

Migrant Workers in the North East of England

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Introduction

This report is the supplementary report of the ‘Organising Migrant Workers in Construction’ project. It is a descriptive account of the nationality, location, sector of work and companies of migrant workers living in the North East of England. Its main aim is to begin to map migrant workers in the region providing information for unions to use for recruitment and organising campaigns. The information is drawn from a wide number of sources; in particular a direct approach was made to the community and voluntary sector, the trade union movement and employer and government sources.

To some extent this report is flawed as the information received from the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) and other sources mentioned are now outdated, as migratory labour is by its very nature transitory. There is also a growing tendency, in some areas, for workers to start at one company, and sector, and then move on to others. Factors here may be non-agency involvement and engagement with developing migrant networks where good and bad workplace information is passed on. The reverse of this is where agencies, or individuals from migrant communities, directly bring migrants to the workplace, literally tying them to inadequate accommodation and poor jobs due to language and cultural barriers.

The next section discusses and analyses information provided through the WRS, it is followed by a section detailing the diverse migrant worker information provided by individuals and organisations. The final section details some of the successes recently achieved in organising migrant workers.

The WRS in the North East

The WRS provides a wealth of data on migrant workers from the new Central and Eastern European accession countries (the A8 countries are: Czech Republic; Estonia; Hungary; Latvia; Lithuania; Poland; Slovakia; and Slovenia). This source, though, does carry an important health warning. Crucially in the publicity available accession reports the North East includes the region of Yorkshire and Humber. To overcome this challenge, postcodes were identified throughout the region and then analysed to give a sub-regional picture (Table 1 and 2). The other issues to highlight are firstly that the data

gives only a passing picture of the last 20 months (May 2004-December 2005), workers can sign on for one employer and then leave for another within weeks. There is evidence from a number of sources that workers are beginning their UK working lives in other regions and then moving to the North East, only first jobs are counted by the scheme but not subsequent movements¹. The reverse of this of course is that those initially registering in the North East may have moved within the 20 months to other UK or foreign locations. Secondly, the self-employed are not required to register and it was also found in the main project, and has been reported by others, that a number of workers are simply not registering to the scheme due to lack of knowledge or simple cost factors.

Before presenting the WRS regional picture it is important to note that compared to any other region the North East has the lowest published number of registered migrant workers in the UK². The overall WRS data for the region reveal that over the last 20 months approximately 3,401 migrant workers registered with the scheme. Of these 311 were working for employers in Cleveland; 1,175 for employers in County Durham (618 in Darlington and surrounding areas); 752 for employers in Northumberland; and 1,163 for employers in Tyne and Wear (broken down into Newcastle 951 and Sunderland and Washington 212). The highest proportions of regional registrations were Polish (53%), followed by Lithuanians (19%) and Slovaks (10%). This approximately mirrors national data with slightly less Poles, by six percent, and more Lithuanians by six per cent. Table 1 indicates the overall proportions of people at a sub-regional level. As can be seen the regional proportions are not altogether mirrored at this level with Cleveland and County Durham having higher proportions of Polish workers (61% each). Northumberland having a large number of Lithuanians and Cleveland have the highest proportions of Czechoslovakians and Latvians.

¹ Nationally by December 2005 there had been 61,000 applications to re-register (from those who have previously registered but have changed employer), 3,000 multiple registrations (from those working for more than one employer simultaneously), and 18,000 multiple re-registrations (from those registering for subsequent, additional jobs, or those who have left their employer and are re-registering for more than one job).

² See the following for a comparison, Home Office (2006) *Accession Monitoring Report May 2004 - December 2005*, Home Office, Department of Work and Pensions, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 28th February 2006.

