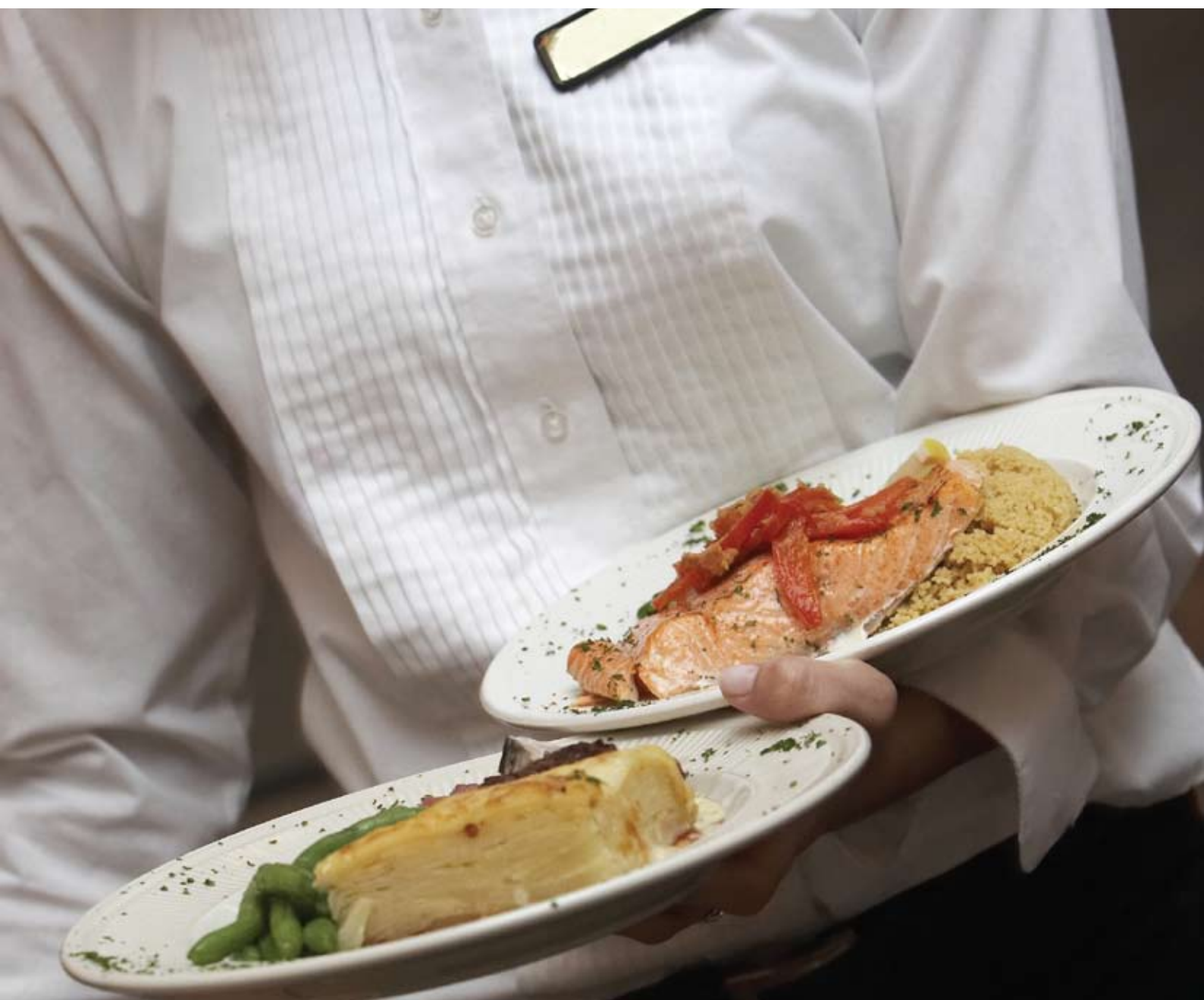


**Economic impact on the London and UK economy  
of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK**

Summary Report



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enquiries 020 7983 4100

minicom 020 7983 4458

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GLA Economics commissioned Ian Gordon, Kathleen Scanlon, Tony Travers and Christine Whitehead of the London School of Economics to conduct this research.

