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# New migrant communities in North East England and Cumbria

## Seminar report

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## Introduction

On 26 November 2007, 18 policy makers, practitioners, funders and researchers came together for a discussion seminar about new migrant communities, hosted by Northern Rock Foundation<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this report is to document the main topics discussed at that seminar, and to present some of the issues arising from it which others may wish to consider.

## Background

At the end of 2006, the Foundation's Trustees expressed an interest in finding out more about migrant communities, an issue which was attracting considerable media interest. The questions we considered included: What was happening in our region? Who was here, what difficulties were they facing, and were they using voluntary and community sector services? What was the effect on the labour market and the issue of worklessness?

We decided to explore the issue in more depth by finding out just what the situation was in North East England and Cumbria. We spoke to a range of organisations including local councils, a CAB manager, representatives from the then Commission for Racial Equality and workers from community based organisations. In May 2007, we produced a scoping report for our staff and Trustees. Following that, the Foundation organised the seminar to pursue the topic with a range of experts in policy, research and practice.

## A summary of the findings from the scoping report

At the time we produced our scoping report, ippr's 'Destination North East'<sup>2</sup> was already nearly a year old, and the imperfections of the statistics available on migrant numbers were widely acknowledged. Putting this to one side, ippr's report still gave the most detailed analysis of how many A8 workers<sup>3</sup> were registered as working in the North East. For the period May 2004 to February 2006, the total recorded number was 4,722. Newcastle had the largest recorded number of registrations (1,080), followed by Derwentside (511), Gateshead (338), Darlington (328) and Sunderland (316). One point noted in the scoping report was that parts of rural Northumberland were shown surprisingly high up on this list. Although the numbers came to 313 and 249 for Castle Morpeth and Berwick upon Tweed respectively, it was interesting to see that it was not only larger towns or cities, or areas that had previously experienced dispersal of asylum seekers, in which migrant workers were recorded as working

The detail available for Cumbria was not so great, and the only information we could find at the time was on Cumbria County Council's website. The website referenced Home Office figures released in July 2006 showing that 2,311 A8 workers had entered Cumbria's labour market since May 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of attendees is in the appendix

<sup>2</sup> *Destination North East: harnessing the regional potential of migration* Rachel Pillai, ippr north July 2006. <http://www.ippr.org/ipprnorth/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=484>

<sup>3</sup> Workers from the eight accession countries who joined the EU in May 2004: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

In both North East England and Cumbria, Polish workers were deemed to be the most numerous, followed by Slovaks and Lithuanians.

Some of the issues identified in the scoping report were real barriers to integration, centring on English language skills and patchy provision of training for employment. Housing and homelessness was something else mentioned by most of the people we spoke to. A particular concern was expressed about cases where housing was tied to employment, with workers being vulnerable to homelessness if they become unemployed.

When we looked at what jobs migrant workers were doing, we drew largely on the 2006 report by the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at Newcastle University<sup>4</sup>. As a sub-region, Tyne and Wear had over 50% of migrant workers registered in either hospitality/leisure/retail and wholesale (30.7%) or personal service and domestic work (21.1%). In contrast, the majority of work undertaken in Northumberland (68.4%) and County Durham (58.2%) was registered as manufacturing/process/other low skilled activities. In a conversation with the Carlisle CAB manager, migrant workers were identified as working in Cumbria as HGV drivers, factory workers, cleaners, agricultural labourers and plumbers.

The question of what impact migrant workers were having on the region's economy was trickier to answer; certainly nothing was as black and white as some commentators would have people believe. So, for example, the argument that migrant workers were taking local people's jobs was questionable, but it could be the case that the continued employment of migrant workers was not helping the demand side of our regional economy, particularly when the demand continued to be for low-skilled workers. One thing that came through time and time again was a widespread consensus that migrant workers were taking jobs well below their actual level of skill.

## Purposes of the seminar

One of our conclusions in the scoping report was that holding a seminar would be a good way forward, making use of the Foundation's position as an independent grant-making trust with a focus on both policy and practice. Our intention was to use the seminar to inform our own current and future work, and to provide a neutral space where people could share knowledge and ideas.

The objectives of the seminar were as follows.

- For everyone present to network and exchange knowledge.
- For clear links to be made between policy/research and practice.
- To inform everyone about what the situation is like for front-line organisations.
- For participants to identify some clear messages to come from the seminar and people/organisation who needed to be informed.

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<sup>4</sup> *Assessing the local and regional impacts of international migration* The Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, Newcastle University, Stenning et al, June 2006

## Key points from the seminar

There was a wide-ranging discussion on the day. These notes summarise the main areas of that discussion.

### *What kind of migrant communities are in the region?*

There was a general consensus that migrant communities are not a homogenous group. The following examples illustrate this point.

