

Migrant Workers in Bolton

Executive Summary

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Introduction

Since May 2004 workers from the EU Accession countries have come to dominate UK arrivals. In the North West, official statistics suggests that there are around 71,350 registered workers, while in Bolton the figure is identified as 2,115 (excluding Bulgarians and Romanians). With the arrival of new migrant communities, individual local authorities are recognising the need to develop their own local response.

Migrant workers can be defined simply as 'individuals who arrive in the host country with the intention of finding a job'. What distinguishes them from other migrant groups is the temporary nature of their movement.

This report presents the findings of a study looking at the needs and experiences of migrant workers from the A8/A2 countries living and working in Bolton. The study was undertaken by the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford.

Study aims

The research had the following primary aims:

- To establish the extent and level of in migration of the migrant worker community from EU Accession states (A8/A2) into the Bolton Study Area;
- To understand the settlement patterns of these communities in Bolton (including where families are joining workers);
- To identify the nature and extent of kinship and/or economic relationships with others across the UK and /or abroad;
- To assess the skills levels and expertise of new communities, including entrepreneurship and self employment, and identify what support is needed to foster these skills now and in the future;
- To investigate the level of community integration and impact on community cohesion and develop support mechanisms to assist migrant communities to integrate within the local resident community; and,
- To evaluate the housing and support needs of this community now and in the future.

Methodology

There were three phases to the research:

- Phase one – a review of existing information
- Phase two – engagement with key stakeholders
- Phase three – personal interviews with migrant workers

Existing trained Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) interviewers from Bolton and Bolton at Homes' own community interviewers, together with locally recruited and trained migrant workers undertook the interviews. A flexible approach to identifying potential respondents was used in light of the lack of a comprehensive database of addresses and ethnicity. A total of 327 households took part from nine national groups. The largest proportion were Polish (56%) and Hungarian (25%), with smaller numbers of Slovakian (6%), Lithuanian (5%) and Czech respondents (5%).

Emerging issues

The report highlights a number of important issues around the size of the migrant workers population in Bolton; the attraction of Bolton; skills, employment and education; access to housing; integration within the community; and, future intentions. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

The size of the migrant worker population in Bolton

Official statistics on local migrant worker populations do not provide a complete picture. The Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) suggests there were 2,115 worker registrations from the A8 countries in Bolton between May 2004 and December 2007.

The study found that 79% of those surveyed also worked in Bolton and of this group, 49% were not currently registered on the WRS. This would suggest that the actual number of migrant workers could be around 3,149. In other words, for every person registered in Bolton there is potentially an additional one person who we don't know about. An important implication of this is that service providers will need to take account of this potential under-estimation of the size of the migrant worker population in determining the future demand for services within Bolton.

The attraction of Bolton

A combination of factors leads many people to consciously choose to move to Bolton. This includes the existence of people from their own country already living in the town, the employment opportunities and the reputation of Bolton.

Skills, qualifications and employment

Migrant workers in Bolton are diverse in terms of their skills and qualifications, ranging from those with higher degrees and medical qualifications to those having no formal qualifications. Just over half the sample reported having a particular trade or skill. The majority had previously worked in the construction sector, wholesale and retail trade or transport, storage and communications. The majority had previously been employed in skilled trades, with smaller numbers in elementary occupations. Comparing previous occupation to current occupation, at times highlighted a great disparity between the two. What was encouraging, however, was that there is evidence that, over time, people's occupational status increases.

It is clear that employers need to be cautious of their position in light of the current changing economies (both here and in migrants' home countries). There needs to be a greater focus on providing support to migrant workers to improve their employment prospects as well as ensuring that their skills match the job they are doing. There are also concerns about the wage levels being paid, especially those paid below the minimum wage level. Language is a key element for migrant workers in gaining employment or career development. The predominance of migrant workers in the construction sector needs to be considered in the context of the current down-turn in the UK housing market.

Access to housing

There is a heavy reliance on the private sector, which is perceived as being cheap and accessible. The evidence suggests a degree of overcrowding in this sector, although not necessarily recognised by the respondents themselves. There are potentially a number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which are unknown to the local authority. The relatively high rents charged and reluctance by both tenants and landlords to inform the local authority, means that little is known about this element of the private rented sector.

While there is widespread awareness of the private rented sector, knowledge of the other housing options in Bolton is restricted, despite a preference for the social rented sector and buying their own home.

Integration within the community

A degree of residential stability was noted, with few people expecting to move to another area. However, the most recent arrivals were less likely to feel integrated within their local community and less aware of local services. There is no distinctive 'community' among migrant workers, which is sometimes reinforced by the fact that some migrant workers have very little contact with people from their own national or ethnic group. This is likely to lead to a sense of cultural isolation and a lack of informal networks, often vital for finding out about what is happening within the local community.

The study reveals a general dispersal of migrant workers throughout the Borough, with particular concentrations in the traditional BME areas, where there is a vibrant private rented sector. Such settlement patterns can lead to a number of local community issues including. These can include concerns among the host community about personal and community safety; increased pressure on local community-based services; and, members of the host community, recognising the financial gains from renting out their homes to migrant workers have moved in with other family members, contributing to high levels of overcrowding. Collectively, these factors are believed to have led to an increase in community tensions in other areas of the UK. It is possible that Bolton could experience similar problems in the future if current settlement patterns continue.

Future intentions

Four out of ten people expected to remain in Bolton for five or more years and a slightly smaller group were unsure about their future intentions. Although the majority of these potential longer-term residents did not expect their family to join them, the likelihood of family reunification in the future and implications for service providers locally should not be under-estimated.

What is clear is that it is difficult to predict future intentions among a population whose migration is temporary in nature, but also when the influence of external factors (such as the changing economy in their home country) cannot be gauged with any certainty. The likelihood of staying in Bolton was found to be largely influenced by the availability of appropriate employment opportunities in Bolton, access to English language provision and affordable accommodation.

Good practice

As part of the consultation element of the project, the research team identified a number of current projects designed to assist and support migrant workers in Bolton. These include:

- Emerging Communities Integration Project (ECIP) developed by Bolton and District Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB);
- Bolton Race Equality Council's Migrant Workers Project, funded by Bolton Community Homes;
- Migrant Workers North West, a charity established to lead on the co-ordination of support for migrant workers across the North West;
- Wiedza at the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) aimed at Polish workers in the North West; and,
- Urban Care and Neighbourhood (UCAN) Centre, provided by St Vincents Housing Association.

Study recommendations and further research

The report concludes with a number of recommendations and suggestions for further research:

- All service providers should be encouraged to record the nationality of those using their service to ensure that up-to-date information is available about the size and composition of the migrant worker community in Bolton, particularly in terms of acknowledging the fluid nature of this community;
- The local authority should work with major employers in the town to consider skill shortages and how to best recruit and train the most appropriately skilled migrant workers;
- The local authority and its partners should consider the development of an information and dissemination strategy which encompasses a range of elements, such as a resource pack aimed specifically at migrant workers which details, among other things, ways of finding out about job opportunities in the town, their housing options and the availability of local support services; guidance to front-line staff concerning face-to-face meetings with migrant workers; and accessibility of the Council's website by migrant workers in other countries. Information should be included on the website about the region generally while at the borough level, promoting Bolton as a place for skilled migrant workers;
- Support should be given to ensuring that local community facilities cater for an ethnically and culturally diverse community and that they are accessible all sections of the community;
- The local authority and other stakeholders should develop initiatives which provide opportunities for members of the individual nationalities to meet up to enable the development of community support networks among the different migrant worker communities and then subsequently, with the broader community;
- Consideration should be given to the co-ordination of existing ESOL provision and additional language support to enable migrant workers to study English as well as more imaginative ways of assisting this group to learn English with the support of local employers;
- Continue to identify and monitor private rented accommodation used by migrant workers either via migrant workers themselves or through incentives offered to landlords of such properties and to carry out property checks and ensure landlords bring properties up to appropriate standard;
- The local authority should routinely collect market intelligence for those community areas where there is a large concentration of migrant workers to monitor the impact of their presence on the dynamics of the community, including the availability and rent levels in the private

rented sector, social housing vacancies rates, the level of crime and ASB, the development of community infrastructure (such as specialist shops serving these new migrant communities), etc.

- The local authority should work with other agencies, both within the Borough and beyond, such as Migrant Workers North West and the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, to inform and be informed of initiatives in relation to migrant workers; and
- The local authority should establish and Information Co-ordination Group to collate and review information about migrant workers from different departments within the Council and partner agencies.

In order to provide a more complete picture of the issues affecting migrant workers in Bolton and the service providers supporting this client group, the following research questions need to be addressed in the near future:

- What is the impact of the settlement of migrant workers in predominantly BME areas in relation to community integration and cohesion and what are the potential factors or 'triggers' which could lead to a deterioration of community relations and community transformation? A case study approach based on a specific geographical area would be the most appropriate way forward, engaging with migrant workers and host communities.
- What are the support needs of migrant workers in terms of access to services, particularly in relation to those with children?
- How are current service providers responding to the needs of migrant workers in terms of promoting their services, ensuring accessibility and their understanding the needs of these communities?
- How do migrant workers find out about their housing options in Bolton and to what extent does this determine their tenure aspirations?
- How dependent are local employers on migrant worker labour, what incentives do they or could they offer to retain such staff and what would be the impact in a reduction of migrant labour if people return to their home countries?
- How is the private rented sector responding to the demand from migrant workers? Have new landlords come into this sector, what type of properties are available and what is the potential impact of a fall in the number of migrant workers seeking private rented accommodation? Also, what is the impact on other community groups who traditionally relied on the private rented sector of this increase in demand from migrant workers?
- What has been the impact of the existing projects in Bolton, which have been developed to support migrant workers?