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The interpretations in this work are our own, as are all errors and omissions.

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GLA Economics

telephone 020 7983 4922

email [glaeconomics@london.gov.uk](mailto:glaeconomics@london.gov.uk)

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# Executive Summary

## The background

1 The GLA has stated it wishes to explore the proposition of an earned regularisation scheme for irregular migrants in the UK. The context for this initiative includes: ongoing changes in immigration legislation which introduce a points system limiting entry in relation to skill shortages; increased emphasis on more rapid processing of asylum requests; stronger implementation of removal powers; and improved border controls. At the same time the government is separately looking to introduce a more transparent path to earned citizenship, which would set out what is required of potential citizens and would limit benefits until full citizenship is achieved.

## The report

2 This study was commissioned to provide an appraisal of the likely economic impacts, within London and across the UK as a whole, of this model of earned regularisation for irregular migrants who have been in the country for at least five years. The report includes four main sections:

- An estimate of the numbers of irregular migrants in the UK and in London and the proportion who might be eligible for regularisation;
- A discussion of the factors to take into account when designing a scheme;
- An assessment of the impacts of regularisation on social welfare through its potential effects on migrants' engagement with the labour market, the housing market, neighbourhoods and social cohesion; and
- An estimate of the fiscal impacts from increased tax revenues on the one hand and increased costs of public services and financial support on the other.

It is important to note that because of the limited availability of official data and also because of complex political and public attitudes to migration, this research and any regularisation scheme can only advance on the basis of approximate and estimated impacts. Hard data are few and far between.



### Who counts as an irregular migrant?

- 3** Formally, 'migrants' are defined as those who enter the country expecting to remain for more than a year. Regular migrants are those who enter with the correct papers and who are given permission to stay under a widely varying set of conditions attached to their permission to enter.
- 4** There are fundamentally three categories of irregular migrants:
- A Illegal entrants – including both those who evade formal migration controls and those who present false papers;
  - B Migrants who have been lawfully present in the country but remain after the end of the permitted period. This category includes two main subcategories:
    - i. failed asylum seekers who stay in the country despite a final decision refusing them continuing right to remain; and
    - ii. overstayers whose period of legal residence has expired without renewal. This group includes those who are no longer eligible to apply for extensions because of the introduction of the points system,
  - C Children born in the UK to irregular migrant couples. They are not migrants themselves, but have no right to remain.
- The two types of overstayers within B above – asylum seekers and those who do not regularise their migration situation after their permission expires – are likely to behave very differently from one another. We therefore look at the evidence for four distinct sets of people within the irregular resident population.
- 5** In addition there is another group, comprising those who are legally in the country but who work in breach of their visa status. These are irregular workers rather than irregular migrants. This category has been excluded from the analysis, because people in this position are very unlikely to qualify for the proposed scheme. Their status will almost certainly change before five years' residence has been achieved, either because they have left, or because their position is clarified as either legitimate workers or irregular residents.



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### Estimating the numbers

- 6** Official estimates of 'Total International Migration' to the UK include, in principle, not only regular migrants but also all those in categories 1 and 2 above, except for those who evaded controls on entry, and visitors (ie, those who entered for less than one year) who stayed in the UK but never officially transferred to migrant status. Irregular migrants are thus not necessarily uncounted migrants.
- 7** The one widely accepted set of estimates of the size of the irregular population was produced by Woodbridge (2005) for the Home Office and the ONS. It uses a 'residual' method that compares the total de facto foreign-born population derived from the 2001 Census with estimates of the lawfully resident foreign-born population. The residual method is used because it is not possible reliably to build up an estimate from counts of the various groups of irregulars. It thus in principle includes all irregular migrants but not their UK-born children. The resulting overall estimate was presented as a range of between 310,000 and 570,000 with a central estimate of 430,000, as at census day 2001. In addition there were at that time 175,000 quasi-legal migrants, whose right to remain depended on future determination of their asylum status.
- 8** Informed observers have not seriously challenged the Woodbridge figures, except with respect to omission of the children of migrants born in the UK. Migration Watch's estimate, for instance, simply added an extra ten per cent for the UK-born.
- 9** The Woodbridge figures are not disaggregated either by types of irregular migrant or by area of residence. Official statistics of asylum seekers suggest, however, that in 2001 there would have been some 286,000 failed asylum seekers in the country – representing two-thirds of Woodbridge's central estimate of irregular population. Another important group are those whose applications for an extended stay were refused, but who nevertheless remained in the country. This group could account for some 50,000 to 80,000 irregulars, while there may be others who did not even apply – as well as the category of illegal entrants (other than asylum seekers).
- 10** The stock of irregular migrants will have changed since 2001 for a number of reasons: the continued arrival of asylum seekers; the clearance of the backlog of asylum cases; further illegal migrants entering and leaving the country; further migrants overstaying their permission; and the regularisation of previously irregular migrants, including those from EU accession countries whose status has become legal.
- 11** The stock of asylum seekers remaining after refusal appears to have increased by some 220,000, though the rate of inflow has been



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sharply cut back since 2004. Similarly, while there is very little evidence on other overstayers, their numbers are likely to have increased more or less in line with the flow of migrants. On the other hand there are large numbers of formerly irregular migrants from the A8 who are now regular. In 2007 the government introduced a ‘case resolution scheme’ to clear the backlog of asylum decisions, which has also resulted in regularisation, as well as removals.

**12** Taking all these factors into account, Table 1 provides our best estimate of the likely stock of irregular residents as at end 2007. In terms of irregular migrants, the numbers are somewhere in the range of 373,000-719,000 with a central estimate of 533,000. Including children born in the UK to irregular migrant couples adds between 12 per cent and 20 per cent to this total. Overall therefore the central estimate of the number of irregular residents (ie, migrants and their children) in the UK at the end of 2007 is 618,000, with a range of 417,000-863,000.

**Table 1: Updating Estimates of the UK Irregular Resident Population 2001-end 2007**

	Thousands		
	Central Estimate	Lower Estimate	Higher Estimate
Woodridge: 2001 estimate of irregular migrants	430	310	570
2001-7 change in numbers of:			
resident failed asylum seekers	+219	+219	+219
overstayers / illegal entrants	+50	+21	+79
Regularised 2003-07 (inc. from EU accession countries)	-166	-177	-149
Total irregular migrants at end-2007	533	373	719
UK-born children	85	44	144
Total irregular resident population at end-2007	618	417	863



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### Origins and duration of residence

**13** Failed asylum seekers come from a wide range of countries with major groups from the Middle East, South Asia, Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. Those refused extensions tend to come from South Asia, the rest of Asia and Africa. Origins of illegal migrants, on the evidence of removals, are concentrated in South and Central America, Africa and 'other' Asia. Importantly, these countries of origin are all within the 'poor country' category; evidence suggests that relatively few regular migrants from these countries return home.

**14** Assuming that the likelihood of remaining is similar to that for regular migrants from the same countries, the evidence suggests that some 62 per cent of all irregular migrants will have remained in the UK for at least five years. On this basis the central estimate of the number eligible for regularisation, on the basis of five years' residence, would be 412,000 with a range of 273,000 to 583,000.

### Estimating London's share of the stock of irregular migrant

**15** London has had a disproportionately large share of almost all types of migrant to the UK, but an especially large share of asylum seekers, at least until 2000. Thereafter, those publicly assisted asylum seekers who were given accommodation were dispersed out of London, while those who simply received financial assistance concentrated there. Failed asylum seekers are not eligible for assistance (except on a short term basis if they are waiting to return home), and do not have constraints on their area of residence. Nevertheless the proportion of post-2000 entrants living in London is likely to be significantly less than for earlier cohorts.