- The Rights Project, a voluntary organisation providing advice and support to people in the West End of Newcastle, largely saw Roma clients. Often they were not here as workers and are not skilled. Many came over as asylum seekers or come to join other family members.
- Derwentside District Council reported that when it tried to consult or engage with its migrant population it always saw the same type of people: mainly Polish, middle aged, fairly well educated or interested in learning English
- Berwick CAB reported seeing mostly Polish or Portuguese people. There were three distinct groups: young, seasonal workers who wanted to earn and improve their English; fairly young people who were thinking about settling here, have a permanent job and were bringing in or starting a family; older people with poorer English skills who tended not to mix outside of their family or co-workers. It was this third group that the Bureau was most worried about.
- People who made contact with the EURES (European Employment Service) service were reported as tending to have a good level of English and differed greatly to the Roma clients The Rights Project sees.
- Carlisle CAB said it saw many workers who were not registered on the WRS. It saw a mixture of Polish, Lithuanian, Slovakian and Portuguese people.

### *What kind of support and guidance do new migrant communities need?*

- There was a widespread feeling that often the support people needed was quite basic (e.g. What does this letter from the council say? How do I transfer my phone provider over now I have moved? How do I register with a doctor?)
- Consumer rights issues were also highlighted as something about which migrant communities often lack information.
- Newcastle Law Centre said that people were often being brought to the UK by employers, and workers needed to know their employment rights. However, they also argued that more importantly there needed to be a system in place for workers to be able to implement these rights.
- Welcome/information packs were thoroughly discussed. Although many people had either used packs like this or liked the idea of them, there was quite a strong counter-argument, or at least a feeling that packs should not be the only way of communicating with/getting information to new communities. For example, The Rights Project made the point that many of its clients were illiterate in their own language, so a written document would not be helpful to them. Joseph Rowntree Foundation wondered whether there was a consistent template for welcome packs, and then raised the point that in wider community cohesion terms it might be better to have the information available to everyone in the community, instead of targeting it at migrants.

- Several mentions were made of the many Polish websites that have emerged in recent years, designed and maintained by Polish inhabitants of the North East. There was even a Polish website specifically for Consett! Derwentside District Council had found that linking in with websites like this was a good way of making contact with its migrant communities.

#### *Using existing skills to help migrant communities support and establish themselves*

- This was linked to the discussion about the number of migrant websites and networks being created.
- JET was using the language skills and the knowledge of more settled members of migrant communities to allow them to act as mentors for new arrivals.
- The point was made that not all migrant workers needed support. Some were highly skilled, knew what they are doing, and were capable of forming their own networks and support systems.

#### *Skills and talent attraction debate.*

- Although many migrants were believed to be more highly skilled than their jobs required, the discussion came back round to the point that not all migrant workers were the same – not all of them were young, skilled people.
- CURDS argued that people needed to think about why migrant workers were coming here – often it was to learn English or to travel and have a ‘gap year’ adventure. Some people did not want to get a job that fitted with their experience back home.
- Neither of the above discussion points sat neatly with the apparent need to attract and retain skilled workers. Outside London, and particularly in the North East, it was very hard anyway to attract and retain skilled workers, let alone migrant workers.
- The Rights Project argued that the majority of its clients definitely did not fit with the types of people that the region was supposed to want to attract.
- The point was also made that by concentrating on the skills debate, we were actually in danger of forgetting that migrant workers were keeping our region going by working in agriculture, driving buses and working in factories etc.

#### *A role for funders and the voluntary sector in highlighting the unseen?*

A theme running through several of the discussion areas was how easy it was for migrants to come into the country, nobody really knew who they were, where they are and what they were doing. If people did not register, or were un-documented,<sup>5</sup> then they effectively went under the radar and it was very hard to know how to make contact with them and to identify whether they needed any help or support. As part of this debate there was a concern that some employers were keen for people not to register as this prevented workers from having rights that they could enforce.

Particularly in the current climate of favouring skilled workers, there could be a role for funders and the voluntary sector to play in highlighting the existence of people who most definitely did not fit that bill, but who had things to offer and needs that had to be met. The issue of un-documented workers led to a discussion about media portrayals of the situation spiralling out of control. The Government was not seen as being in control or on top of the situation. This was thought to breed concern amongst the general population

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<sup>5</sup> Un-documented workers were identified as a big London issue, but those present at this seminar were not sure how much of an issue it was in the North East and Cumbria

about the number of migrants here, whether they were claiming benefits, and the effect that their presence was having on the economy etc.

### *Community cohesion*

The conversation also touched on the insularity of the North East and a fear of the unknown. Berwick CAB argued there was a lot of passive hostility and mistrust of the new communities. The young age profile of many of the new migrants was actually what caused problems in some of the region's more rural areas.

Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Scottish Council Foundation liked the idea of trying to look at people just in terms of being a newcomer, whether they come from Eastern Europe or another part of the UK. Barrow Cadbury was thinking about how to tackle disadvantage for everyone, as new migrants often end up in already deprived areas. This could be a good way of addressing some of the community cohesion issues.

The idea of mentoring and befriending across communities was also mentioned as potentially a good way of building links between new and existing communities.

