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Migrant Workers in Liverpool: A Study of A8 and A2 Nationals

Executive Summary

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The study

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the migration of people from the new EU countries¹. It is now recognised that local authorities need to understand the composition and needs of their local population in order to be able to plan and deliver services effectively, as well as being able to respond to any issues relating to community cohesion². Consequently, local authorities are making efforts to find out about the experiences and needs of these new and emerging communities.

This research was commissioned by Liverpool City Council in July 2008 and was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford. The study was greatly aided by research support from a number of community interviewers and was managed by a steering group composed of officers representing the commissioning authorities.

The study had two primary objectives:

- to scope numbers of migrant workers in Liverpool; and
- to identify the needs of migrant workers in Liverpool, focusing on employment needs but with a view to wider service provision issues and community cohesion.

The key areas of investigation included focusing on:

- the number of migrant workers in Liverpool;
- qualifications of migrant workers;
- language skills of migrant workers;
- future forecast of migration numbers;
- proposed length of stay of migrant workers;
- current employment and match to qualifications;
- criminality associated with migrant workers;
- housing take-up and type of tenure of migrant workers;
- benefit take-up of migrant workers;
- education take-up of migrant workers and their children;
- health care take-up of migrant workers;
- access to other goods, services and facilities, including financial services, vehicle ownership and usage of public transport;
- numbers and ages of any dependants;
- evidence of hate crime or victimisation;
- evaluation of impact of migrant workers on local labour market; and
- level of involvement in the local community.

¹ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (commonly referred to as the A8 countries); Bulgaria and Romania (commonly referred to as the A2 countries).

² Institute of Community Cohesion (2007) *Estimating the scale and impacts of migration at the local level*, London: Local Government Association (LGA).

The study was undertaken by conducting:

- a review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
- consultation with key stakeholders, including service providers and employers; and
- **235** interviews with migrant workers from the following countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

Main findings

The characteristics of the sample

- The sample included representatives from all A8/A2 countries, with the exception of Slovenia. The majority of respondents were Polish (47%), followed by Slovak (21%) and Czech (20%). The sample also included a small number of people (5%) who identified themselves as Roma (all of whom were Czech or Slovak).
- The majority of respondents (77%) were aged 17–39 years.
- In terms of gender, 52% of the respondents were female and 46% were male, with 2% unclassified.
- Just over half of the sample was single (51%), 28% were married and 21% had a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- 71% of those who were married indicated that their husband/wife was currently living with them, while 82% of those with a boyfriend/girlfriend were currently living with their partner in the UK.
- 23% of the sample had dependant children. 73% of those with dependant children stated that their children were living with them in Liverpool, while 27% stated their children were in their home country.
- The Czech respondents were more likely to have dependant children, but also more likely to have their children with them in the UK.
- 17% of the sample had lived in another EU country prior to coming to the UK, with Germany being the most common response.
- 18% of the sample had lived somewhere else in the UK before moving to Liverpool. The Polish respondents suggested higher levels of internal movement.
- The majority of people had chosen Liverpool because of social connections; for example, 40% had moved to Liverpool because they had friends living in the city, while 28% had family living there.

Skills, qualifications and employment

- The sample was diverse in terms of their skills and qualifications. A quarter of respondents had degree-level qualifications (including accounting, economics, engineering, finance, journalism, social work, teaching and tourism). Just under half had vocational qualifications (including construction-related qualifications such as electrician, joiner, plumber, plasterer, but also including catering, engineering, marketing, agriculture, hairdressing, textiles, child care, administration and gardening).
- The male respondents were more likely to have vocational qualifications, while the female respondents were more likely to have undergraduate/postgraduate qualifications.
- 72% of people said that their ability to speak English was poor or very poor *upon arrival* in the UK. 28% of people stated that their *current ability* to speak English was poor or very poor.
- 41% of the sample had undertaken some form of training since their arrival in the UK. The most common type of training was Health and Safety-related training.
- 66% of respondents had a particular trade or skill from their home country. People came from a range of occupational levels from elementary occupations through to managers and senior officials. The data suggests that a greater percentage of women were drawn from the highest occupational classifications.
- 77% of the sample was currently in paid employment. There were slightly higher rates of employment amongst male respondents.
- 61% of people were currently working in Liverpool, with an additional 14% working in other areas of Merseyside.
- The survey suggests a shift in occupational level between previous job in home country and current employment. Using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), the majority of respondents were currently working in elementary occupations (65%, compared to 26% previously working in elementary occupations). The Polish respondents currently worked in a wider range of occupational classifications, including occupying the three highest classifications (managers and senior officials; professional occupations; and associate professional).
- The lowest paid worker in the sample was earning in the region of £2.00–£2.44 per hour. The highest paid worker was earning around £9–£11 per hour.
- 44% of the respondents with an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and 64% of respondents with college/technical/vocational qualifications were currently working as process, plant and machine operatives or in elementary occupations.

