Immigration is certainly one of the most hotly debated topics in contemporary western society. The prospect of unprecedented numbers of immigrants in search of economic advancement, not least through the recent EU enlargement in 2004 has fuelled public concerns about unwanted – and potentially illicit – competition in an already precariously unstable labour market. The relationship between immigration and illicit work, however, is not a modern phenomenon of industrialized (and post-industrialized) societies.

The following article takes a closer look at immigrants and illicit work in early modern England. It focuses on immigrants in 16th and early 17th century towns, which witnessed a massive influx of refugees from the Netherlands. It has been estimated that some 50,000 men, women and children arrived in the country during the reign of Elizabeth I alone. The official correspondence between urban authorities, the Privy Council in London and exile community leaders described them as religious refugees fleeing the persecutions of the Spanish authorities in the Low Countries; unofficially many of them were economic migrants who left their war-torn country in search of job opportunities abroad. For most of the immigrants a mixture of religious and economic motives might have caused their departure from the Netherlands. The majority established themselves in London and in towns in south-east England: Sandwich, Norwich, Maidstone, Southampton, Stamford, Colchester, Dover,

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2 For a discussion of the motives of early modern migration and historiographical trends in migration research see A. Schunka, Glaubensflucht als Migrationsoption. Konfessionell motivierte Migration in der Frühen Neuzeit in: Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 10/05, pp. 547-566.
Canterbury and a few other places. For comparative purposes the study will focus on the two cities with the largest immigrant communities in England at the time: Norwich and London. Town Councils, guilds and immigrant community leaders in these two cities employed very different tactics in response to the influx of foreign newcomers, many of which centred on economic rights and restrictions. The study will, thus, focus on urban mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion through the granting, modification and withdrawal of economic rights in 16th and early 17th century England.

Dutch and Walloon immigrants found many contradictions in the reception they received from their host societies in England. Both newcomers and English authorities emphasized the Strangers’ role as co-religionists and Protestant “brethren”, who fled their homes “for the sake of true religion”. Magistrates and ministers of the immigrant (Calvinist) churches, which quickly emerged as the political, social and cultural centres of the alien communities, portrayed the Strangers as god-fearing, law-abiding people, who maintained high standards of religious and social conduct. They led exemplary lives, so it was argued, and could serve as role models for the native English population. The idea of offering a safe haven for persecuted fellow-Protestants was certainly partly created to overcome criticism and fear of unwanted economic competitors in parts of the urban population, who witnessed the arrival of the Strangers with suspicion. Membership in the Dutch and Walloon churches was also seen as a means of ensuring religious orthodoxy amongst the alien population in a time, when the religious landscape in England herself was still very much in flux. The motives of local authorities (and of members of the Privy Council such as Francis Walsingham and William Cecil, who actively promoted the establishment of exile communities in England) to invite

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3 Estimates of the alien population of Norwich calculate around 3,000 Dutch and Walloons resident in the city in 1569-70, while the native population figured around 8,000. Immigration figures doubled in the following decade while the overall population rose to 14,000-15,000 people. In these peak years of immigration (which were, however, capped by severe outbreaks of the plague in the 1570s) the percentage of immigrants in the city rose to a substantial 30 percent. With the perspective of alternative migration options, particularly to the Northern Netherlands, Dutch and Walloon immigration to Norwich fell in the beginning of the 17th century. Immigrants also started to leave the city for more lucrative employment opportunities in the United Provinces. For the figures for Norwich see R. Eßer , Niederländische Exulanten im England des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1996, p. 49; J. Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich, Old Woking 1988, p. 28f. The Stranger population in London was comparable to immigrant figures in Norwich with 7,000 aliens registered in 1593, but compared to London’s overall population at this time, the Strangers accounted for a mere 3 ½ percent of London’s inhabitants. For more detailed figures see Goose, Introduction, in: Goose/Luu (eds.), Immigrants, pp. 14-29.


5 See, for instance, the letter of the Privy Council to Bishop of London, Edwin Sandes from the 29th of June 1574: “...Our desyre is that as soche which resorte to no devine service allowed of in this realme, but use the cloke of religion for other practices, should be commanded to departe the realme...”, Hessels (ed.), Ecclesiae, vol. 2, pp. 499-501, here: p. 500.
Strangers and to grant them rather specific settlement and business rights, which were often set down in patents and charters either issued by the Queen or by the town authorities themselves, had been based on the hope of economic improvements particularly in the ailing English textile industry. Throughout early modern Europe Dutch and Walloon textile workers were renowned for their expertise in the production of new, fashionable fabrics and it was expected that they would introduce these techniques into the English textile market. Discussions of work patterns of the newcomers, thus oscillated between the demand for “innovation through migration” and the management of native envy against unwanted competition. Within these parameters immigrant economic activities and, more particular, the construction and perception of legal and illicit work were carefully balanced between the economic aspirations and visions by city governments, central authorities, native economic pressure groups and immigrant communities. This relationship differed substantially in the two case studies under discussion. Initially, the patents covering the number of immigrants, their religious freedoms (with their own church and community networks supervised by the respective bishop of the English diocese of their place of residence) and their economic activities (usually severely restricted to the textile production and associated trades) might have been regarded as sufficient for both refugees and town authorities to regulate immigrant life in their host society. In cases of dispute community leader referred to their charters for clarification. However, large scale immigration to cities such as Norwich, where newcomers quickly outnumbered the fixed number of “Thirty Douchmen of the Lowe Countrys of Flaunders Alyens borne (not

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6 For Norwich see: Norfolk Record Office [hereafter: NRO], 17/d, Dutch and Walloon Strangers Book [hereafter: DWSB], 1564-1643, fol.16-18. For the largest immigrant communities in London no specific charters or letters patent were issued. This practice, however, remained the exception. All other major immigrant cities issued more or less detailed orders for the newcomers. In recent years individual exile communities in England have been studied in some detail. See, for instance, M.F. Backhouse, The Flemish and Walloon Communities at Sandwich During the Reign of Elizabeth I (1561-1603), Brussels 1995; R. Eßer, Niederländische Exulanten; B. Magen, Die Wallonengemeinde von Canterbury von ihrer Gründung bis zum Jahre 1635, Frankfurt/Main 1973; A. Spicer, The French-Speaking Reformed Community and their Church in Southampton, 1567-c.1620, Stroud 1997. See also Goose/Luu (eds.), Immigrants and L.B. Luu, Immigrants and the Industries of London 1500-1700, Aldershot 2005.

7 The debate on the impact of the Strangers on England’s textile industry has dominated much of the older historiography on early modern migration. It was informed by the paradigm of ‘modernization’. This debate is of no further relevance to this article, but a few references might be useful here: H. Schilling, Innovation through Migration. The Settlement of Calvinistic Netherlanders in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Central and Western Europe, in: Social History/Histoire Sociale 16, 1983, pp. 7-33; ibid., Confessional Migration and Social Change. The Case of the Dutch Refugees of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century, in: P. Klep, E. van Cauwenberge (eds.), Entrepreneurship and the Transformation of the Economy (10th-20th Centuries), Essays in Honour of Herman van der Wee, Leuven 1994, pp. 321-333. For a general overview on government-initiated projects and the textile industry in early modern England see Luu, Immigrants and the Industries, Chapter 3.

8 Thus the title of Heinz Schilling’s article in Social History/Histoire Sociale 16, 1983, see footnote 7.

9 See, for instance, Hessels (ed.), Ecclesiae cit., vol. 3, pp. 1209.
denizens) & being alle householders or master workmen”¹⁰ and diversification of Stranger activities to areas outside the defined economic boundaries of the charters necessitated a reconsideration of the economic status of aliens in towns.