**16** Our estimate is that 80 per cent of failed asylum seekers from before 2000 are in London, together with around 60 per cent of those entering later. For other groups the only available evidence is about the proportion of all those (legal or illegal) from the relevant national origins who are living in London. This suggests an overall London share for them that is a little lower than for asylum seekers. Table 2 provides our summary estimates, with a range between 67 per cent and 73 per cent of all irregular residents living in London – and a best estimate of 442,000.

**Table 2: Estimates of London's Irregular Population as at end 2007**

	Thousands		
	Central Estimate	Lower Estimate	Upper Estimate
Failed asylum seekers as at 2001	229	215	243
Growth in failed asylum seekers	131	99	164
Overstayers/Illegal entrants	121	28	226
Regularisations 2003-07 (inc. EU accession countries)	-100	-91	-108
UK-born children	61	30	105
Total irregular residents	442	281	630

**17** The number of residents who might be eligible for regularisation (on a five-year residence basis) is estimated at some 412,000 nationally (with a range of 273,000 to 583,000), with 294,000 in London (with a range between 194,000 and 425,000).

### The design of regularisation schemes

#### Who would be eligible?

**18** Eligibility depends on two factors: length of time living in the country and the legality of behaviour. The question of how proof of time in the country would be determined is a major issue that would affect both eligibility and take-up. Legality of behaviour is also a

problem, as almost by definition, irregular migrants will have broken at least some laws in remaining in Britain. The assumption must be that the restriction would apply only to those found guilty of a crime prior to application – but even here there is an issue about how serious a conviction would have to be to act as a bar to eligibility.

#### What are the benefits of regularisation?

**19** The benefits to the economy depend first, on whether the migrant will become able to work or get a better job, second, on the chances of a later reversal of legality because the migrant cannot meet the requirements for the new



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residence status (e.g. no recourse to public funds); and third, on whether they actively begin to access additional public services, which in turn depends on current usage and the terms of the residence status granted.

- 20** International experience suggests that each of these factors can vary greatly, affecting both the extent to which people would take up the scheme and the likelihood of achieving regular status in the long-term. These factors in turn affect the societal benefits and the chances of success for the scheme.

### Current eligibility

- 21** The extent to which legal migrants are able to access public services varies enormously, from complete access for those accepted as refugees, to 'no access to public funds' and limited access to parts of the health service for others. The only service where all migrants, whether legal or irregular, have full rights is education up to school-leaving age. Equally providers are paid in relation to these numbers, not to legal status. It is evident that many irregular migrants are already accessing a number of public services, so any move to regular status would have limited cost implications. Access to housing and

social security by irregular migrants is likely to be more limited.

### 'Path to Citizenship'

- 22** The government intends to introduce a formal 'Path to Citizenship' by which legal migrants would go through three stages: temporary residency, where they must prove that they are self sufficient and contribute through taxation as well as abide by the law; probationary residence after perhaps five years, where they would achieve additional services but no welfare benefits (this period would last at least a further year); and finally full citizenship/ indefinite leave to remain.
- 23** It is unclear what the proposed regularisation scheme would offer. However if it were only to place people on the Path there would be a high chance that many would not be able to meet the conditions and would therefore fall back into irregularity.
- 24** Finally there are important issues with respect to the administration of the actual process. International experience suggests this could be very costly, with potentially continuing costs of reassessment and removal.



### Assessing the impacts of regularisation

- 25** The impacts of regularisation on the economy and social welfare depend upon: the current position of irregular migrants; their position after regularisation; the effect that removing constraints has on their behaviour; and the impacts of these on the labour market, the housing market and quality of life. These factors all depend not just on the architecture of the scheme but also on how effectively the irregular migrant has been integrated into the workforce and society.
- 26** With respect to the labour market the two main questions are: Will the productivity of the migrants be increased? And how will this affect wages and taxes?
- 27** The UK has a more limited informal sector than many of the other countries that have previously undertaken regularisation schemes. There is also less reliance in Britain on formal identity papers and a lower representation of illegal (as opposed to irregular) migrants. As a result it is likely that a large proportion of

irregular migrants that work are already working in the formal sector.