Chapters 7 and 8 of the report provide a full discussion of the findings in relation to qualifications and employment.

Housing experiences

- In line with previous studies, there is a dominance of the private rented sector for migrant workers living in Liverpool (73%).
- 19 people indicated that they were currently staying with friends/family rather than being tenants themselves, while five people were currently homeless (all of whom were Romanian).
- 44% of the sample currently shared their home with non-family members, with a further 13% sharing with a mix of both family and non-family. Of those who were currently living with non-family members, 30% (36 respondents) indicated that they were sharing bedrooms with people who were not family members or partners.
- 10% of respondents did not know the different housing options available in Liverpool.
- The majority of respondents wanted to live in either socially rented accommodation or own their own home in the future.

Chapter 9 of the report provides a full discussion of housing experiences.

Community integration

- Although respondents were engaging with people from their own country (97% had some form of contact), there were lower levels of involvement with the indigenous population. A quarter of the sample had no contact at all with the indigenous population.
- 51 respondents (23% of the sample) stated that they had experienced hate crime whilst living in Liverpool. This percentage was higher amongst Czech and Slovak respondents (37% and 43% respectively).
- 47% of the sample would recommend Liverpool as a place to live and work to friends and family in their home country. The Czech and Slovak respondents were least likely to recommend Liverpool.
- 53% of people were generally satisfied or very satisfied with their neighbourhood; however, 31% of people indicated that they would like to move to another area. This primarily related to wanting to move to somewhere 'safer'.

Chapter 10 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to community involvement and engagement.

Access to services and facilities

- 60% of respondents were currently accessing a Doctor/GP, while 23% were currently accessing a dentist.
- 80% of respondents currently made use of public transport, with just 16% having a car or van.
- The majority of respondents (93%) had a mobile phone, compared to only 16% having a landline phone.
- 9% of respondents were registered to vote in the UK.
- 40% of respondents were currently receiving benefits or tax credits. These were primarily child-related or in-work benefits.
- With regard to the use of English language services, 42% of people wanted to study on a language course but were not currently enrolled. The main reason given was not having enough time. This was followed by needing information or not knowing where to go.

Chapter 11 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to use of goods, services and facilities.

Future intentions

- 42% of the sample did not know how long they intended to stay in Liverpool. Just under a quarter (24%) wanted to stay indefinitely, while just under a quarter (24%) intended to leave within three years.
- The Slovak respondents were most likely to leave Liverpool over the next few years (48% stated they would be leaving within three years) while the Czech respondents were more likely to stay indefinitely (43% intended to stay indefinitely).
- With regard to those who intended to leave, 64% would be returning to their home country, while nearly a quarter intended to go to another country. 10% of the sample intended to move to another part of the UK.
- 15% of respondents said they would be joined in the UK by other family members.

Chapter 12 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to future intentions of the respondents.

Conclusions and ways forward

The following provides a summary of the main conclusions and suggested ways forward based on the findings of the survey.

Employment

Previous research (with migrant workers and asylum seekers/refugees) has highlighted the need to look at how best to 'match' people's skills and qualifications to the appropriate jobs, as well as looking at how to get overseas qualifications recognised by employment agencies and employers.

