

Post-Brexit and Covid-19 Period Goan Migration Scenario to the United Kingdom: A Compendium of Literature

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Abstract

Of late nationalism features very prominently in a number of countries across Europe's political spectrum. In fact, Brexit became possible because of nationalists who resented globalisation. The objective of the paper is to call attention to the impacts of the new migration policy adopted by the United Kingdom on India with special reference to Goa. The study has adopted a rigorous analysis of the secondary literature available on Brexit, which was a decisive shift into the unknown with confusion and uncertainty prevailing concerning its latent functions, and future relations of UK with the EU and the rest of the world. This study has found that UK's exclusionary immigration policy has led to a decrease in migration of the EU citizens to UK, depriving the disadvantaged, the disabled, aged and people with chronic illnesses of the much needed social and health care during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study revealed that the potential Goan migrants, in the process of procuring the Portuguese passport to migrate to UK for better economic opportunities, have been adversely affected, having lost not only lakhs of rupees already spent to obtain the Portuguese passport but also the glimmer of hope for a brighter future.

Key words: Goans, migration, immigration, Covid 19, Post-Brexit

Introduction

The political climate in Europe today is one of inter-governmentalism, wherein national capitals tend to favour decisions taken by themselves rather than by Brussels, the HQ of European Union. Not only anti-European feelings but political parties attacking EU and rooting for

sovereignty of the nation are on the rise in Europe. In UK, the roots of Euroscepticism may be traced to the post-imperial nostalgia for the loss of the Empire. In many other European countries, there has been disenchantment with the European Union bordering on complete opposition to it and this is not exclusive to UK (O'Reilly et al., 2016,p. 811). The European plan of integrating all the nations and holding them together in the federation of nations is under serious threat due to the rampant populist nationalism in many member countries.

The Causes and Implications of Brexit

Britain's entry into the European federation of nations was on 1 January 1973, when it joined the European Economic Community. Its exit or Britain and exit's portmanteau Brexit happened after 23rd June 2016 referendum in which 72.2 percent of the eligible voters turned out to vote and from these voters, 51.9 percent as against 48.1 percent voted to leave the EU. Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union? - was the question to which the voters responded at the referendum.

The British public's concern about immigration coupled with the intent to stem the rising tide of UKIP (United Kingdom's Independence Party) prompted David Cameron, the then Prime Minister to call for the landmark referendum in June 2016. A report by Pew Research Center stated that the highest number of unauthorised immigrants was found in Germany and the United Kingdom, amounting to almost half of Europe's total immigrants (Bruns, 2020).According to the Office of National Statistics (Cohen and Hinchin, 2016), the net migration into UK for the year ending March 2016was 3,27,000 out of which 1,80,000 were EU nationals, 1,90,000 were non-EU and the remaining 43,000 were British citizens who had left the UK. Studies in the UK made efforts to show that the migrant influx from EU countries was at the cost of the welfare system in the country. The Brexit campaigners used the rising discontent among the Britishers of the migration question, wherein they clubbed together

both the intra EU and non-EU migration. According to IPSOS (Market and Opinion Research International), a total of 44 percent of UK population considered that one of the important issues which the UK voters had to decide about was that of immigration, and for a number of years, the rise in the number of immigration was increasingly linked to the country's membership of the EU (Boswell, 2016).