- 28** Evidence from the Labour Force Survey suggests that those from 'irregular origins' who are in work may be earning about 30 per cent less than those from legal origins. It also suggests they are very much more likely to be workless, with perhaps 50 per cent of adults not working in a given week as compared to about 25 per cent of the whole migrant population. A large part of the differential in employment rates seems, however, to reflect the influence on migrants' labour market outcomes of constraints other than residential status. After allowing for these factors, the gap in employment rates may only be about six per cent. The estimated gap in earnings is, however, not significantly reduced when these factors are taken into account.
- 29** International experience suggests that regularisation does improve the possibility of accessing better employment, especially for those who start off heavily disadvantaged. However other evidence, particularly from the USA, suggests that many irregulars are already well integrated into the labour market.
- 30** Potential impacts of regularisation on GDP in the UK are uncertain, both because of data limitations and because their achievement would be contingent on complementary policies, toward equal opportunities, immigration control and the informal sector. Illustrative estimates, that assume employment rates of irregulars could be raised by six percentage points and earnings by 25 per cent, imply an addition of £3 billion per annum (or about 0.2 per cent) to national GDP.

### Impacts on housing

- 31** Impacts on the housing market are likely to be limited. Irregular migrants are currently mainly accommodated in the private rented sector or living with family and friends. Except to the extent that their incomes increase, there will be very little additional demand. In the short run at least, very few additional



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households would be eligible for either benefits or social housing.

**32** In the longer term however there would be an impact on the demand for social housing. In London for instance there might be 128,000 households regularised. Earlier evidence suggested that perhaps 40 per cent of those from similar backgrounds have over time been able to access social housing. This would imply adding 52,000 units to the stock at a public sector cost of perhaps £4.4 billion. over a long period. Across the UK the figures might be as many as 72,000 units required at an estimated cost of £6.2 billion. However the much more likely outcome is simply that there would be longer waiting lists both in London and across the country as a whole.

### Impact on quality of life

**33** The quality of life of both regularised migrants and their neighbours should be improved by their greater willingness to interact with the police and through a general increase in perceptions of legality. Any harm caused by having a cohort of

irregular citizens would be reduced. However, there is also a risk of some increasing tensions if people felt that regularisation enabled people to 'jump the queue'.

### Fiscal Impacts

**34** There are three main service areas where costs might increase as a result of the regularisation programme:

- direct costs of implementing the scheme;
- additional demands on public services;
- potential increases in welfare benefits to eligible households.

### Administrative costs

**35** The closest comparator available to estimate per-unit administration costs of a regularisation scheme is the current UKBA 'legacy' programme (with a total cost of some £1 billion). The latter scheme was wholly concerned with asylum cases, but we assume that equivalent costs per unit would be involved in processing non-



asylum seekers also. The additional costs for them are estimated at around £300 million. This new cost might be increased if the scheme generated an incentive effect, encouraging additional migrants.

**Public service costs**

**36** Our analysis of the impact on public service costs is based on an interview programme that was concentrated in London – and initial cost estimates related to this city.

**37** The most important issues relate to what services irregular migrants are currently able to access; the extent to which demand may be increased by regularisation; and the extent to which constraints on access are removed as a result of regularisation.

**38** The education service is at one extreme of the spectrum in that all parents or guardians, whatever their status, must send their children of between five and 16 years to school, and funding is provided per student. At the other

extreme are welfare benefits to which neither irregular nor some other migrants are eligible – so that any impact will only occur once the migrant has been given indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.

**39** The costs of a large proportion of local public services would not change significantly, simply because the irregular migrants are already in the country and using services. This applies to fire, the environment, planning, culture and leisure services and transport. For many of the other services the only check made is to confirm that the applicant’s address is within the borough. The objective of the providers appears to be to ensure that everyone obtains the service rather than to test the migrants’ immigration status and thus exclude particular groups. This finding also applies to nursery schools and social care for both children and adults. Any increases in costs in these services would come from the regularised migrants feeling more able to access the services.