Table 1: Regional and sub-regional profile of main A8 migrant nationalities

Nationality	North East	Cleveland	County Durham	Northumberland	Tyne & Wear
Czech	7%	12%	7%	3%	9%
Latvian	6%	14%	6%	2%	7%
Lithuanian	19%	7%	9%	56%	9%
Polish	53%	61%	61%	33%	57%
Slovakian	10%	4%	14%	2%	12%
Other*	5%	2%	3%	4%	6%

* Other includes Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia who have low number of migrants

Table 2 gives an indication of the sectors where people are working, the most common sector of employment at a regional level was manufacturing with thirty-four per cent of A8 migrants working there, this compares to eight per cent at a national level. If it is taken into account that Food Processing and some of the occupations under General Services are normally classed under the Manufacturing SIC code this overall total rises by approximately seventeen per cent. Manufacturing was also the most important sector at a sub-regional level with Tyne and Wear having twenty-two per cent of migrant workers in this sector, Cleveland twenty-three per cent, County Durham thirty-seven per cent and Northumberland having almost half (47%) of its migrant workers employed there. Northumberland also had the highest concentration of migrant workers from any sector employed here with 317 Lithuanians, forty-two per cent of its overall total of migrant workers. Hotel and catering was also an important area of employment with sixteen per cent of regional A8 migrant workers employed here. The highest concentration of workers here were the 135 Polish workers in Tyne and Wear.

The next section gives a wider indication of the migrant worker presence in the North East providing details of nationality beyond the A8 countries and the names of some employers.

A wider view of migrant worker employment

Whilst the previous section used the official data provided by the WRS and was limited to a discussion of A8 migrants, this section compliments it by beginning to give a fuller picture. It is based on interviews with a range of regional trade union officials and

Table 2: Sub-regional sectors and nationalities

*¹ Some sectors and Estonia, Hungary & Slovenia are not shown
 * Numbers <5 have been removed due to Data Protection

Main nationalities and sectors* ¹	Cleveland	County Durham		Northumberland	Tyne & Wear	
			Darlington		Newcastle	Sunderland
Czech	*	-	*	*	*	-
Latvian	*	*	12	*	-	-
Lithuanian	-	*	10	*	*	-
Polish	17	-	33	19	*	-
Slovakian	-	-	-	-	*	*
Agriculture totals	19	*	56	30	9	*
Czech	*	*	*	-	8	-
Latvian	6	-	6	*	*	-
Lithuanian	11	*	*	*	7	*
Polish	23	20	25	52	23	18
Slovakian	-	-	*	-	6	9
Construction totals	42	23	43	57	45	30
Czech	*	*	-	-	-	-
Latvian	-	*	-	-	*	11
Lithuanian	-	*	*	11	*	-
Polish	6	54	43	6	6	*
Slovakian	-	*	31	*	*	-
Food processing totals	8	66	76	19	11	12
Czech	-	18	9	*	43	*
Latvian	23	19	*	*	14	*
Lithuanian	-	15	7	59	21	*
Polish	11	16	23	16	62	28
Slovakian	-	*	19	-	13	*
General services totals	34	72	60	81	153	42
Czech	*	-	*	*	-	-
Latvian	-	-	-	*	*	-
Lithuanian	-	-	*	-	-	-
Polish	6	10	15	18	35	11
Slovakian	-	-	-	-	6	-
Health & social work totals	7	10	18	21	42	11
Czech	*	*	4	15	20	-
Latvian	*	-	16	6	10	-
Lithuanian	*	*	14	13	7	*
Polish	23	20	34	86	128	13
Slovakian	*	*	9	15	63	*
Hotel and catering totals	32	24	77	135	228	19
Czech	20	19	7	-	14	-
Latvian	9	*	10	-	11	10
Lithuanian	*	13	23	317	46	-
Polish	30	180	133	33	132	23
Slovakian	6	6	39	-	12	7
Manufacturing totals	69	219	212	350	215	40
Czech	*	-	*	-	*	-
Latvian	-	-	*	-	*	*
Lithuanian	*	*	*	13	*	-
Polish	57	80	11	15	82	33
Slovakian	*	*	8	-	*	-
Transport & storage totals	65	84	28	28	92	36
Sub-regional totals	311	557	618	752	951	212

voluntary and community sources. Table 3 presents the bulk of data collected by country of origin, although one row has no information on country of origin only providing company names. The most striking feature is the number of nationalities present (16) indicating the slow changing ethnicity of parts of the region. Respondents identified five main sectors where migrant workers were employed: food processing; hotel and catering; health and social work; small business; and transport and distribution. Food processing would normally come under manufacturing but due to its importance with regard to migrant workers it has been singled out both here and in the WRS data. Small business also covers a number of sectors but again was singled out as it captures discussions with community and voluntary groups, particularly about the east coast of Northumberland and Newcastle.

In discussions with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and with a number of unemployed workers centres it became apparent that these were becoming an important source of information and support for migrant workers. As stated in the main report some CABs note that as many as a quarter of enquires now come from migrant workers. The Newcastle Centre Against Unemployment also reported that as many as four to five migrant workers were coming to the centre for advice and help with tribunal cases following direction from the job centre. A CAB on the east coast of Northumberland estimated around 40 enquires a year from a diverse range of migrants referred to them by the local job centre. She also commented that a number had told her that they had originally started off in London and had found their way up here looking for work. She noted that people were working in food processing or local small businesses. Also reported by a respondent in Wallsend where the growing Iranian community worked in local small businesses. Other CAB interviewees further noted migrant workers moving from large employers to smaller locally based shops, pubs, take-aways and other businesses as they became embedded into communities.

The most striking example found of migrant workers becoming members of traditional communities was provided by Berwick and its surrounding areas. Here it was reported that migrant workers, many originally from Portugal, had been working for local employers in food processing for the last few years. An interviewee stated that people had 'taken to

Table 3: Reported North East migrant labour

Country of origin	Location	Number of workers	Industrial sector & employer	Job type	Conditions	Organised
Africa – i) South Africa ii) Congo iii) African (countries not given)	i) As with Philippines i) below. ii) Wallsend iii) Newcastle	n/a for all	Health and social work - i) As with Philippines i) below Locally based small businesses - ii) Hotel & catering – iii) The Gate Casino Newcastle.	i) Nurses ii) iii) n/a	i) Union negotiated ii) iii) n/a	i) Yes (limited details) ii) iii) n/a
China	Washington	n/a	Manufacturing (Wuo One)	Production line workers	n/a	No – major obstacles with language
Czech Republic	Teesside	n/a	Food processing	Butchers	n/a	(See discussion in conclusion)
India	As with Philippines i) below.	n/a	Health and social work - As with Philippines i) below	n/a	n/a	n/a
Iran	Wallsend	n/a	Small business	n/a	n/a	n/a
Iraq (Kurds)	Durham	Part of 100 migrant workers (25% of workforce)	Food processing	n/a	Interviewee noted the well organised Kurd agencies supplying these workers	(See discussion in conclusion)
Latvia	i) Durham ii) Wallsend	i) Part of 100 migrant workers (25% of workforce) ii) n/a	Food processing - i) Small business - ii)	n/a for all	n/a for all	i) (See discussion in conclusion) ii) n/a
Lithuania	Durham	Part of 100 migrant workers (25% of workforce)	Food processing	n/a	n/a	(See discussion in conclusion)
Philippines	i) Cleveland; Northumberland; Tyne and Wear. ii) Tyne & Wear	i) 279 in total ii) <10	Health and social work i) Gateshead Healthcare NHS Trust; Newcastle Hospital NHS Trust, North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust; Northumbria NHS Healthcare Trust; Wearside NHS Health Trust. ii) Windmills Hills Private Nursing Home.	i) ii) Nurses	i) ii) Union negotiated	i) ii) Yes (between 60% to 100%)

Table 3: Reported North East migrant labour (continued)

