

Central and Eastern European migrants in Tameside

Executive Summary

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The study

It is accurate to say that all areas of the UK have experienced migration of some kind, whether it is long-established migrant communities, dispersed asylum seekers and refugees, or migrant workers. In recent years, the term migrant worker has been increasingly associated with individuals from the new EU countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

It was recognised that, since 2004, a large number of Central and Eastern European migrants had moved into Tameside. To meet the challenge of providing responsive services to new communities, the aim of this study was to enhance intelligence in relation to CEE migrant communities, focusing on some of the key issues facing these communities in Tameside, as well as providing an understanding of the impact of migration on key public services.

The study was commissioned by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in February 2010 through the Migration Impacts Fund. This funding was created by money collected from migrant communities (for example through visas) and allocated to all regions of England for projects which focus on understanding and managing the impacts of migration at a local level.

The study was conducted by Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford. It was greatly aided by research support from a number of community interviewers. The project was managed by a steering group composed of officers representing Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and supported by the Culture and Community Cohesion Partnership and Tameside Housing Partnership.

The study was undertaken by conducting:

- Consultation with **12** key stakeholders and service providers;
- A survey of **160** CEE migrants; and
- Additional qualitative consultation with **6** CEE migrants.

Main findings

The characteristics of the sample

- The majority of respondents were Polish (96%); however, the sample also included Czech, Latvian, Romanian and Slovak nationals;
- The majority of respondents were aged 25 – 39 years (65%);
- 58% of the respondents were male and 42% were female;
- 34% of the sample were single; 28% were married; and 26% were cohabiting;
- 39% of respondents had children;

- 27% of respondents had lived somewhere else in the UK before moving to Tameside; and
- The main reasons for choosing Tameside were because they had family/partner in the area or a job to come to.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a full discussion of the characteristics of the sample.

Qualifications and language skills

- 10% had postgraduate degree level qualifications; 10% had degree level qualifications; and 34% had technical qualifications;
- 39% of people said that their ability to speak English was good or very good. Understanding of spoken English was rated highest (59% rated this as good or very good). Respondents most frequently had problems with written language skills;
- 31% of respondents indicated that they did not need an English language course as they had already completed one; and
- 35% of respondents indicated that they did not have time to complete an English language course due to work commitments.

Chapter 5 of the report provides a full discussion of qualifications and language skills.

Employment

- 81% of respondents were currently in paid employment; a large proportion of those without employment were female;
- 61% of people were employed in elementary occupations (i.e. lower skilled occupations);
- The majority of respondents had undertaken between two and four different jobs in the UK. A large number of people made reference to undertaking temporary or agency work;
- 85% of respondents were satisfied with their treatment by work colleagues; 79% were satisfied with their treatment by their employer. People were less satisfied with rates of pay and skill level of work; and
- 42% of respondents had found their current employment through friends/family.

Chapter 6 of the report provides a full discussion of the findings in relation to employment.

Accommodation experiences

- 59% of respondents were living in the private rented sector; 16% were living in accommodation provided by their employer; and 14% were in socially rented accommodation. The remaining respondents were staying with friends/family or owner occupiers;
- 47% of respondents had found their current accommodation through friends/family;
- 85% of respondents indicated that they had enough space in their current home. There were a small number of cases where overcrowding was evident;
- 4% of respondents had experienced rough sleeping since living in Tameside; 23% had stayed with friends/family temporarily because they had nowhere else to live; and
- 23% of respondents said that they would move to a different property in the future; 43% of these wanted to live in private rented accommodation, 30% wanted socially rented accommodation and 14% wanted to buy their own home.

Chapter 7 of the report provides a full discussion of housing experiences.

Community and neighbourhood

- Proximity to work and affordable accommodation were the main reasons for living in their specific area of Tameside;
- 76% of people were satisfied with their local area as a place to live; 53% of respondents had a fairly strong sense of belonging to their local area, while 25% indicated that their sense of belonging was not very strong;
- 46% agreed that their local area was a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds mixed well together; 12% disagreed;
- 30% of respondents indicated that they had been victims of crime. Crime against property was most commonly referred to (14%); 12% of respondents had experienced hate crime; and
- 74% of respondents would recommend Tameside as a place to live and work to friends/family.

Chapter 8 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to community involvement and engagement.

Access to services and facilities

- 88% of respondents had used a doctor/GP, while 45% had used a dentist. Respondents also made reference to using A & E, walk-in centres and NHS Direct. 10% of respondents had not used any health services in Tameside;
- 22% of respondents indicated that they had children attending local schools. Stakeholder consultation suggested that the main issue in schools related to language barriers. There was also a preference for children to attend faith schools;
- The facilities that were most commonly used in Tameside were: shops (98%); public transport (72%); churches/places of worship (58%); libraries (41%); and sports facilities (40%); and
- 43% of respondents were accessing benefits/tax credits in the UK. The most commonly referred to were: Working Tax Credit (24%); Child Benefit (23%); and Child Tax Credit (22%).