Brexiters prioritised the interests of the Britishers vis-à-vis those of the immigrants and also expressed the resentment of the British public over the requirement to accept immigrants without any limits. To Pertti Ahonen, an important factor that contributed to the victory of the Brexiters was the fear that migrants were coming into UK in great numbers (Ahonen, 2019). A reason for Brexit, and one that was linked to migration, was the creation of too many bad jobs and too many workers getting stuck in the jobs alongside migrant workers. Apart from the above, the desire to gain back control motivated the Brexiters. Brussels (European Union) was seen to be at the root of everything wrong with the country. On the one hand, the Nationalists of UK argued against EU as they foisted on the UK 'rules, norms and people' which were unBritish, on the other hand, the UK globalist libertarians lamented Brussels' interference with free markets. The campaign was animated by an aggressive appeal to the 'UK nostalgia for empire and insular nationalism', taking 'back control' and regaining UK 'sovereignty' and 'making all things possible again' (Ferretti, 2020, p. 140). Before the referendum, the pro-Leave campaigners, Eurosceptic Tories, the tabloid newspapers, the Daily Mail and the Sun, manipulated, exaggerated the number of immigrants stoking fears of 'mass immigration' from the EU. The 'invisible', European citizens', 'free movers', were made 'visible', 'immigrants' and a 'problem' that had to be solved by the UK by 'Brexiting' and thus gaining total control and sovereignty (King, 2020, p. 853). The people were 'duped, lied to, manipulated and brow-beaten by the insidious rhetoric of fear about immigration, including an "invasion" of 80 million Turks about to join the EU' (ibid., 860). The politicians and

the media failed to recognise and acknowledge the immense economic contribution to UK by the EU migrants through their skills at different levels ranging from ‘university research, finance and business, and the National Health Service, to lower-skilled jobs in the construction industry, hotels and restaurants, and agricultural work’ (ibid., p. 853).

It is contended by some that they saw Brexit coming but, on the whole, when Brexit really happened, people were shocked. So flabbergasting was its impact that the word itself has acted as a model, a source word or an inspiration and generated neologisms in English like Spexit to mean the possibility of Spain leaving EU, Brentrydenoting retrospectively the entry of Britain into the European Economic Community in 1973, or Retireland, describing the hypothetical scenario of Ireland leaving the EU.

Russel King referred to the referendum as a ‘wicked event’ that opened a Pandora’s box with unintended consequences. He termed it ‘wicked’ as it was a problem that was ‘difficult or impossible to solve because of its complex interdependencies, inherent contradictions and shifting nature’ (King, 2020, 855). In Brexit’s case, what the new relationship between UK and EU should be had to be debated for a long time. The result of the referendum was ‘a collective act of national self-harm’ (ibid., p. 853). Nicholas Boyle described it very aptly, stating that Brexit was ‘a collective English mental breakdown, English people living on the dreams of Empire never learned to see others as equals’ (Boyle, 2018). The question Brexit raised was ‘not one of economics or politics, but of national psychology’ (ibid).

The results showed that the various sections of the population of the UK to be sharply divided on the subject of the referendum. High correlations were found between higher levels of education and the vote ‘Remain’, and between older age and the vote ‘Leave’ (King, 2020). At the 2016 referendum, people of Britain belonging to different regions, generations, level of education voted differently. While Scotland voted Remain, Northern Ireland was divided, and England and Wales voted Leave. Older

voters voted Leave, while 73 percent of those in the age-group of 18 to 24 years voted Remain. The university educated voted Remain and others who had left school earlier voted Leave. It was a motley coalition of citizens who voted leave. Psephologists averred that working-class voters who voted for Leave were ‘older, socially conservative, nativists with very different attitudes’ from the ‘younger, educated, socially liberal, big city cosmopolitans’ who voted for Remain (O’ Reilly et al., 2016, p. 816). For the leave voters sovereignty determined their choice in that they thought that decisions relating to UK ought to be taken in UK and that Leave would make possible a better control over immigration and the borders. The Leave voters convinced themselves that multiculturalism, globalisation and immigration were forces that could adversely affect Britain.

The fear of the large-scale incoming migrants was an important factor contributing to the victory of the Brexiteers. Brexit manifested xenophobia of the British citizens. However, though one of the reasons for Brexit was to reduce immigration in UK, the prognosis that Brexit will lead to significant reduction in immigration to UK was poor. Immigration from EU had fallen after Brexit as per late summer 2018 statistics but immigration from outside EU had risen considerably. History of Europe has been a history of migration and it will continue, notwithstanding the obstacles, as it has happened in the past centuries. Given the global megatrends of population growth coupled with glaring inequality as well as political instability, increase in migration is a foregone conclusion.