Country of origin	Location	Number of workers	Industrial sector & employer	Job type	Conditions	Organised
Poland	<p>i) Hebburn ii) Newcastle iii) Newcastle iv) Hartlepool v) Cleveland, County Durham and Tyne & Wear vi) East coast of Northumberland vii) Newcastle viii) As with Philippines i) above.</p>	<p>i) 30+ currently but considering 400+ in future ii) 20+ iii) 10 and 20+ (agency) iv) n/a v) 140 in total vi) Growing numbers vii) n/a viii) n/a</p>	<p>Manufacturing - i) A&P Tyne; ii) Siemens Power Heaton; iii) British Engines; iv) Stadium Plastics. Transport – v) Arriva Buses and Go Ahead Buses Small business - vi) Hotel & catering – vii) The Gate Casino Newcastle. Health and social work - viii) As with Philippines i) above.</p>	<p>i) Boiler making and Outfitting ii) Armature winders iii) Machine operators iv) n/a v) Bus drivers vi) Butchers, hairdressing, hotels & catering, pubs vii) n/a viii) Nurses</p>	<p>i) Around £5.00 per hour agency rate ii) PAYE status same terms & conditions iii) Agency n/a other workers PAYE same terms & conditions iv) n/a v) Union negotiated vi) Generally low paid jobs vii) n/a viii) Union negotiated</p>	<p>i) ii) iii) iv) vi) vii) n/a v) Yes viii) Yes (limited details)</p>
Portugal	East coast of Northumberland	Growing number	Food processing, Hotel and catering and small business	General factory workers, hairdressers, bar staff	Low paid work	n/a
Russia	<p>i) As with Philippines i) above. Wallsend ii)</p>	n/a for all	<p>Health and social work - i) As with Philippines i) above Small business - ii)</p>	<p>i) Nurses ii) n/a</p>	<p>i) Union negotiated ii) n/a</p>	<p>i) Yes (limited details) ii) n/a</p>
Slovakia	Teesside	n/a	Food processing	Butchers	n/a	(See discussion in conclusion)
Spain	As with Philippines i) above.	n/a	Health and social work - As with Philippines i) above	Nurses	Union negotiated	Yes (limited details)
Ukraine	Teesside	n/a	Food processing	Butchers	n/a	(See discussion in conclusion)
Migrant workers reported but no country of origin given	<p>i) ii) v) vi) vii) viii) ix) x) County Durham iii) xii) Newcastle iv) Northumberland xi) xiii) Cleveland</p>	<p>i) ii) iv) have investigated or used migrant workers iii) v) vi) vii) viii) ix) x) xi) xii) xiii) n/a</p>	<p>Food processing - i) Derwent valley Foods; ii) Pride Valley Foods vi) International Cuisine; xi) SK Chilled Foods; xii) Findus Foods xiii) Brambles Food Health and social work - iii) Four Seasons Health Care Manufacturing - iv) Cramlington Precision Forging; v) Graham Cook Radford; viii) Explorer Group; ix) Dyer Engineering; x) Powder Liquid Products; vii) Tweed Enterprises</p>	n/a for all	n/a for all	n/a for all

the area' and had '*started relationships, set-up houses and now we have six migrant worker babies in the area*'. She went on that '*this is a major opportunity for us but can be threatening to some people, as to see an African face in Berwick is unique. It's beautiful to hear all these Portuguese, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian voices. The people I meet in here are young, energetic, go-getters who will be future employers*'.

There is, though, a reverse side to this as detailed by a migrant worker involved in assisting migrants to find employment in the area. He reported that a large fish processing plant just the other side of the border in the Scottish Borders employed hundreds of migrant workers from many A8 countries and Portugal. They travelled from Northumberland to work and were employed for very long hours with many housed in inadequate accommodation, although sometimes through choice due to the need to increase earnings. This is a clear trade union issue as it was reported that as many as 400-600 workers are based here with seemingly no trade union guidance.

A regional trade union secretary involved in the food processing sector discussed the difficult challenge of fully safeguarding migrant workers entering the industry. He noted that as a consequence of migrant worker entry onto some sites working conditions for current members were deteriorating. There had been a growth in low paid migrant workers which was now undermining terms and conditions of employment established over a number of years. A situation was occurring where some employers were creating separate groups in the workforce based on ethnic origin. A factor which UCATT are working hard to make sure does not occur in the North East construction sector (see main report). In food processing many migrant workers were introduced into the workforce by agencies with employers not taking responsibility for their wages or working conditions (see main report for experience in construction). Interestingly it was reported that Latvians and Lithuanians, numbering around 100, made up approximately twenty-five per cent of a County Durham food processing factory. The WRS data identifies that no Latvians and only two Lithuanians had registered with the scheme in this sector and area, again providing a warning on the potential fragility of this data.

Turning to the health and social work sector Unison reported on a number of migrant nurses from five main countries, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa and Spain.

This is discussed again in the next section but it is worth noting here that there had been an excellent success rate in organising these nurses. A CAB, through, did provide a sobering account of the original plight of Filipino nurses. These nurses were arriving at the airport to be taken straight away onto a bus provided by a Northumberland hospital trust. On the bus a trust representative instructed groups to sign tenancy agreements that were offering accommodation at three to four times the market rate. Nurses were told that if they complained they would be sent back to the Philippines. This came to light when a nurse went to her local CAB to ask for help. This episode occurred over a year ago and has now been resolved but it again reminds us of the fragility of many migrant workers lives.

