

## **Britain and the EU Referendum: Arguments over East European Welfare Benefit Tourism**

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**Abstract :** This paper considers the political controversy in Britain, both pre- and post-EU referendum, concerning claims over welfare benefit tourism and immigration in the UK. These claims were seen to be a significant reason for the vote for Brexit despite evidence to the contrary that benefit tourism was not, and is not, implicated in the migration of East Europeans to the UK. Populist rhetoric is analysed alongside studies that contradict such views. These contentious issues are examined with respect to the agenda set by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) concerning anti-EU and anti-immigrant sentiment and the notion of cultural differences as the basis for supporting Brexit. The paper also examines the paradoxical claim that East European migrants are taking British jobs and driving down wages. Taken together, it is argued that these two kinds of claims effectively contribute to anti-immigration discourse based on the logic of economics, but also at the same time conceal more irrational fears of adapting to change through the inclusion of others. Such fears are considered as being founded upon a challenge to the stability of totems of national life and identity.

**Keywords :** benefits, Brexit, immigration, tourism, welfare

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