Norwich’s artisans were not organized in guilds or livery companies. At the beginning of each mayoral year (on the 1st of July) three masters of each craft or trade were elected as wardens, who supervised the rules and regulations (set down by a team of Aldermen, Common Councillors and artisan masters) for their fellow-practitioners.¹¹ This policy was also applied to the newcomers. From 1571 onwards Dutch and Walloon wardens were elected in accordance with the English model to supervise bay- and camiant making and related luxury textile trades practised by the Strangers.¹² These orders, which were particularly detailed in matters of quality control, were set down in collaboration between city officials and immigrant masters. They were frequently reviewed and updated. Rules about employment and training remained comparatively open. Here, Dutch standards and practices of apprenticeship procedures, which were considerably shorter than the seven years required by the English “Statute of Apprentices” (1563), were put in place. Supervision of apprenticeship rights and regulations were placed firmly into the hands of the Dutch and Walloon community leaders. “Eight [Dutch] and Four [Walloon]” so-called Politic Men – usually from the higher echelons of the refugee society - registered apprenticeships among Strangers, punished breaches of economic laws and settled business disputes between immigrants and occasionally between Englishmen and Strangers.¹³ Here, town official were clearly willing to make concessions to their new workforce. In defence against native artisans’ complaints they emphasized the novelty of their crafts in the city and the ensuing economic gains for everyone. More controversial, however, were the sales activities of the immigrants, which were the sources of frequent complaints by various groups engaged in Norwich’s economy. Conflicts, which flared up in the early 1570s offer important insights into the mechanisms and the rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion on the labour market. Norwich’s textile industry was heavily dependent on Norfolk’s wool production. Export and import of wool and its use inside and outside the county was, therefore, highly regulated. Complaints about illicit export of wool

¹⁰ NRO, 17/d, Dutch and Walloon Strangers Book, 1564-1643, fol. 16-18.
¹¹ This system underwent a complete overhaul in 1622 after complaints that the wardens were too lenient when dealing with the activities of illicit workers. See W. Hudson, J.C. Tingey (eds.), The Records of the City of Norwich, 2 vols, Norwich 1910, vol. 2, pp. 382-386.
¹² DWSB fol. 62-67, fol. 80-81, fol. 83v, fol. 100. For further details see R. Eßer, Niederländische Exulanten, pp. 174-202
¹³ Three volumes recording the activities of the committee are still preserved in the Norfolk Record Office and in the British Library respectively. DWSB, 1564-1643; British Library [hereafter: BL], MC 181/1, MS2204, Norwich Strangers’ Book 1583-1600, BL, Add. MS 43,862 Book of the Norwich Dutch Church 1605-1615. DWSB, 1564-1643, p. 19v.
and yarn to London, to Flanders and to other places outside the county were frequently issued
against alien merchants and were meticulously recorded in the Dutch and Walloon Strangers
Book, a compendium of rules and regulations for Dutch and Walloon crafts and trades in the
city and of related correspondence between the parties involved.\textsuperscript{14} In these cases Norfolk’s
influential landowners (whose lands were mainly used as pasture for sheep), men such as Sir
Clement Paston and Sir Edward Cleere, joint the chorus of complaints from Norwich’s native
weavers, who felt threatened by the loss of raw material and from the city authorities, who
lost substantial taxes and fees otherwise received through the sealing of finished textile
products in Norwich itself. As a measure to cap Strangers activities retail trade became
restricted to the privileges of Norwich’s citizens, thus excluding the Strangers (who were only
offered citizenship rights in the late 1590s). What seemed to be a mission in support of
Norwich’s English weavers, however, ended temporarily with a lucrative monopoly on
Norwich’s wool trade for the mayor and three Aldermen: Simon Bowde, who had been sent to
London to settle the case with the Privy Council, Robert Suckling and Thomas Layer and
Mayor John Aldriche in 1571. However, in a shrewd diplomatic manoeuvre Strangers
community leaders brought their case to their patrons at the Privy Council whose members
decided in favour of the aliens’ request to participate in the retail trade for wool with any
interested party both in London and overseas. The magistrate’s strategy to combine economic
privileges with citizenship rights, was, therefore, torpedoed by the Privy Council, where
Stranger supporters such as Sir Thomas Smith, who had been in charge of the whole affair,
were actively interested in economic innovations and a more open trade policy.\textsuperscript{15} Within the
urban context descriptors of illicit work and its persecution were, thus, firmly determined by
Norwich’s and Norfolk’s ruling elite and by their economic advantages, which not always
matched expectations of the English craft and trade masters, or, indeed, of Privy Councillors
in London. Different standards were applied to different cases. Breaches against the number
of looms used by alien parchment weavers, for instance, which were brought forward by
aggrieved English craftsmen, were recorded, but not persecuted.\textsuperscript{16} Matters were, however,
further complicated by the interference of members of the Privy Council in London, which the
Strangers often asked for protection and support for their cases.

