Research on the living, working experience and wider needs of migrant workers in Berwick.

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English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Poles in Newcastle website

Polskachata website

Berwick Youth Project

Northumberland Info net

Newcastle Law Centre

Commission for Racial Equality
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Introduction

This research has been commissioned by the Northumberland Delivery Group for Black Minority Ethnic issues. It has been funded from the Value Added Grant of the Northumberland Tyne and Wear Delivering Race Equality (DRE) Group. The Northumberland Delivery Group was formed to manage and steer the delivery of the Delivering of Race Equality (DRE) agenda in mental health and to explore particular challenges within a largely rural context. It is one of six delivery groups reporting to the Northumberland Tyne and Wear DRE regional group. Whilst initiating from mental health services the DRE initiative has been established to work more broadly at specific access and service delivery issues for the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population.

This particular research project was undertaken by Northumberland Multinational and Minority Ethnic Group (NMMEG). NMMEG is a voluntary group, operating to engage other BME community and voluntary groups, families and individuals in Northumberland. NMMEG was formed in 2004 and enjoys membership from people of varied ethnic backgrounds. NMMEG’s core aim is to promote community cohesion, inclusion and diversity among its members and the wider community in Northumberland.

1.1 Definition of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) is a general term use to classify the minority ethnic community. ‘Black’ is a political term denoting people who identify themselves on the ground of skin colour, race, culture and language. This research covers the wide spectrum of BME to include those who are non-black minority who may also experience discrimination in terms of beliefs, language, race and culture.

1.2 Definition of migrant worker
For the purpose of this research, the term migrant worker refers to overseas nationals especially those from the A8 accessing countries, who work but have foreign citizenship born outside the UK. The A8 accessing countries incorporate Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Latvia all of which joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004.

1.3 Scope of Research

The research focuses generally on workers from the A8 countries and specifically on migrant workers from Poland in Berwick- Upon- Tweed and the surrounding area. Other migrants that are not from the A8 countries that are living and or working in Berwick were also included.

The research addresses the following issues:

- Where the migrant workers are based.
- Where migrant workers come from and the process of arrival
- How static the population is and their precise legal status.
- Explores such areas as housing, health, relationship, community and social support.
- Issues around integration and discrimination.
- Mental health and accessing mental health services.
- Recommendations to Mental Health bodies and other statutory services.

It was decided that the research should explore the personal reasons behind the decision of coming to the UK, their experience, concerns and needs as residents and / or workers in Northumberland. The research covers those who may work in Berwick and surrounding area but who may live elsewhere in Northumberland or the North East. Conversely this also includes those who may live in Berwick and surrounding areas but who might be working elsewhere in the region.
The main aim of this research was to profile and assess the mental health needs of migrant workers.

**Methodology**

This research was carried out using the Participatory Appraisal Research method. This method is commonly used and suitable when researching areas in community settings especially when direct access to communities is a vital element of the research scope. The research method allows the participant to influence the content and areas of interest as long as they remain within the perimeter outlined. Participants are able to identify concerns, ideas and make recommendations based on their own interpretation and perspective of the topic. The method is participative and encourages interaction by other participants with the use of different research tools to ensure information is extracted whilst at the same time maintaining focus and enthusiasm.

This research was equally carried out by two volunteers of NMMEG who plan and organise research in their spare time. Both researches have their own occupation and do their best to accommodate the convenience of the intended group. A fund was contributed by the commissioning body to cover expenses including room hire and catering. Any remaining balance of fund goes to NMMEG for its core activities.

2.1 Meetings

One to one meetings were carried out with representatives from various bodies who have either produced research report, delivered direct or indirect services and those who have particular interest in the migrant community in Northumberland. Most meetings were carried out on face to face basis as well as telephone interviews. Where appropriate, telephone interviews were the preferred method employed as it minimise the travel cost on NMMEG volunteers.
To complement the one to one meetings, two focus groups were formed to meet. The Focus Groups represent the core element of the research as it is the participants that contribute to the wealth of information on the experience of living and / or working in Northumberland. The first meeting was intended for mid December and even though NMMEG managed to organise this meeting with support, there were only two participants who attended on the day. Although a good attendance was anticipated, potential participants were unable to attend as they had made different arrangements that were out of organisers’ control. Even though a few migrants had expressed their availability, the mixture of the festive season and the cold among other reasons had contributed to factors that made this meeting unsuccessful.