Chapter 9 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to use of services and facilities.

Future intentions

- 49% of respondents intended to stay in Tameside; 30% were unsure of their future intentions;
- With regards to those who intended to leave, the majority would be returning to their home country; and
- 17% of respondents said they would be joined in the UK by other family members.

Chapter 10 of the report provides a full discussion in relation to future intentions of the respondents.

Conclusions

The following provides a summary of the main conclusions based on the findings of the survey.

Language barriers

Language barriers remain a pervasive issue for migrant communities. Across the sample as a whole, just over a third (35%) said that they did not have time to complete an English language course due to work commitments. However, it was apparent that while some people will actively seek English classes, others want to learn a basic level of English that will enable them to 'get by'. Furthermore, there are also those who are not interested in learning English as their work/home life is spent with people from their home country.

Migrant communities therefore need to be encouraged to access English language courses, with more emphasis placed on the importance of acquisition of English language. In order to do so, however, there is a need to continue and develop flexible learning opportunities. For example, consultation with Tameside Council indicated that they were providing shorter courses as they had found that retention was an issue with longer courses. Previous studies have also shown that more 'informal' methods – such as conversation classes, etc – were popular with migrant communities. Overall, what was apparent was that ESOL providers were often having difficulty meeting demand; however, this issue could only be resolved with additional resources.

Reliance on social networks

A common theme running throughout the study was the reliance on social networks. Having friends/family living in Tameside was vital for many people, not only influencing their decision to move to particular areas, but assisting with access to employment, accommodation and services. For example, there was evidence of a particular accommodation 'pathway' in the UK, whereby people lived in lower quality accommodation or lived with friends/family, until they could afford to move to another property and had a better understanding of what was available. While there are clearly positive benefits to these social networks, we cannot guarantee that the advice and assistance provided by social networks provides the best option for people. There will also be 'gaps' in people's knowledge, which means that people can be unaware of particular services. Furthermore, it was apparent that there were groups of migrants who are not engaged with local services, particularly those whose contact is limited to people from their home country. It is these migrants who are potentially vulnerable to exploitation or do not understand their rights. There was evidence in this study, for example, that people sometimes did not understand rights in relation to accommodation (i.e. in terms of eviction, deposits being withheld, etc). There is a need to explore how to provide information to migrant communities who are less engaged with local services (this could include targeting places where there are known populations, as well as through local churches, libraries and sports facilities, which were commonly being used by migrant communities).

Perceived and actual issues

A number of interesting issues have emerged from the study, which highlights potential discrepancies between perceptions of key issues for migrants and the views of migrants themselves. For example, there can sometimes be a perception of exploitation of migrant workers in employment. The survey suggested largely positive views on treatment by employers, suggesting that poor treatment was not the majority experience for those interviewed in this study.

Furthermore, previous research has highlighted problems in relation to accommodation, particularly around the private rented sector and HMOs. While it is recognised that some migrants had experienced problems with private landlords, the study indicated that it is perhaps too simplistic to focus solely on the actions of landlords. Rather, we need to also acknowledge the actions and choices of migrants themselves, particularly in relation to economic opportunities. For example, there was evidence that people sometimes choose to live in overcrowded accommodation – often sub-letting without landlord's knowledge – as it enabled them to minimise rental costs.

Future considerations

Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict future intentions, particularly with regards to a population whose migration is predominantly linked to economic opportunities and social networks. While it was often the case that people initially had short-term intentions, it was apparent that a number of people had actually been in the UK longer-term; for example, 59% of respondents had arrived in the UK between 2004 and 2007. Furthermore, while it was acknowledged that employment opportunities had decreased in recent years, over three quarters (77%) of those in employment had a permanent contract. It was also highlighted that opportunities in the UK – not just employment, but also in relation to education, welfare, etc – were still better than opportunities in their home countries and a high proportion of people had intentions to stay indefinitely (49% of respondents).

In addition, a number of participants had children (39% of the sample). Consultation with CEE migrants in this study – as well as previous research – highlighted that families were more likely to settle in the UK. This study did not focus on the needs and experiences of children, or cover *in depth* the implications of an increase in CEE migrants' children on local services such as early years and nursery provision, plus health care and schools. This may therefore be an area for further consideration.

Finally, this study represents a 'snap shot' of a population, providing a starting point for key stakeholders to begin looking at how to take the findings of the report forward and where further information is required. Service providers need to ensure that they are frequently monitoring population changes within their local area and sharing this information and good practice at a wider level.