\textsuperscript{14} NRO, 17/d, DWSB, 1564-1643.
\textsuperscript{15} J. Thirsk, Economic Policy and Projects. The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England,
und seinen Beziehungen zur Grafschaft Norfol, Frankfurt 1988, p. 245f.
\textsuperscript{16} DWSB fol. 20v. “Note that this order tooke smalle effecte for that the Straungers dyd not observe yt as they
promised to do: which so weried those that dyd trayveyle ther complaynte, that they permitted them to do what
them lusted.”
Goal-posts of what was legal and what was illicit artisan work changed over the next years. In the first decade of the 17th century economic activities were (again) increasingly linked to citizenship rights as put forward by Norwich’s town oligarchy. On the 11th of April 1614 the following entry was recorded in the Mayor’s Court Book:

Yt was this day agreed that concerning the Strangers of the Dutch Congregacion those that are not Denzens shall be permitted to use the manufacture of houseyne within this Cytty and liberties thereof notwithstanding they come not in for their freedomes. They payenge a forren fyne for their Tolleracon therin. And for the other that are Denizens as well those that are borne with this kyngdome as those borne out of the land and sitthence have been made denizens; that they shall be to all purposes as those that are English borne.17

The city father were obviously interested to attract members of the lucrative trade of hosiery, which was firmly in the hand of the Strangers, to apply for citizenship and, thus, to become fully accountable for the city’s public contributions. 15 days after this decision Peter Wallewein alias Wallwyn, one of the most prosperous hosiers in the city, appeared at the Mayor’s Court and was offered the right to work in his trade for £20. Wallewein flatly refused this offer and suggested to pay a mere £5 for the privilege. This, in turn, was rejected by the Mayor’s Court, which forbade Wallewein to continue his trade in the city. The affair dragged on for a whole year and affected other Stranger hosiers, who also refused to buy these permits or circumvent them through the purchase of denizen- or freeman status. Eventually, in July 1615 the matter was settled in favour of the Court. On the 5th of July 1615 the Mayor’s Court Book recorded the compliance of the alien hosiers, who agreed to the payment, but did not take up the alternative option to acquire citizenship.18 Others, however, did and the registers of freemen show a significant rise in alien-born or sons of alien-born hosiers between 1613 and 1619. 17 out of 29 newly registered hosiers were of Dutch or Walloon descent.19

While the Norwich city authorities, thus, took a keen interest to raise citizenship numbers among prosperous Strangers, who fulfilled the expectations of economic innovation and the introduction of new products and their technologies in the textile industry, such as hosiers, alien artisans in trades where they were regarded as direct competitors to the native labour

18 MCB No.15, fol. 18. See also folks. 20, 21, 22.
market were not encouraged to become registered with English guilds and acquire Norwich citizenship. The economic activities of Dutch and Walloon bakers, for instances, were severely restricted to produce only for the consumption within their own community. Only a limited number of six selected bakers were permitted to practice their craft in the city. Breaches of the code of production and of the sale of bread and cakes were harshly punished at the Mayors’ Court. On the 10th of November 1598, for instance, six Dutch bakers were sent to prison for illegally baking and selling bread. John de Wylde, on the other hand, was grudgingly granted the magistrates’ permission to sell not only ordinary bread but also his speciality, sweet gingerbread, in the city’s market, after he had successfully lobbied the Privy Council, whose members sent two letters to the Norwich magistrates supporting de Wylde’s case. However, his case remained the exception and bread and cake making and selling became increasingly restricted both in quality and size and in opening hours for bakeries and stalls at the market. Well into the 1630s no alien baker was registered with the Norwich baker’s guild, which had a strong lobby in town government and enjoyed close personal relations with Norwich’s Mayors and Aldermen, who obviously favoured the exclusion of alien competitors on the bread and cake market.20