Discussions with a few representatives for support were still deemed effective and two dates were anticipated for January, 2007. Unfortunately, the dates suggested had to be postponed by two weeks as more suitable times and dates were established, which could yield a better outcome.

Support was received from two different parties whose effort in the pulling and encouraging of migrants to attend the meeting were invaluable. The first Focus Group meeting was on:

Tuesday, 23rd January, 2007
At Berwick Community Centre, Berwick-Upon-weed
From 7 pm

This meeting was kindly organised by an ESOL teacher with her ESOL learners. It was rather interesting because the researchers had covered one of the topics for her lesson for the evening which was on the life and background of the learners. There were eight learners at the session, of which five were men and three were women. Six participants arrived with no dependants in this country. This does not
mean that they may not have any dependents in their own countries as no actual information was extracted. Two participants have dependents residing with them.

The second Focus Group meeting was held on:

Sunday, 28th January, 2007
At Our Lady & St. Cuthbert Parish, Berwick-Upon-Tweed
From 12:30 noon

This meeting was kindly supported by the Parish priest who distributed flyer that NMMEG had produced to attract migrant parishioners to the meeting. The meeting was also mentioned after mass. Also, in attendance were a local Berwick Councillor and the parish priest, to whom we are grateful for their company.

NMMEG researchers did face initial difficulties on engaging the migrant communities. It was only through joint working and utilising of local knowledge that the researchers were able to reach out to the migrant communities. Researchers were fortunate that the issue was of concerns not only to NMMEG and Northumberland Delivering Group (DRE) but also to various voluntary organisations and the statutory body.

Desk research method was also employed where publications for examples from the Home Office and reports of previous researches written by parties from local, regional and national organisations produced important data that can be explored. This also includes the use of online database and the internet, which allow the collating of findings that could be analysed in potentially exciting ways to provide information as to the background of the scope from a wide view point.

This provides a detailed study of the history of the current frame and standing on this matter. This method adds new dimension to current and past researches and allows an in-depth knowledge on the scope. This research focus predominantly on
the qualitative information which complements the questionnaire produced by joint working between different organisations in Berwick at present, looking at gathering quantitative data from migrant workers.

**FIGURE 1** Number of participants on a one to one and group sessions

![Chart showing the number of participants by gender and nationality.]

**Background**

The Northumberland Delivery Group is aware of the significant increase of migrant workers coming to Northumberland. Despite the increase in numbers, there was evidence for the lack of formal links with these communities by the statutory sector. There is also evidence to the lack of services and accessing of services by these communities.

3.1 Profile of the Borough

The ‘Northumberland as a place to live’ survey undertaken by MORI\(^1\) had placed the county as offering the highest level of satisfaction as a place to live in. There are six borough district councils in Northumberland.

\(^1\) Northumberland as a place to live’ survey: MORI 2006
Berwick-Upon-Tweed which shares its border with the Scottish region is the northern-most town in England located on the mouth of river Tweed. Berwick, with its beauty and troubled history, is a market town with population of 25,949\(^1\).

59.5 percent of its population are employed. 60 percent of its employed population works in the service industry with about 13 percent in manufacturing, 10 percent in agriculture and 8 percent in construction\(^2\). More recent types of economic industry include salmon fishing, shipbuilding, fertilizer production and manufacturing of tweed and hosiery\(^2\).

According to the 2001 census, Berwick with 99.6 percent of White population is the least ethnically diverse area in the country. The unemployment rate based on those claiming unemployment related benefits was at 2.1 percent in 2005. Berwick also record the lowest average earnings of £12,294 in 2004 and is the only borough displaying a decrease in annual earnings of 17 percent in 2003-2004\(^3\).

