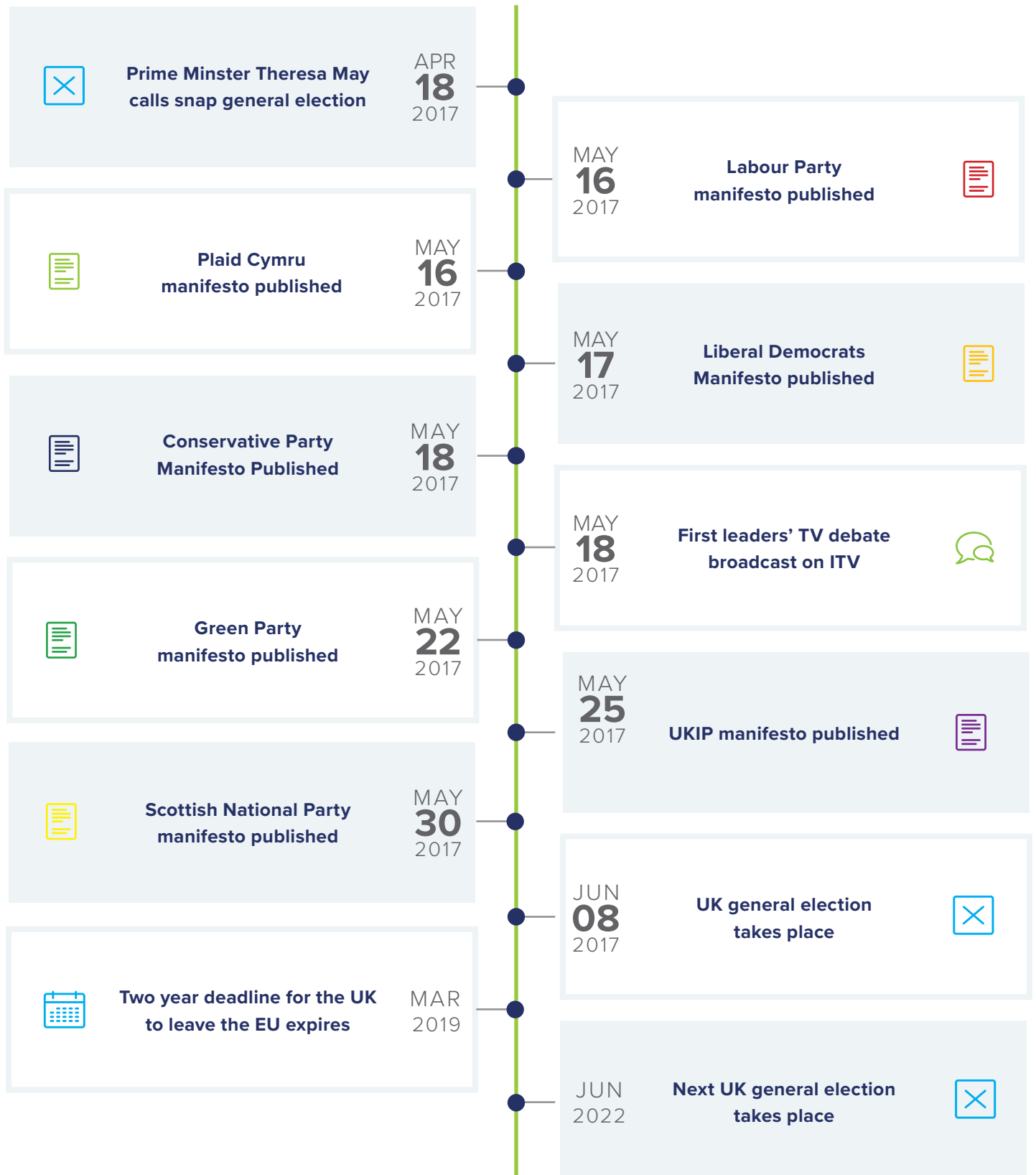


Who? Caroline Lucas, Co-Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales with Jonathan Bartley and Member of Parliament (MP) for Brighton Pavilion since the 2010.