Immigrant experiences in London seem to have differed substantially from the life of their compatriots in Norwich. Surprisingly, the London city authorities had not issued rules and regulations for the newcomers. Neither did they acquire a letters patent from the Queen. The first royal arrangement to invite Dutch and Walloon refugees to England dated back to the reign of Edward VI, who was particularly interested in the establishment of an exile Calvinist church in London. The patent of 1550 granted to this first wave of immigrants headed by Calvinist divines such as Johannes à Lasco regulated the religious organization of the newcomers, but was not concerned with other issues such as economic rights or restrictions.21 The Calvinist community of Strangers in London was dissolved with the ascension of Mary Tudor to the English throne. After her death, arrangements for the return of the refugees were made, but, again, religious considerations overshadowed other questions of alien resettlement in the city.22 The supervision of a large influx of Strangers into a city, which underwent dramatic social, economic and demographic changes in the 16th century, was, thus, extremely

20 Eßer, Niederländische Exulanten, pp. 216-223.
22 For details see Pettegree, Foreign Protestant Communities.
difficult. \textsuperscript{23} Here as in Norwich the Strangers’ churches were seen as the main regulators for alien behaviour and economic performance.

Other than Norwich London had a very powerful guild system, where the twelve Livery Companies strictly regulated their crafts and trade. As Joseph Ward recently remarked, in early modern London livery company membership was a class marker, because members had access to markets and opportunities formally denied to others. \textsuperscript{24} Companies, therefore, reacted swiftly and sharply against unwanted competition. However, with a lack of central guidance many issues remained controversial. It was unclear, for instance, whether Continental immigrants in the capital were required to serve an English (or English style) apprenticeship. This grey area caused much concern and remained a frequent issue of complaint, which overshadowed the critique against the Strangers retail practices. Some guilds, such as the Goldsmith’ or Weavers’ Companies accepted the (usually shorter) Dutch or Flemish equivalents. Other guilds such as the Merchant Tailors had no policy of admitting aliens thus forcing them to work illegally or outside the city’s jurisdictions in the suburbs. Aliens quickly became aware that in order to practice their trades legally and unmolested by English informers they needed to acquire at least denizenship. In the early 1560s ministers and elders of the Dutch and Walloon Church lobbied members of the Privy Council persistently in that regard. In the second part of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the London authorities constantly shifted the goal-posts for the acceptance of immigrants into the city’s economic networks and made integration through citizenship or denizenship increasingly difficult. After 1574 children of aliens or even denizens born in England were no longer permitted to work as apprentices with English masters. Protests from the aggrieved denizens, who pointed at the considerable amounts of money that they had invested into the acquisition of their status, met with some sympathy in the House of Commons, where they pressed for a bill to reverse London’s new rules, but did not lead to the desired result. \textsuperscript{25} Further anti-alien initiatives, particularly with respect to their economic activities, were discussed both in London’s Common Council and in both Houses of Parliament, but the Strangers still had powerful advocates for their case and no further legislation was passed in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. \textsuperscript{26} The existing measures, however, closed alien opportunities on the London labour market and made the acquisition of citizenship as a road to economic integration for many Strangers too expensive to consider. In 1606 the


\textsuperscript{24} J.P. Ward, \textit{Immigrants, Guilds and the Labour Market}, in: Goose/Luu (eds), \textit{Immigrants}, pp. 76-87, here: pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{25} Public Record Office, SP 15/24/67.

\textsuperscript{26} For further details see Pettegree, \textit{Foreign Protestant Communities}, pp. 291-295.
London Common Council again reinforced the employment and trading rights exclusively for citizens. A new act forbade “persons not being free of the said city … to sell, or put to sale any wares or marchandises within the said City or Liberties of the same by retaile, or keep any open or inward shop, or other inward place or room for them [sic] sale, or putting to sale, any wares or marchandises, or for use of any Arte, Trade, Occupation, mystery or handicraft within the same.”