### 3.2 Migration

Around 144,000 of migration to the UK in 2004 were for work-related reasons\(^4\). Statistic suggests that there is an increase of migrants from eastern European countries since the A8 Accession countries joined the European Union (EU).

An estimate of 64,000 A8 citizens migrated to the UK in 2005 live in this country for at least a year. A8 citizens on long term migration to this country increased by over 50 percent from 52,000 in 2004 to 80,000 in 2005. An estimated 49,000 Polish citizen migrated to the UK in 2005\(^5\).

The Accession Treaty gave member nationals the right to travel freely across the EU and allowed them to visit, live and study in any Member State. This Treaty

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1. National Statistics 2001 Census
4. People and Migration 2005
5. National Statistic: National Picture on Migration
also restricts access to labour market from the A8 countries. The movement of migrations are not just to large conurbations but also to rural areas for temporary or permanent settlement.

Whilst members from the EU have to be registered with Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) when employed in the UK, those from the rest of the world need to obtain a working visa.

The Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) was introduced on 1st May 2004\(^1\). Under the Accession, A8 nationals only have;

- the right to reside in the UK as workers if they are registered and working in accordance with the scheme.

- do not have a right of residence as work seekers or as unemployed workers unless they are self-sufficient persons while seeking work.

Workers must register with WRS within 30 days of the start of their employment. They must send a seventy pounds fee along with their passport or identity card and they will be sent a WRS registration card and certificate naming the employer. They must have a certificate for every employer they work for and must inform WRS of change of employer without additional fees.

Once registered, workers need to comply with the WRS requirements for 12 months after which they will have the same right to work as any other EEA citizen\(^2\).

Self employed persons are not required to register under this scheme.

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1. Home Office document: EU Chapter 7 Section 1
2. Excerpt from International Migrant Workers in Northumberland report, 2006 pg 14
Northumberland saw an increase from A8 countries since early 2005. There were reported around 3,401 migrant workers registered in the North East under the WRS scheme of which 757 migrant workers were in Northumberland, which account for 18 percent of the North East migrant population\(^1\). The majority of migrants coming to Northumberland are of Polish, Czech, Lithuanian, Filipino, South African and Portuguese origin.

Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that the main migrant communities from the A8 countries in Northumberland are Polish and are mainly living in Berwick upon Tweed. Although this figure was released in the 2005/06 statistic for NINo registration; there is a confident unpublished figure of 231 A8 migrants recorded in Berwick alone\(^2\).

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\(^1\) Fitzgerald, I. (2006) Analysis of Northumberland A8 WRS workers; unpublished. This differ from the figure illustrated by the DWP use later in this report

\(^2\) Pillai, R. Destination North East? DWP unpublished. Note that this figure slightly differs from the figure used earlier that reflects calculation made through WRS registration and NINo registration.
On 24 November 2005, the Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWC) had written a letter to the then Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz to raise to Prime Minister Tony Blair the uncovering of employment and Health and Safety related incidents around the miserable treatment of Polish migrant workers in the UK. TGWC showed an official figure of 173,000 Polish workers that had applied for work in the UK since the enlargement of the EU\(^1\).

TGWU pointed out the alarming levels of exploitation and the denial of basic employment rights of Polish workers. Is this the case for migrant Polish and others from other A8 workers in Berwick and Northumberland in general?

**Findings**

The Focus Groups were asked specific questions that falls within the scope of the research but there were also spontaneous questions that may arise to provide accuracy to facts and information gathered.

4.1 Background information and reasons for coming to the UK

This question was asked to establish the views and reasons for coming to Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland in particular and the UK in general. This looks at the internal and macro reasons for migrating.

About 80 percent of the participants had come to Berwick-upon-Tweed and the UK in general for primary reason, to work. It becomes clear that there are employment opportunities for those who are willing to work at the minimum wage rate.

Majority of the participants had been offered a job through local agencies in their country. Most of the agencies are branches of a wider agency mainly with head quarters in Poland, Portugal, Russia and the UK, aimed at recruiting to supplement

\(^1\) http://eurofound.europa.eu
the UK labour market. There was also evidence of accessing work through word of mouth directly to the workplace. One participant actually accessed employment via the internet typically to work in a farm. Most migrant workers found themselves working with other migrants in the workplace but there were also evidence that a few may have been on their own among co-workers from the wider community.