### *Political message*

Newcastle Law Centre argued that local councils and central Government needed to properly debate the migration issue and to decide once and for all whether or not migration was good thing. This debate needed to be honest about the costs: if it was decided overall that migration was a positive thing, the costs needed to be acknowledged and addressed. Currently people seemed to want all the benefits of migration without accepting any of the costs. The Scottish Parliament's backing of migration was cited as a positive example of a strong political message working well.

### *What do organisations need to be able to do things better?*

- Some of the vital services mentioned included basic support by friendly faces.
- The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project felt that offering drop-ins, where people could go for a cup of tea and a chat was crucial, as once a relationship was built, more difficult issues could be dealt with. The Rights Project agreed, but also said that once this trust had been established, some people could become quite dependent on the service.
- JET said that it often helped people with issues it was not paid to deal with, as often people from A8 countries were scared of large organisations and had not had a good relationship with the state in their home country. Organisations involved in this field needed to know this kind of background information, and to be able to approach people in the right way.
- As well as this 'basic' support and hand-holding, a need was expressed for translation and interpretation costs. Assistance interpreting legislation correctly was also highlighted. This was believed to have massive resource implications.
- There was a feeling that statutory agencies needed to look at their own practices and ensure that they knew and were meeting people's entitlements.
- Concern was expressed about the current trend of moving away from single group funding. Although supporting groups to make connections and work in partnerships with other communities was often a good thing, small, locally based organisations needed to be able to access funding.

## How might policy and practice move forward?

Below is a summary of some of the ideas that emerged from our discussion. These are not formal recommendations, as not everyone agreed with every suggestion. They do, however, give a good indication of where some of the policy and practice developments might lie.

- More work is needed to study and describe the diverse nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century migration. The reality is much more nuanced than is suggested by media hysteria about hoards of migrants swamping our borders, or by rose-tinted visions of highly skilled migrants boosting the economy. Blunt policy instruments will not suffice
- Regional bodies in the North East and Cumbria could provide leadership by stating publicly that economic migration is good for their areas and that they support it. But in promoting migration's economic benefits, they should also recognise its social challenges, and work with others to take responsibility for addressing them. An objective of attracting talent should not damage one of social justice. Regional agencies should also make clear that their policies may need to differ from those set at a national level, or in southern regions.
- A key regional and national policy objective should be to protect the rights of everyone in employment – whatever their status and whoever is their employer. Greater employer and trade union engagement, across the board, in debates on migration is needed – since it is employers who are creating the demand.
- Any new arrival into a locality – whether an economic migrant or not – will benefit from good welcome information about what's going on and how to access services. Developing more such generic resources might both provide a level of necessary basic information to those migrants who will get on and use it to help themselves, and a means of bringing communities together. There might be some benefits to such resources – or at least templates for them – being developed at a regional level.
- Funders and commissioners should consider how they can enable service providers to develop the best services that are flexible and effective. Services might be better designed if they targeted particular needs rather than categories of people: focusing on generic concerns, such as 'new arrivals', 'destitution' and 'employment rights', without specifying the demographics of a client group. Services need to do more than give information and advice; practical support and hand-holding can be greatly beneficial. Mainstream services providers should face more challenge about how they are evolving and adapting their provision to meet changing needs. Service providers of all hues need to be better networked.
- Trusts and foundations could do more to use their independence in particular to highlight the issues of destitute migrants, undocumented workers and other 'under-the-radar' communities, like Roma.
- Cohesion work could do more to focus on existing communities learning about the social, political and cultural heritage of people coming in.

## Appendix: seminar attendees

NAME	ORGANISATION
Dr Alison Stenning	University of Newcastle upon Tyne (Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies)
Andrew Auld	Carlisle Citizens Advice Bureau
Andy Collier	One North East, Leadership and Talent Attraction Programme
Brenda Johnston	Jobs Education Training (JET)
Emma Stone	The Joseph Rowntree Foundation
George Vickers	Newcastle Law Centre
Hannah Stapley	Northern Rock Foundation
Jennifer Hall	Berwick Citizens Advice Bureau
Joe Bennett	EURES North East England
Macius Kurowski	Equality & Human Rights Commission
Mark Ellis	Newcastle City Council, Chief Executive's Office
Michael McHugh	Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project, Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Justice and Peace
Olga Mrinska	Ippr North
Phoebe Griffith	The Barrow Cadbury Trust
Rob Williamson	Northern Rock Foundation
Rowenna Foggie	North East Strategic Migration Partnership
Sally Thomas	Northern Rock Foundation (Trustee)
Sarah Kyambi	Scottish Council Foundation (formerly with the Migrant Rights Network)
Sarah Smart	The Rights Project
Stephen Tracey	Derwentside District Council, Corporate Strategy Department



## About Northern Rock Foundation

Northern Rock Foundation is a charity formed in 1997, when Northern Rock converted to a plc. Its objectives are to tackle disadvantage and to improve quality of life in North East England and Cumbria. It does this through grant-making, policy and research work, training and development activities, special initiatives, loans and other investments.

More information: [www.nr-foundation.org.uk](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk)