With the failure of neo-liberal economics scapegoating migrants has taken another turn. Irish labourers have been demonised. Jews escaping the pogroms in Tsarist Russia were accused of dragging down wages. And West Indians encouraged to come here after the Second World War to work on our transport networks and, in our hospitals, were confronted with overt racism. Now workers from Eastern Europe are met with similar refrains.

**Context**

Blaming migrants for the economic crisis is nothing new. It is time to replace myths with facts. Migrants didn’t cause a housing crisis. Migrants don’t drag down wages. Migrants don’t cause job shortages. The causes are clear. The sale of council housing has led to a catastrophic depletion of housing stock which was not replaced. Now we have rising rents and another disastrous housing bubble in the making. Predatory employers and the weakening of trade unions since the 1980s along with deregulation of labour markets have led to a race to the bottom.

**Global context**

In the run up to the 1979 General Election Margaret Thatcher used the language of fear when she told a reporter on the TV documentary World in Action; “People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture.” It was a blatant overture to those thinking of voting for the National Front.

Today there is a different target but the same arguments rage. Nigel Farage launching UKIP’s EU election played the ‘fear’ card with posters claiming that 26 million people in Europe were looking for work with a finger pointing at the viewer. It’s an election strategy aimed at appealing to a section of the electorate who are disengaged from political elites. We shouldn’t be scrapping about low skilled, low wage jobs when it is decent jobs with decent wages that are needed. While UKIP has to be taken on for peddling ‘fear’ with ‘a big lie’ their policy stance on economic issues such as a flat rate tax should also be exposed. This policy has apparently been fine tuned to include a second tier but this would still mean the majority paying a single tax regardless of income.

UKIP’s main message may be Britain out of the European Union but it is fighting this campaign relentlessly on immigration yet if we look at Britain’s migration figures in a global context we can see that in 2010 migrants made up 11.3% of the UK population, not far above the European average of 9.4% and less than the US with 13%, Canada with 20.6% and Australia 25%.

**Benefit Tourism**

“Freedom of movement must be about work – it was never meant to assist benefit tourism”. Ian Duncan Smith in one sentence managed to express his euro-scepticism and propagate another myth. It doesn’t stack up. Britain has some of the lowest benefits in Europe.

Far from being generous UK spending on social protection benefits per population shows that we come after the Scandinavian countries (not surprisingly) but also Italy, Germany, Belgium and France.
**Wages**

Migrants increase the labour supply; this in turn makes for economic growth through consumer demand leading to more jobs. Migration has a positive effect on average wages. Add in the skills set of migrant workers - the result an increase in overall productivity leading to increases in the average wage.

Wages are not depressed because migrants arrived in the UK. It is caused by:

- a failure to enforce minimum wages
- the weakening of the trade unions,
- failure to implement the Agency Workers Directive
- the deregulation of labour markets.

We need to reverse the race to the bottom and pursue a high wage and high skills economy.

**Housing**

A major housing building is the only way to resolve the chronic housing shortage. Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found no evidence of immigrants jumping social housing waiting lists.

- 64% of migrants rent privately.
- 17% were owner occupiers
- 11% live in social housing.

NB: Ed Miliband has given a commitment that should Labour form the next government 200,000 council and social houses a year would be built by the end of the next Parliament.

**National Health Service**

Another tourism –" health tourism" – another myth. A government report identified a ‘plausible range for health tourism’ of just 5,000 to 20,000 visitors a year. This equals just 0.1% of total NHS spending and not the billions of pounds we are led to believe is spent. Migrants are young and in good health.

**Jobs market and skills**

The UK is the only EU country to have a lower unemployment rate for migrants 7.5% - nationals 7.9%. Only 1% claim unemployment benefits.

The UK attract highly educated migrants who have degrees and skills

- In 2011 21% of British adults have a university degree
- 32% of recent EU migrants
- 43% of recent non-EU migrants.

In 2011-12 foreign students accounted for 17.4% of the 2.5 million student population and contributed an estimated £8.8 billion to the economy.

For more information contact:

[www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org)
[www.classonline.org.uk](http://www.classonline.org.uk) for a copy of its publication on why immigration is good for us.