There was also evidence that 20 percent of the participants had friends, partners or relatives arrived in the UK to join them. Most of the Polish and other migrant workers who are living and / or working in Berwick are living by themselves and a few others are with their partners and families with children. Berwick Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) confirmed at least 8 babies in their recent count.

Around 99 percent of the focus groups have agreed that their reason of coming to the UK is purely on economic grounds. The ambition for better pay in the UK will have enabled them to support their family back in their home country.

A few participants had arrived to the country by plane while the rest have to undergone a treacherous journey traveling by coach.

Previous reports have evidenced that the number of migrants increases between May and July with a decrease period from October running up to December\(^1\). These times are linked with the agricultural seasons such as fruit picking and food processing such as salmon products. This was also evident with the first initial meeting for the Focus Group which failed to attract the numbers of migrants anticipated as most workers had headed home due to the completion of their contracts and some because of the festive season.

Some 30 percent of the Focus Groups are working in Farne Salmon & Trout Ltd in Duns while others works at Drysdales Vegetable Farm in Cockburnspath,
Haggerston Castle and a hosiery, rosette and ribbon manufacturing factory. There were also others that worked with the voluntary sector, a café and pub within Berwick town centre. Other areas of work are construction, hospitality and catering. There was clear evidence that most migrants are doing factory and farming work despite a few that were highly qualified in their own country.

A few participants had also established a business working as a self-employed as sole trader in fields of carpentry and gardening and jointly with other fellow migrants.

4.2 Barriers experienced living and / or working in Northumberland

The majority of the group have identified that language is the main barrier for them from fitting in and socializing with other communities. Participants also find it difficult to communicate with frontline officers or employees especially with doctors, nurses, dentist and council offices to name but a few. 85 percent of the Focus Group speaks Polish followed by Latvian, Russian, Urdu, Portuguese and Spanish. Majority of the participants attended ESOL in Berwick through their own private arrangement and for purpose of personal development. There was no record of support on languages or language classes offered by employers.

There is anecdotal evidence that some migrants are not aware of ESOL and how to access it.

Although English was not mentioned as a major requirement for work, anecdotal evidence proved that workers asserted this was one of the very reason they are working below their qualification and skills. This might have great implications for example on workers and employers relation, health and safety, tasks instructions and training.
Some 60 percent of the migrant workers agreed that they have a satisfactory working environment. Others felt quite unhappy with their employers or agency as there is no written contract, a situation which hinders them from knowing their rights, benefits and entitlements. Agency workers main rights are:

- paid holiday, rest breaks and limits on working time
- no unlawful deductions from wages
- the National Minimum Wage
- not to be discriminated against under any of the equality legislation

Some participants were also made working longer hours than normal, up to 18 hours a day with a Sunday off, without being paid overtime. There was also evidence of a worker who is made to work 40 hours but received pay based on reduced hours, and that was a common practice with the employer regardless of the employee or workers background. Some workers are not given pay slips therefore are not aware if they pay tax or have contributed to the National Insurance contribution.

Although all participants have access to the health service, majority found it extremely difficult to register with a dentist. Most migrants will ensure they visit a dentist when visiting their home country. Evidence showed that a migrant had taken an extreme action of extracting a decaying tooth by himself as the he was unable to find an emergency appointment.

All A8 migrant workers are aware of the WRS registration scheme and have certificate for each employers they worked for. They do find the system too bureaucratic and found difficulties updating the change of employers’ details, although all agreed that they have done so as required.
4.3 Barriers accessing services

There is some social support among migrant workers. This is much needed especially if the information on mainstream services and on other areas are not accessible. This also makes it easier for those who find it difficult to communicate in English.