What? The party's ideology combines environmentalism with left-wing economic policies. The party gained its first MP in 2010.



UK General Election timeline



The Conservative manifesto and immigration

The Conservative manifesto was released on 18 May, a week and a half later than planned. The Conservatives' plan to reduce net migration and increase the costs of hiring migrant workers.



The top line

“Britain is an open economy and a welcoming society and we will always ensure that our British businesses can recruit the brightest and best from around the world and Britain’s world-class universities can attract international students.”

“We also believe that immigration should be controlled and reduced, because when immigration is too fast and too high, it is difficult to build a cohesive society.”



Special relationships, not free markets

“We do not believe in untrammelled free markets...we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union but we will seek a deep and special partnership including a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement.”

“We will maintain the Common Travel Area and maintain as frictionless a border as possible for people, goods and services between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.”

“We will seek to replicate all existing EU free trade agreements and support the ratification of trade agreements entered into during our EU membership.”



A certain type of migrant

“We will...establish an immigration policy that allows us to reduce and control the number of people who come to Britain from the European Union, while still allowing us to attract the skilled workers our economy needs.”

“We will...continue to bear down on immigration from outside the European Union.”

“We will always ensure that our British businesses can recruit the brightest and best from around the world and Britain’s world-class universities can attract international students.”

“We will take action to make it harder for people to enter the country if they have a criminal conviction and will implement satellite tracking for every foreign national offender subject to an outstanding deportation order or deportation proceedings.”



Tougher for students

“We will toughen the visa requirements for students, to make sure that we maintain high standards. We will expect students to leave the country at the end of their course, unless they meet new, higher requirements.”

“Overseas students will remain in the immigration statistics – in line with international definitions – and within scope of the government’s policy to reduce annual net migration.”

The Conservative manifesto and immigration



Still committed to net migration in the tens of thousands

“We will reduce and control immigration...It is our objective to reduce immigration to sustainable levels, by which we mean annual net migration in the tens of thousands.”



Increased costs for sponsored migrants

“We will double the Immigration Skills Charge levied on companies employing migrant workers, to £2,000 a year by the end of the parliament, using the revenue generated to invest in higher level skills training for workers in the UK.”

“And we will increase the Immigration Health Surcharge, to £600 for migrant workers and £450 for international students, to cover their use of the NHS.”

“We will increase the earnings thresholds for people wishing to sponsor migrants for family visas.”



Securing the skills we need

“Address the immediate needs of those sectors of the economy suffering shortages in skills. We will make the immigration system work for these sectors, whilst ensuring that we develop the skills we need for the future.”

“Allow us to set aside significant numbers of visas for workers in strategically-important sectors, such as digital technology, without adding to net migration as a whole.”

“We will ensure digital businesses have access to the best talent from overseas to compete with anywhere in the world...”

“We will open discussions with the leading tech companies and other like-minded democracies about the global rules of the digital economy, to develop an international legal framework that we have for so long benefited from in other areas like banking and trade.”

“We will make it a priority in our negotiations with the European Union that the 140,000 staff from EU countries can carry on making their vital contribution to our health and care system. However, we cannot continue to rely on bringing in clinical staff instead of training sufficient numbers ourselves.”



Human rights

“We will ensure Britain remains a place of sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers...the government will offer asylum and refuge to people in parts of the world affected by conflict and oppression, rather than to those who have made it to Britain.”

“We will not repeal or replace the Human Rights Act while the process of Brexit is underway...We will remain signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights for the duration of the next parliament.”

The Labour Party manifesto and immigration

Labour's manifesto was published on 16 May 2017, a week after an earlier draft was leaked. The manifesto has a lot to say on immigration, across a number of sections.



The top line

"Labour offers fair rules and reasonable management of migration."



A day 1 guarantee for EU nationals living in the UK

"A Labour government will immediately guarantee existing rights for all EU nationals living in Britain and secure reciprocal rights for UK citizens who have chosen to make their lives in EU countries."