Ways forward: a 'skills audit' would be a useful exercise in Liverpool and could also include looking at people's aspirations for future employment and training.

What is apparent from this research, however, is that 'migrant workers' are not one homogeneous group. While there are many people who will prioritise finding a job and being able to earn money, there are also those who will actively seek occupational mobility.

Ways forward: agencies providing advice in relation to employment need to be able to offer comprehensive guidance in relation to what employment opportunities are available to migrant workers according to their qualifications, as well as advice on what is required in order to obtain recognition of qualifications.

Ways forward: employers and employment agencies need greater awareness of equivalency issues in relation to overseas qualifications.

The second issue to highlight is that of the potential exploitation or lack of rights that migrant workers experience. There was evidence in this study that some migrants were experiencing exploitation by agents, as well as negative experiences within the workplace.

Ways forward: employers should be encouraged to sign up to the *Minimum Standards Charter* produced by Migrant Workers North West³. This Charter provides 'best practice' in the employment of migrant workers.

Language barriers

Perhaps unsurprisingly, acquisition of English language remains a key issue for migrant communities. There is clearly a link between language and employment, for example, with English language being vital for occupational mobility.

³ See: <http://www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org/>.

Both migrant workers and key stakeholders in this study made reference to language barriers. Work and other commitments, combined with a lack of information about what is available, can leave people unable or unwilling to access language courses.

Ways forward: there is a need for increased (but also affordable) ESOL provision in Liverpool. There is also a need to consider how to provide flexible learning opportunities, particularly for those working long or anti-social hours.

This could include supporting employers to build the language capacity of overseas employees, in the same way that they would provide other types of staff development courses.

Accommodation

The research, like previous studies, has shown an overwhelming dominance of the private rented sector in Liverpool. Migrant workers often lack the necessary information about their accommodation options to make informed choices about what is on offer (see section on information, advice and guidance). There are three main issues to highlight in relation to accommodation.

Firstly, there is an issue around accommodation standards and possible exploitation in relation to housing. This study suggests that there are a number of people living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). There were also a number of people sharing bedrooms with non-family members. Although the accommodation situation of migrant workers has been highlighted in a number of previous studies, it remains a pervasive issue.

Ways forward: there is a need to ensure greater enforcement of accommodation standards in relation to private rented accommodation.

In addition to looking at the standard of accommodation provided by private landlords, there is also the issue of tied accommodation (i.e. accommodation that is tied to employment). It was clear from some of the respondents that exploitation by agents was occurring in relation to accommodation and employment; however, the scale and nature of this remains unclear.

Ways forward: there is a need for more in-depth information in relation to migrant workers whose accommodation is tied to their employment, particularly that provided by an 'agent'.

Secondly, consideration needs to be given to the people who were currently homeless. These individuals have particular needs and experiences, perhaps very different to those of the archetypical 'migrant worker'. There are also those who would be classed as 'hidden homeless'. This refers to those individuals who indicated that they did not have their own accommodation but were staying with friends, family and other acquaintances. The number represented in the sample may be just a fraction of those who are currently in this accommodation situation.

Ways forward: there is a need for more in-depth information in relation to homelessness (both 'street' and 'hidden' homelessness) amongst migrant worker communities in Liverpool. This includes a need to look at what has caused their homelessness (i.e. no recourse to public funds, loss of tied accommodation, breakdown of relationships, etc.), as well as people's pathways out of homelessness and the support required.

Thirdly, there is a need to consider the implications of people's future accommodation aspirations. There are implications to explore in terms of a potential increase in demand for socially rented accommodation in future years. There are also potential community cohesion issues that may arise from this, particularly as there is often a misguided perception that migrants receive preferential treatment with regard to housing.

Community cohesion and involvement

This research has highlighted the two interrelated issues of cohesion and involvement. With regard to community cohesion, discrimination against migrant communities is clearly a pertinent issue. Racial discrimination is often based on misconceptions and misinformation, which can be fuelled by negative media debate. Some negative attitudes stem from long-standing misconceptions about migrants claiming benefits and taking the jobs of domestic workers. Migrant workers therefore become 'scapegoats' for existing social and economic problems.