*Accommodation / Housing*

Around 70 percent of participants have had no problems in finding a place due to the fact that they have arranged accommodation with their friends, employers and others with their partners who may have arrived earlier and had accommodation or housing sorted by various means with ease. The rest of the participants did find difficulties sorting out housing mainly because of the high price of houses or flats in Berwick. There is also lack of quality and availability of accommodation and housing in Berwick. Due to the cost of buying a property, many have decided to share accommodations with fellow migrants.

There is no evidence from the participants that accommodation charge is applied even thought a few participants do have the accommodation offered by their employer.

*General Practitioner (GP)*

The Polish group and other migrants did not face any difficulties registering with the health service or GP’s in Berwick. They found the process was easy with no hassle and mainly because they have been supported by friends, relatives and other migrants. Although they do not have problem registering with the GP, they do find it difficult to express their emotions, symptoms or needs to their GP because of their limited knowledge of the English language. Staff at the GP practice does not speak other languages and there is no interpreter service available. Information was also not available in different languages.
Dental Service

Majority of the participants have identified difficulties in registering with a dentist. Moat complained of the long wait for an appointment and that emergency appointment was difficult to get. This may be due to lack of information regarding emergency appointments or simply the language barrier that may have hindered the migrants from communicating the urgency of the treatment needed. Most participants therefore prefer to have dental appointment or dental services back at their home country.

Migrants have no access to interpreter service or information in different languages.

Library

Participants use the library for internet and as a form of info point. Library is also a meeting venue for other migrants who may be going to the library for information on mainstream services.

There is no mention to whether migrants borrow books, tapes or magazines from the library as libraries do not hold books of different languages. Information in the library would mainly be in English and not in different language.

Citizens Advise Bureau (CAB)

Around 85 percent of the Focus Group participants have no information as to what CAB does and where it is located. The rest have approached CAB or use their services. From evidence gathered from CAB, the staff has had contacts with migrants from Poland, Portugal, Russia, Lithuania and Latvia and migrants from these countries do access their services regularly.
There were evidence that migrants access CAB services on enquiries and support information on employment such as unpaid holiday pay, accommodation issues, financial problems/ matters, domestic violence, immigration issues and criminal charges relating to driving offences. It is clear that many others are not aware of CAB and they are not accessing the services offered.

4.4 Mental health issue

The participants experienced homesickness because they miss their friends and families back in the home country and miss communicating in their own language. Others were feeling stressed at work due to exploitation such as long working hours and not being paid accordingly. There were concerns that if they make a complaint to their employer or agency, they will be dismissed from work. Agency workers are covered by the National Minimum Wage but anecdotal evidence proved that some may have earned far less than the minimum wage.

Those on agency arrangements are required a high degree of flexibility to take up and leave work at short notice. This made most migrant workers worried about the uncertainty and lack of security of agency work, which leaves them and their family vulnerable to income instability and sudden change of circumstance and would struggle without the support of families and friends.

About 3 percent of the participants are on medication due to anxiety caused by hardship of looking after a dependant, getting low pay and long hours of work. Some workers also have financial worries in general for themselves and their families. Some participants also note that deductions for management fee to their agencies were deducted from their wage. No other deductions were recorded from the participants.

Some participants have experienced verbal abuse from the wider community which made it difficult to socialize. Because of the rural setting, majority felt isolated and
lonely as there is lack of facility or services that may meet individual or the minority community needs in general. Most felt that verbal support and advice should be available to those who need them.

Participants are not aware of organizations that offer support on mental health apart from their GP. Most migrant communities are self contained as they are encapsulated by the reasons mentioned earlier. Participants are also not aware of the mainstream services offered by the Borough Council.

On wider anecdotal evidence, there was a fatality reported incident in Tyne and Wear due to the inability to cope with the changing circumstances experienced in this country and the pressure received from the families in the home country. Others have to endure long travel distances to work which adding to the already long working days, have significant impact on their physical and mental health and family relations.