Single Market access or no free movement?

"We will scrap the Conservatives' Brexit White Paper and replace it with fresh negotiating priorities that have a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union – which are essential for maintaining industries, jobs and businesses in Britain. Labour will always put jobs and the economy first."

"Freedom of movement will end when we leave the European Union."



Could immigration still be used to encourage trade?

Interestingly, the second line of Labour's immigration commitments promises that "in trade negotiations our priorities favour growth, jobs and prosperity."

Many economists would argue that prioritising growth, jobs and prosperity means remaining part of the Single Market and keeping free movement, so this is an interesting promise. It remains to be seen how this would play out when trade agreements end with Brexit. Could a free trade agreement with Australia, Canada or India contain more favourable migration policies, for instance?



No net migration target?

"We make no apologies for putting these aims before bogus immigration targets."



A fair immigration system

"Whatever our trade arrangements, we will need new migration management systems, transparent and fair to everybody."



Everyone would get a chance to contribute

"Working with businesses, trade unions, devolved governments and others to identify specific labour and skill shortages. Working together we will institute a new system which is based on our economic needs, balancing controls and existing entitlements"



It may not be all that different from the existing system

"This may include employer sponsorship, work permits, visa regulations or a tailored mix of all these which works for the many, not the few."

The Labour Party manifesto and immigration



Helping British workers find jobs and upskill

“Our National Education Service will raise the level of skills and training.”



Preventing displacement and undercutting

“Labour will crack down on unscrupulous employers. We will stop overseas-only recruitment practices, strengthen safety at work inspections and increase prosecutions of employers evading the minimum wage.”

“Working with trade unions, we will end workplace exploitation.”



Genuine foreign students will be welcomed

“Labour welcomes international students who benefit and strengthen our education sector, generating more than £25 billion for the British economy and significantly boosting regional jobs and local businesses. They are not permanent residents and we will not include them in immigration numbers, but we will crack down on fake colleges.”



A reinstatement of the Migrant Impact Fund

“For areas where immigration has placed a strain on public services we will reinstate the Migrant Impact Fund...”



Funded by high net worth migrants

“...and boost it with a contributory element from the investments required for High Net Worth Individual Visas.”



Family reunion

“[Labour] will continue to support the work of the Forced Marriage Unit. We will replace income thresholds with a prohibition on recourse to public funds.”

It is not entirely clear which income thresholds Labour are referring to, but we could assume they mean the minimum salaries for sponsoring a spouse or partner.



More refugees?

“Unlike the Tories, we will uphold the proud British tradition of honouring the spirit of international law and our moral obligations by taking our fair share of refugees.”



And a bit of mud slinging

“We will not cut public services and pretend the cuts are a consequence of immigration.”

The Liberal Democrat manifesto and immigration

The Liberal Democrats' manifesto was released on 17 May 2017. It has a strong anti-Brexit tone. EU migration is covered almost immediately with the dedicated 'immigration and asylum' section featuring as a sub-section of 'rights, justice and equalities'.



The top line

"Immigration is essential to our economy and a benefit to our society. We depend on immigration to ensure we have the people we need contributing to the UK's economy and society, including doctors, agricultural workers, entrepreneurs, scientists and so many others."



The Liberal Democrats don't want to leave the EU

"Britain is better off in the EU."

"Leaving the single market, ending freedom of movement and abandoning the customs union... will make the UK poorer."

The Liberal Democrats propose "a referendum, with the alternative option of staying in the EU."

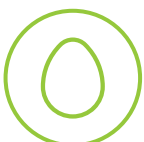
"Enable all UK citizens living abroad to vote for MPs in separate overseas constituencies, and to participate in UK referendums."



The rights of EU nationals living here matter

"We will press for the UK to unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU nationals in the UK."

"Secure the same rights for UK citizens living in European Union countries."



A very soft Brexit

"Any deal negotiated for the UK outside the EU must protect the right to work, travel, study and retire across the EU."

"Must maintain membership of the single market."

"We will vote against any attempts to scrap the Human Rights Act or withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights."