**40** For other services, notably police and ambulances, there might be offsetting reductions in demand – eg if fewer irregular migrants became victims or needed A&E.

**41** The two service areas where there might, at least in principle, be large changes in costs are health and housing. In the context of health, irregular migrants may well avoid using services because of the fear that checks will be carried out. However with respect to primary care there is little evidence of exclusion. The situation may be different with respect to hospitalisation, especially where ‘health tourism’ is an issue. However again little evidence was adduced showing formal attempts at exclusion, although concerns were raised about pregnancy and cancer care. Certainly the costs of A&E are higher than those for GPs, while the extent and timing of when people present themselves for treatment depends upon migrant fears of deportation. Removing this fear should result in earlier diagnosis and therefore lower treatment costs as well as benefits to public



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health, especially because of earlier diagnosis of contagious disease. Overall, the costs to the NHS would increase on regularisation even allowing for offsetting reductions as health improved.

**42** The issues with housing are very different. Anyone 'subject to immigration control' is ineligible for social housing or housing benefit. The costs of regularisation will thus be minimal until the migrant receives indefinite leave to remain (ILR). Over time as regularised households achieve ILR or citizenship the costs could be disproportionately high. Many households will be lower-income families who might be eligible to receive housing benefit and to be accommodated through homelessness provisions and waiting list allocations. The long-run costs with respect to housing could therefore be significant.

**43** Many of the same arrangements apply to social security, tax credits and other benefits where eligibility will increase over time.

**44** Overall our estimate of the annual UK costs specific to public services is of the order of

£410 million per annum, including housing benefit, social security and child benefit, which some households will become eligible for once they receive indefinite leave to remain, thereby raising this figure to around £1 billion.

**45** The costs in terms of public services are relatively low, mainly because access to most services does not depend on regularity per se, but on whether or not migrants are 'subject to immigration control'. Thus the immediate costs are much lower than most commentators might expect. The major costs relate not to services but to welfare benefits: mainly child benefit, social security and housing benefit. Some countries limit migrants' access to such benefits — and indeed this government intends to do so for those seeking indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.

#### The impact on tax revenues

**46** The most widely perceived benefit of regularisation is that tax revenues will increase because more migrants will be employed in formal jobs (where taxes are collected) and that they will achieve higher-paid employment. Evidence from the USA (which seems to be the



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closest comparable case) indicates that many (perhaps a half of) irregular migrants already pay income tax and the equivalent of national insurance. Some regression analyses with UK evidence suggest a similar pattern may apply here too. On this evidence, a shift of status from irregular to regular might be expected to add the equivalent of 15 per cent of weekly earnings to the tax/insurance take. This could imply perhaps £1,450 per annum per regularised adult.

**47** If, over the long run, regularisation closed the gap between current employment and earnings rates of irregulars and those of otherwise comparable migrants, the tax/insurance yield could be raised by a further £1,171 per regularised adult. Together, on these assumptions, the tax/insurance revenue from a regularised population could increase by some £846 million per annum.

**48** Our best guess is that there would be some net benefit to the public purse in the short to

medium term based on the costs to public services alone, while access to welfare benefits is restricted. However, these costs will increase over time as more regularised migrants gain indefinite leave to remain.

**Bringing the story together**

**49** Overall, we estimate the UK has a population of some 618,000 irregular residents, within a range between 417,000 and 863,000. London has about 70 per cent of this total, with a central estimate of 442,000 and a range between 281,000 and 630,000. Of these totals, we estimate that nationally 412,000 (67 per cent) might be eligible for regularisation; of these, 294,000 would be in London.