This study revealed evidence of hate crime against migrant workers, some of which had involved not only verbal but also physical abuse. Indeed, nearly a quarter of the people interviewed in this study had experienced hate crime. The survey also highlights that Slovak and Czech nationals were experiencing higher levels of hate crime, some of which was associated with the Roma community. Consultation with the Police, however, revealed that under-reporting of hate crime was an issue.

Ways forward: there is a need to explore what prevents people from reporting hate crime and how to address these issues. There is also a need to focus in greater detail on differences between particular communities in relation to experiences of hate crime.

Secondly, engagement with the local community appeared to be consistently quite low, regardless of how long people had been in the UK. With work and family commitments, lack of time can also be an issue. However, the issues highlighted above in relation to cohesion may also be a factor.

Ways forward: more resources are needed to strengthen current initiatives which promote a sense of 'belonging' for migrants and increase social interactions with members of the local community.

Ways forward: there is also a need to explore the possibility of developing community resources to incorporate a wider range of nationalities.

Given that people tend to move to areas where they have social networks, as well as areas where accommodation is affordable, the current patterns of settlement are likely to continue with concentrations of migrants in particular areas of the city. Consideration needs to be given to the impact this can have on community cohesion in these areas, as well as any impact on the local infrastructure.

We would suggest, however, that while this research has focused on the needs and experiences of migrant workers, there is a need to look at the experiences of local people in the receiving neighbourhoods to see how the arrival of migrant communities has affected them and their neighbourhood. Understanding what some of the issues are for local people is perhaps one of the first steps to being able to break down the barriers that sometimes occur.

Information, advice and guidance

In some respects dissemination of information to migrant communities is regarded as more important than increasing provision of services⁴. One concern is that people are not always getting full and accurate information, and rely on the advice and information provided by family, friends and acquaintances. There is sometimes a lack of understanding around, for example, UK driving laws, school attendance for children, as well as smaller issues such as refuse collection. These issues, however, can create tensions between migrant communities and the local community.

Welcome packs are therefore needed to provide information for new arrivals and many local authorities across the UK now provide these. Although some agencies in Liverpool do provide welcome packs, there needs to be a more consistent approach to this, ensuring that it provides as much information as possible in relation to rights and responsibilities, as well as social expectations of behaviours.

In addition to provision of printed information, there is also a need to look at wider service provision issues.

Ways forward: there is a need for greater coordination of services within Liverpool that currently provide assistance to migrant workers. This could include the creation of a forum made up of key stakeholders, including those who have taken part in this research. The purpose of this is to share information with regard to which migrant communities are living in the city, as well as sharing good practice, new initiatives, etc.

Ways forward: there needs to be a continued dialogue between service providers and migrant communities. Members of the A8/A2 communities therefore need to be encouraged to get involved in sharing information with regard to issues and problems at a local level. Existing community organisations provide a starting point for such dialogue.

⁴ Pemberton, S. and Stevens, C. (2006) *Supporting Migrant Workers in the North West of England*, Merseyside Social Inclusion Observatory.

The issue of language also features in relation to provision of information. Welcome packs, for example, need to be translated into the required languages, but more importantly, when people contact services for assistance, there is a need to ensure that language support is available. Language support also needs to be accounted for in the resources available for service providers.

Future intentions

Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict future intentions, particularly with regard to a population whose migration is intrinsically linked to economic opportunities. This research provides a 'snap shot' of the current population and a number of the people interviewed in this survey were unsure about their future intentions. Given the diverse and fluid nature of migrant worker communities, agencies need to be ensuring that they are monitoring which nationalities are using their services and any changes in population at a local level.

This survey suggests that the current economic climate may be affecting the employment opportunities available to some migrant workers in Liverpool. What we need to recognise is that people are adaptive, making use of social networks and responding to the opportunities available to them. Decisions on whether or not to remain in Liverpool may be based on a combination of factors including economic considerations, but also their overall experience of life in Liverpool.