A simpler system

"We will call for the overhaul and simplification of the registration process and the requirements for EU nationals to obtain permanent residence and UK citizenship."



An emphasis on skills and efficiency

"Continue to allow high-skilled immigration to support key sectors of our economy, and ensure work, tourist and family visas are processed quickly and efficiently."

"Make it easier for refugees to join relatives already living in safety in the UK."

The Liberal Democrat manifesto and immigration



Closing the skills gap

“We need to grow the country’s skills base.”

“Train up young people.”

“Identify and seek to solve the skills gap.”



An open debate

“Hold an annual debate in parliament on skill and labour market shortfalls and surpluses to identify the migration necessary to meet the UK’s needs.”



Foreign students matter

“Reinstate post-study work visas for graduates in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects who find suitable employment within six months of graduating.”

“Remove students from the official migration statistics...recognising their largely temporary status.”

“Find ways to measure accurately the number of students leaving at the end of their course.” *This could potentially lead to stricter compliance obligations for Tier 4 sponsors.*



Defending rights and promoting justice

“Promoting universal liberal values such as openness, tolerance and unity...opposing the extreme and divisive forces that now blight our politics and public life. The rise in hate crime, the abuse of refugees, and the toxic rhetoric on immigration and about immigrants themselves is not the future Liberal Democrats want for Britain.”



Getting asylum seekers into work

“Expect working-age asylum seekers who have waited more than six months for their claim to be processed to seek work like other benefit claimants, and only to receive benefits if they are unable to do so.”



Sanctuary for Syrians

“Expand the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to offer sanctuary to 50,000 people over the lifetime of the next parliament.”

The Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto and immigration

The SNP manifesto was released on 30 May. It calls for devolved powers so that Scotland can control its own immigration policies.



The top line

“Scotland needs an immigration policy suited to our specific circumstances and needs...The current UK one-size-fits-all approach to immigration is failing Scotland.”



Keeping Scotland in the single market

“We will demand a place for Scotland at the Brexit negotiating table and the inclusion of the case for our place in the Single Market in the UK’s negotiating remit.”



Devolved immigration powers

“We will demand new powers, so we can continue to encourage the best and brightest from around the world to make Scotland their home, and contribute to our economy and society.”

“If the UK Government chooses not to give EU nationals the certainty they deserve, then immigration powers should be devolved so that Scotland can do so.”

“We will...press for immigration powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, so that Scotland can attract EU and EEA nationals to work in Scotland’s NHS and care sector in the years to come.”



Scrapping the Immigration Skills Charge

“The UK government recently introduced a Skills Immigration Charge...of £1,000 per non-EEA worker per year...[SNP are] concerned that the UK government will implement a similar charge for workers from the EU post-Brexit ...SNP MPs will oppose any such moves, and press for the charge to be scrapped altogether.”



Certainty for EU migrants

“EU nationals contribute immeasurably to our economy, our public services and our culture. By giving straightforward access to permanent residence, we can end the uncertainty about their future.”



Streamlining citizenship

“Support a review of the citizenship application process, with a view to bringing down its cost and reducing its complexity.”



Seamless Scotland

“Ensure border checks are as seamless as possible after the UK leaves the EU, making it as easy as possible for international tourists to visit Scotland.”

“Ensure continuity in cross-border health insurance arrangements – including the European Health Insurance Card.”



Post study work visa

“SNP MPs will call for the full reinstatement of the Post-Study Work Visa scheme.”

The Plaid Cymru manifesto and immigration

The Plaid Cymru manifesto was one of the first to be released. It sets out plans for an immigration system specific to Wales, offering protection for current EU workers.



The top line

Plaid Cymru seeks “a logical immigration policy that works for Wales, where students and job creators can come, but wages aren’t undercut and communities are protected.”



Welsh rules for Welsh immigration

“We will create a Welsh Migration Advisory Service so that we can have a system that suits Wales’s needs.”

“Welsh-specific visas are necessary to plug skills gaps.”