Strict regulations against trades where the immigrants were seen as direct competitors on the English market – as bakers, tailors, shoemakers etc. – were absent in the capital, which caused much conflict and escalated in the Merchant Taylors’ Company’s attempts to expel foreigners and aliens from the city. It presented a bill in Parliament to that effect and it employed informers to harass their unwanted competitors. Only after the failure of this bill and after extensive negotiations with the Strangers Churches an agreement was reached in October 1608, which followed the Norwich practice of restricted alien work solely for their countrymen – and women.

In contrast to Norwich, economic considerations appear to have been secondary to security and political issues in influencing government policies towards refugees in London. London’s magistrates often reacted only ad hoc to complaints and grievances from pressure groups both within the native population and from immigrant communities. Here, the much more powerful London guilds could and did influence government decisions. In times of economic difficulties enforcement of the economic laws of the city became tougher, partly in response to public pressure. However, in the vast growing city with large areas outside the city’s jurisdiction, aliens found their economic niches, often overlooked or quietly tolerated by the authorities.

Here as in Norwich the Stranger population voted with their feet against increasing pressure to conform to the standards of citizenship now required for a successful participation in the urban labour market. Stranger numbers declined in the last decades of the 16th and in the first years of the 17th centuries (in comparison to mid-century figures). In the capital as well as in the other immigrant communities alternative job opportunities on the Continent, and particularly in the newly established United Provinces, which offered specific advantages such as tax exemptions, free housing and free citizenship, might have been viewed as more attractive than work and life in London, which seemed to be increasingly restricted.

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29 Luu, Immigrants and Industries, p. 167.
Discussions among urban authorities, English economic interest groups and representatives of the immigrants regarding breaches of economic rules and regulations employed the rhetoric of the common weal, of the Protestant brotherhood and of economic fairness. Here, the exile status of the refugees was frequently used on both sides of the argument to either discredit the Strangers as unprincipled and ungovernable people or as steadfast Protestants in need of support. Sir Walter Raleigh, probably the most vocal critic of immigrant economic rights in the House of Commons in 1592 claimed: “The Dutchman is to fly to no man but for his profit, and they will obey no man long … They are the people that maintain the King of Spain in his greatness.”

This critique echoed the Norwich magistrates’ complaints to the Privy Council in the above mentioned dispute over the Strangers’ retail activities in 1571: “we have over much favoured them and their causes, whearbye we have nowe to conceyve, that of our over muche lenite and favours, they have gathered such stomacke and boldnes, as some of them wolde seeme rather nowe to governe then to be governed.” Supporters of the Strangers used the opposite argument by highlighting their contributions to the commonwealth. In a request to Sir Francis Walsingham for the return of Dutch baymakers to Halstead from 1590 town magistrates firmly blamed ‘some few English Baymakers…, seeking rather ther owne priuate gayne then respecting anye common good’ for the departure of Dutch textile workers to neighbouring Colchester.

In their interpretation, the Dutch had been the better citizens of Halstead, because ‘the poor of the sayd towne and of other townes thereunto adionyng were well mayntayned by the weaving, spinning and working to the sayd Duch Companye’. The Strangers themselves also referred to their work as profitable for the “comonwealthe of this realme” which was “to be preferred befor the singular proffyte of a fewe.” According to the recipient their commonwealth could, as in above example, denote the realm of England rather than the particular town of their residence. Economic rights were, thus, interpreted within the framework of good government. What constituted good government of city authorities might not have been perceived as such by a national institution such as the Privy Council or by a very mobile migrant group, who frequently compared their situation in Norwich and London with allegedly more favourable conditions elsewhere in England or abroad.

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32 DWSB fol. 28.
34 Tawney, Power (eds.), *Tudor Economic Documents*, vol. 1, p. 319.
35 DWSB, fol. 27v.
Given the different interests of government and urban authorities, guild masters and journeymen, it is perhaps not surprising, that these positive assessments which emphasized the immigrants’ inclusion into the English (urban) common wealth were issued by the political and social elites of the time, while more critical voices of members of the lower strata of society and less influential members of artisan guilds, who felt economically threatened by the arrival of the newcomers were increasingly less audible. Although clearly standing out within the economic world of early modern England, Strangers found their economic niches in a labour market in transition.