Other areas of concern supported by anecdotal evidence are on the following;

- Lack of information on the education system in Northumberland and important school dates
- Lack of information on pre-school and further qualification
- Lack of information on the services provided by Berwick Borough Council and Northumberland County Council and the relation of their structure
- Lack of information on NHS provision in Northumberland and in different languages
- Lack of information on Job Centre and in different languages
- Lack of information on public spaces, parks, play area and community common areas
- Lack of information for voluntary support group for migrant workers
- Lack of information on ESOL classes
- Lack of information on employment rights and other legal information
- Lack of social activities tailored for migrant communities
- Lack of access to interpreter by statutory service providers
- Lack of information on Trade Union
- Lack of information on housing providers
- Lack of dental practitioners
- Lack of information in other languages
- Lack of equality and diversity training among agencies and employers
- Lack of Polish club or clubs for other migrant communities in Northumberland
- Lack of cultural events to promote cohesion
- Lack of information in other languages in general
- Greater reach of CAB, voluntary sector and council to migrant communities

**Recommendations**

There has been some work with engaging the migrant communities and supporting them on various issues by CAB, parish church and other voluntary organisations in Berwick. There is clearly lack of capacity and resources for such voluntary services to cope with the increasing support needed in Berwick and Northumberland. As much as greater work is needed at grass root level, there is also the need to ensure that services offered to these communities are fair and equitable. This requires the need for those who work at influencing policies and strategies to include the concerns and needs of the new communities in their policies and future plans for Berwick and Northumberland in general. Consultation with the black and other minority communities is vital to ensure inclusion of needs and concerns to ascertain that services are tailored to include their needs and that specific and mainstream service are also accessible.
The following suggestions were made directly by those who were interviewed and the Focus Groups as well as anecdotal evidence and suggestions made by researchers themselves.

- the need for interpreting service for mainstream services such as GP, dentist, Job Centre, local council to name but a few.
- staff at Job Centre, banks and other service providers should be helpful and courteous at all times
- front line officers are trained in equality and diversity areas
- equality and diversity is embedded within service delivery organizations
- effective diversity policies
- local council and other organisations should include the needs and concerns of minority and migrant communities in their plans
- consultation with these communities to ensure fairness and equality of services
- information on services available in other languages (these may have been looked into but the notification itself is in English therefore speakers of other languages would not be aware of their existence.)
- greater partnership working to ensure employers are abiding to the law
- information on Trade Union and aspects of employment law are much needed
- suggest the use of locally trained interpreter to support with interpreting services on peripatetic and as when needed
- invest on training for a local interpreter and other relevant training
- initiate a migrant community club as focal point of contact
- increase the number of dental surgeries in the area to accommodate the increasing number of migrants arriving in Berwick.
- provide translated general information such as on education system, basic highway code, police, hospitals, parks and leisure centre to name but a few.
- for multi agencies across sectors to work in partnership to ensure quantity and quality of services
• consultations and need assessment activities
• greater reach by Berwick Borough Council and Northumberland County Council is necessary
• information on ESOL and ESOL classes
• to encourage employers to invest on ESOL for migrant workers
• greater partnership with Learning Skills Council
• information on housing providers such as Cheviot Housing and local authority for example
• information on UK’s health and safety system
• partnership working between stakeholders to include employment agencies
• cultural activities that promotes cohesion and integration

Conclusion

A8 nationals and their family members are eligible for permanent residence once they have exercised their Treaty Rights in the UK for 5 years. A good proportion of this community is in this country for a short term employment while others have intention to stay longer. Migrant workers compensate for the shortage of skills or workforce in the UK’s labour market. With the overall population aging, migrant workers, not only offset to the labour shortages but also contribute to mobility and cost effective employment of labour for employers and the overall dynamics of the country’s economic wellbeing.

For an efficient workforce, information on health and safety and employment rights are crucial as the foundation to working in the UK. Lack of provision and knowledge on those are potentially advantageous to employers but to the migrant worker’s disadvantage, leaving workers unable to challenge employers’ actions and decisions. Unless intervention and greater working partnership is established to ensure policies and procedures are in place to determine that employers are taking reasonable care for the health and safety of their workers, these workers remain vulnerable. Service providers should show greater reach and address the
concerns of these communities to ensure they are safe, confident, share a sense of belonging and promote respect within the community in general. This contributes to a vibrant, cohesive and ethnically diverse county.