Perhaps this could lead to a Welsh Shortage Occupation List (as already exists for Scotland) or an altogether separate set of immigration rules for Wales.



A special relationship with the EU

“Plaid Cymru will ensure that Wales can continue to buy and sell to Europe without any costly barriers.”

“[Protect] 200,000 jobs that rely on our trade with Europe.”



What about EU workers?

“Plaid Cymru will guarantee the rights of all Europeans currently living and working in Wales.”



Welsh people will get the support they need

“Plaid Cymru will guarantee employment, education or training for any person under 25 looking for work...we will also create a new network of specialist National Colleges of Vocational Education.”



Students fall into a distinct category

Although no net migration targets are specified within the manifesto, Plaid Cymru confirms that international students would not be considered under these figures.



A commitment to refugees

“We will maintain the 0.7% of GDP commitment on international aid and fight for the Dubs amendment, allowing vulnerable refugee children into the UK.”

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) manifesto and immigration

The UKIP manifesto is heavily focused on immigration. It seeks to implement a new visa system, aimed at making it more difficult for migrant workers to fill roles in the UK.



The top line

“Only UKIP is prepared to commit to reducing net migration to zero.”



No compromise on Brexit

“A true, unequivocal Brexit.”

“We must have left both the EU single market and the customs union.”

“Britain must be completely free from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and we must be free, if we wish, to relinquish our membership of the European Court of Human Rights.”



Net migration set at zero

“UKIP will establish a Migration Control Commission and set a target to reduce net migration to zero, over a five-year period.”

“We must not be bound by any freedom of movement obligation, and we must be free to set and meet our own annual migration targets.”

“We could immediately take back control of key policy areas such as immigration and border controls.”



“British jobs for British workers”

“UKIP will bring forward legislation requiring employers to advertise jobs to British citizens before they offer them overseas.”

“Improve prospects for our own people, rather than facilitate the continued importation of foreign workers.”

“A moratorium on unskilled and low-skilled immigration for five years after we leave the EU.”



A new visa system

“We will introduce a new Australian-style points-based system, and a work permit system for citizens of the Republic of Ireland, with whom we will maintain our current arrangements.”

“Work visas: Highly skilled workers with a job offer sponsored by companies paying them a minimum of £30,000 per annum will have priority.”

“We will abolish the EEA family permit scheme...Foreign nationals marrying British citizens will have to prove the primary purpose of their marriage is not to obtain British residency.”

“We will also operate a seasonal worker scheme based on six month visas to support those sectors, such as agriculture, which need additional labour for short but predictable periods of time.”



Comprehensive insurance requirement for migrants

“All new entrants to the UK must have and maintain comprehensive private medical insurance for the duration of their stay, as a condition of their visa.”

“Those arriving on Work Visas may apply for British citizenship after five years, provided they have worked, paid tax here, and maintained their medical insurance throughout that time.”

The Green Party manifesto and immigration

The Green Party's manifesto emphasises the importance of upholding existing rights, without indicating how immigration could change in the wake of the general election.



The top line

“We will be actively campaigning to safeguard jobs, uphold basic rights and put environmental protection at the heart of any future trade deals.”



A second shot at remaining in the EU

“The Green Party supported the Remain campaign and continue to believe that membership of the EU makes our future more hopeful and secure.”

“We will campaign for your right to vote on the final terms of the Brexit deal, including an option to stay in the EU.”

“We will demand that the terms of the final deal are closely scrutinised. We do not accept...a “hard” Brexit.”



Protecting existing rights

“Protect freedom of movement, press for remaining within the single market, and safeguard vital rights for people and the environment.”

“Immediately guarantee the rights of EU citizens to remain in the UK and urgently seek reciprocal arrangements for UK citizens in the EU.”

“Guarantee the rights of young people to study, work, live and travel in the EU, including through schemes like Erasmus.”



Human rights responsibilities

“A humane immigration and asylum system that recognises and takes responsibility for Britain's ongoing role in causing the flow of migrants worldwide.”

“Defend the Human Rights Act and UK membership of the European Convention on Human Rights.”



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