The other sector where migrant worker activity had been monitored and engaged with by trade unions was in transport. Although, one union respondent noted a road haulage firm had introduced a policy where through natural wastage drivers on union negotiated wages and conditions were being replaced by Czechoslovakian migrant workers on less favourable conditions. However, transport provides another example of a sector in the region where unions are beginning to have success in recruiting newly arrived migrant workers. The example here is regional bus companies, who it was reported, now employ over 120 Polish bus drivers, this again will be discussed in the next section. The other two sectors not yet mentioned, hotel and catering and manufacturing, have limited data, which is contained in Table 3. The final section details some of the successes that unions have had with recruiting and organising migrant workers.

Organising migrant workers can be a success

The main report and the last section here have again brought to the surface not only the plight of many migrant workers but also the difficulties that trade unions face when trying to recruit these workers. This section, though, attempts to tell a somewhat different story. If we start with food processing there are clear challenges here that unions are facing. But there has also been progress, not only with some membership gain, but with regard to tackling the exploitative structure that is being introduced by some employers. The most obvious sign of this is with agencies, some of who recently came under a form of control through the gang masters legislation. A food processing

union reported that it had recently been able to negotiate a national agreement with one of these leading agencies. Even through this was still in its early stages a representative of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) noted that migrant workers were receiving a recommendation from the agency, in their home country, to join the union when they entered the UK. He went on to comment that the company had *opened its books*, for example the union had a right to inspect any accommodation provided by the agency. *'We had heard the stories and this is why we got involved in the accommodation and we are now helping people to integrate into society. We've had an influence from the start and as we're a recognised trade union it gives us the opportunity to bring people in on the same terms and conditions'*. He concluded by noting that even some employers were now aware that it was not cost effective to bring people in on much worse conditions as *'they end up not wanting to do the job and just making up the numbers'*.

In the health and social work sector Unison reported that that had made significant membership inroads into Filipino and other migrant worker groups. With regard Filipino migrant the union had used a strategy of sponsoring a basketball team, the national Filipino sport, and working with a London based Filipino ex pats group who produced a regular newsletter. The union were also encouraging their union learning reps. to work with migrant workers assisting them with basic skills and language training. At a wider level the union was working with sister unions and the Public Services International to campaign for the ethical recruitment of health care workers. They were also undertaking an international project on women and migration in the health sector. The aim will be to produce materials on the key aspects of labour migration for branches to use for campaigning and recruitment.

The final example of regional success with migrant workers is provided by the T&G; in particular the union has worked with Go Ahead and Arriva who have both recruited Polish bus drivers. With regard to Go Ahead a T&G official noted that *'the company has supported the arguments that we put forward when they told us they were going to recruit migrant workers. Without the input of workplace representatives we would not have succeeded with this initiative'*. A workplace rep. explained that the company had entered into discussions with the union through their board before they employed any Polish workers. This allowed the union to stress that they were not against this move as long as

people received the same terms and conditions as indigenous workers. As the rep. commented *'we have been able to influence this from the start and this was very important as there have been bad practices elsewhere in the industry'*.

He noted, though, that the company had underestimated the challenge that language posed. This was mirrored at Arriva where a union representative reported that the experience of employing Polish workers had been very costly for the company and that they were considering whether to continue. The Arriva story is much the same as Go Ahead and a representative commented that Polish workers were *'happy to join the union and have taught us a thing or two about trade unionism'*. As with Go Ahead the union were informed all the way about what was happening with recruitment. The rep. also noted that the ESOL training provided through the company and TUC had been important in this success.

These examples of migrant worker recruitment are important not only in providing stories of how organising can be a success but also in providing two examples of differing engagement strategies. The first through the more traditional route of negotiation with employers at the workplace and beyond which can allow good early access to newly arrived workers. The second Unison case exemplifies the importance of engaging with migrant worker communities to break down barriers and allow a measured approach where trust can be built and long term gains assured. As the Unison regional official noted a number of those workers recruited had moved on to the South but had *'taken'* their union membership with them. The lesson is not to be caught in a straitjacket of tradition but be willing to look for differing approaches, and new ways to open up communication with groups who are often looking for help but sometimes are too frightened to ask or just do not know where to go.

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