Brexit, Migration, COVID-19 and the UK Society

Brexit was a decisive shift into the unknown with confusion and uncertainty prevailing concerning its latent functions, that is, its unintended and unforeseen consequences, and future relations of UK with the EU and the rest of the world (Hepburn, 2020). Eva Hepburn stated that the increasing uncertainty around Brexit was responsible for a slower

economic growth in the UK and the disproportionate numbers of low-income groups being affected. Several impacts were already visible post-Brexit. Skills shortages were already observed in the UK. Not only the number of the EU migrants to the UK had declined to a six-year low, the EU8 (Central and Eastern European nationals) also were leaving the UK, adversely affecting sectors like social care, thereby depriving the disadvantaged people like the disabled, aged, people with chronic illnesses and others. Some other sectors like agriculture, hospitality and construction wherein many EU nationals are employed, were also facing hardships and damaging consequences.

The EU nationals are uncertain about their position with regard to the possibility of continuing to live and work in UK, despite the provision of the EU Settlement Scheme, as the applications of a number of EU nationals have met with rejections or have been offered less secure and temporary pre-Settled Status (Gentleman, 2019). There are also fears that some vulnerable individuals like those with cognitive impairments, may lose their residence in UK due to their being ignorant of the need to apply to the EUSS (Home Affairs Committee, 2019). Further, the Mental Health Foundation has stated that Brexit-related stress disproportionately affects the equalities groups, including people who are migrants, due to the discrimination and other structural barriers they are likely to face.

Further, the Yellowhammer report acknowledged the fragile situation of the social care market which could bring about the failure of social care because of the need to adapt to the rising staff and supply costs (Hepburn, 2020). UK Department of Health report (*ibid*) submitted to the UK Government's Migration Advisory Committee indicated that women might have to give up their well-paying jobs to work in the informal sector providing care to the loved ones, in the absence of the EU care workers who would face difficulty in migrating to the UK post Brexit and the new immigration system.

Immigration numbers were also affected by Covid-19 and it is a challenge

for the government to make sure that the new immigration system will work in post-Brexit UK. Brexit triggered the labour mobility crisis and the Covid-19 scenario brought it into sharper relief by doubling the adverse effects on UK economy (Alberti et al., 2020). During this corona virus pandemic, certain jobs came to be categorised as essential. For instance, healthcare work, transport, provision of food and necessary goods – these are the very jobs which were over-represented by migrants.

A huge chunk of NHS workers in UK are migrant workers – ‘in 2018, 12 per cent of the 1.9 million strong healthcare workforce in the UK were non-UK nationals’ (Office for National Statistics, 2019), whilst according to another agency, ‘Skills for Care (2020), one in six of the 8,40,000 care workers in England were non-UK nationals’ (Alberti et al., 2020, 15) and the huge outflow of the EU workers since the referendum affected the social care activities during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic period revealed shortage of key products of food supplies, delayed supply chains and urgent requests for labour. The agricultural sector reported a shortage of 80,000 workers as per one survey, despite the fact that 10,000 people had signed up to work on the ‘Feed the Nation’ campaign (Farming UK Team, 2020).

The corona virus brought about drastic changes in the world and, Sylvester (2020) opined it would be unbelievable to think that it would not bring any changes in the migration policy. A suggestion was made that the migration system should reconsider the categorisation of care workers as low skilled and on the contrary creates a fast-track visa regime for them. The Covid-19 called for a rethink of the post-Brexit migration regulation. The pandemic showed the value of the migrants, of the occupations they were involved in and ‘the inevitable interconnectedness of our lives, mobilities, care and survival in a world that cannot travel back from globalisation’ (Alberti et al., 2020,p. 18).

The present Prime Minister, Mr. Boris Johnson, has introduced the Australian-style points-based immigration system, which he had promised