**50** Regularisation of these groups could be expected to contribute to higher levels of national output to the extent that it enabled a greater proportion of irregular residents to work and to make better use of their human capital. Indicative estimates suggest that over the longer run and with supportive policies this



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- might add something like £3 billion per annum (or 0.2 per cent) to GDP.
- 51** The regularised might generate a total of £846 million per annum additional tax revenue for the UK as a whole. This can be compared to a possible increase in public service costs of £410 million per annum. In addition potentially available welfare costs might in time raise this figure to £1 billion; there would also be a one-off cost of the regularisation scheme and administration of £300 million.
- 52** The figures for London on a similar basis are around £596 million per annum additional tax revenue, compared to £240 million for public service costs; £713 million when including welfare costs plus £210 million one off costs.
- 53** If, as we would expect, not everyone who was eligible took up the option of regularisation, both tax benefits and costs would be lower. The balance between tax revenue and costs could also be substantially affected by whom it was who actually took up the option of regularisation.
- 54** The figures presented here are based on the numbers of irregular residents in the country at the end of 2007. Many of these migrants are likely anyway to be regularised under the current schemes, which are based on case-by-case assessment of individual circumstances, including the length of time spent in the country. What a regularisation scheme would do is clarify the position of those irregularly in the country and allow irregular migrants to come forward for regularisation within a clearly defined set of rules. This is consistent with the general intention of enhancing the ethos of legality within immigrant communities and localities with high concentrations of migrants. A simple scheme with clear rules also increases the chances of achieving the high take-up and success rate that would be necessary to generate a step-change in legality.
- 55** The main objection raised to a formal regularisation scheme is that it could incentivise additional irregular migrants. Much of the evidence for such incentives however relates to countries with much illegal immigration across land borders from nearby countries. The likelihood of large-scale additional irregular immigration is far lower in the UK, where most irregulars come from much further afield – and could only occur if border controls were ineffective.
- 56** The costs in terms of public services are relatively low, mainly because access to most services does not depend on regularity per se, but on whether or not migrants are ‘subject to immigration control’. Thus the immediate impact on public services is much lower than many commentators might expect. The major long-term costs relate to welfare benefits, including child benefit, social security and housing benefit. Some countries limit migrants’ access to such benefits — and indeed this government intends to do so for legal migrants until they receive indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.
- 57** Making a regularisation scheme work effectively in social and economic terms would require careful design, involving a progressive programme (integrated with a version of the current ‘paths to citizenship’ proposal) and complementary policies to address equal opportunities issues and parts of the informal economy which have exploited irregular labour.
- 58** The issue of irregular migrants and how to deal with them has been difficult to research because official agencies have little information and few data about the question – and a lack of clarity about the position of irregular migrants, in part because immigration is a topic of controversy. However, the fact that immigration is ‘difficult’ politically does not mean there cannot be debate, followed by improvements to public policy. This report provides some evidence as a contribution to such a debate.

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Public Liaison Unit  
Greater London Authority  
City Hall,  
The Queen's Walk  
More London  
London SE1 2AA

Telephone 020 7983 4100  
Minicom 020 7983 4458  
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## Greek

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## Turkish

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## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦੀ ਕਾਪੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਰਾਬਤਾ ਕਰੋ:

## Hindi

यदि आप इस दस्तावेज की प्रति अपनी भाषा में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निम्नलिखित नंबर पर फोन करें अथवा नीचे दिये गये पते पर संपर्क करें

## Bengali

আপনি যদি আপনার ভাষায় এই দলিলের প্রতিলিপি (কপি) চান, তা হলে নীচের ফোন নম্বরে বা ঠিকানায় অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন।

## Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کی نقل اپنی زبان میں چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم نیچے دئے گئے نمبر پر فون کریں یا دیئے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں

## Arabic

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## Gujarati

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# GLAECONOMICS

Greater London Authority  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London SE1 2AA

Tel: 020 7983 4922

Fax: 020 7983 4137

Minicom: 020 7983 4458

Email: [glaeconomics@london.gov.uk](mailto:glaeconomics@london.gov.uk)

[www.london.gov.uk/mayor/economic\\_unit](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/economic_unit)