

# RESEARCH SUMMARY

## MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

October 2005

### Highlands and Islands Enterprise

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to provide information and understanding of the role migrant workers play in the labour market in the Highlands and Islands, and to suggest how the support needs of employers and migrant workers might be addressed.

#### 2. METHODS

The study adopted a mixed methods strategy, which included qualitative as well as quantitative methods. The inclusion of a range of stakeholders – employers, migrant workers, service providers and national organisations– in the research has ensured a multi-dimensional perspective on the issue of migrant labour. The main methods employed in the study were:

- A Literature Review
- Analysis of secondary data
- Interviews conducted with :
  - 53 employers
  - 25 migrant workers
  - Nine service providers (including two recruitment agents)
  - Four representatives of national bodies
- Focus group discussions with :
  - Employers (One group with six participants)
  - Migrant workers (Two groups with five and six participants respectively)
  - Representatives from public and voluntary sectors (One group with 11 representatives)

#### 3. OVERALL FINDINGS

- The number of National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations of overseas nationals for the HIE area have more than doubled over the tax years 2003/04 and 2004/05, from 1,235 to 2,555 respectively. In Scotland as a whole, those registrations went up by nearly 50% over the same period.
- There has been an eleven-fold increase in the registration of EU accession states nationals in the HIE area over the tax years 2003/04 and 2004/05.
- In the tax year 2004/05, 1,320 (52%) of overseas nationals registered in the HIE area on the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS) were from the EU accession states.
- Half of the overseas nationals who were registered on the NIRS stayed in the Eastern parts of the HIE area, in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey as well as in Moray.
- The proportions of overseas nationals registered on the NIRS from different age groups have remained fairly stable over the years. Around 80% are 34 years of age or younger, and approximately 40% are younger than 25 years.
- Migrant workers who participated in the study are mainly employed in semi-skilled and unskilled work, and often in jobs that are significantly below their qualification levels and experience.

- Most study participants were of the view that migrant workers are undertaking work local people did not want, or for which no local people are available. Many employers attributed the lack of locally available labour to the relatively low pay and long, often irregular, hours of work associated with particular jobs (e.g. hospitality, fish processing).
- All employers praised highly the commitment of migrant workers, their flexibility, and the quality of their work - sometimes contrasted with the performance of local workers.
- The majority of migrant workers reported that they were recruited by agencies often based in their countries of origin. Other routes included responding to job adverts and word of mouth.
- While about a third of employers reported that they had recruited migrant workers through private agencies, several also mentioned that the employment of one migrant worker resulted in further word of mouth recommendations, and subsequent passive recruitment of more migrants. Some employers were disappointed at the lack of adequate vetting of employees by recruitment agents, especially with regard to English language skills.
- Most migrant workers were pleased to be in work, despite their employment conditions being characterised by short term contracts, low pay, irregular patterns of working, long hours, and lack of training opportunities
- The migrants, the main drivers for migration were earning an income, creating a better life for themselves and their families, as well as high unemployment and low wages in their own countries.
- The main challenges experienced by migrant workers were poor English language and communications skills, lack of interpretation and translation facilities, lack of appropriate accommodation, difficulties in banking, and lack of information and advice. Migrants reported limited opportunities for social interaction outside work, especially for young people.
- With regard to migrant workers' long-term intention to remain in the Highlands and Islands, the picture was mixed. For most it was a very uncertain future, much depending on how the situation in their home countries developed in the short to medium term. Perhaps more importantly, the emphasis was on having positive experiences as well as access to good quality accommodation and services whilst here.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Principles and Approaches

- It is important to recognise that **integration** is an interactive process, involving migrants as well as the host society.
- A **coordinated** approach is required which draws on the public and private sectors as well as civil society to explore how they might jointly address fundamental infrastructural issues.
- There is a need to **clarify and agree** responsibilities and obligations of all stakeholders – i.e. employers, public sector bodies at local, regional and national, local communities and the voluntary sector.
- There is a need to create opportunities for sharing, and implementing '**good practice**' across sectors, organisations, stakeholders and geographical areas.

The following are the main recommendations arising out of the study:

### 4.2 Labour market issues

- More in-depth evidence is required to develop a better understanding of the roles migrant workers play in local labour markets, taking into account existing pools of labour (for example, older workers, workers with a disability, ethnic minorities, and asylum seekers/ refugees). Furthermore, current and evolving policy initiatives (such as Fresh Talent) need to be based on such evidence.
- In collaboration with employers and other key stakeholders, there should be better forward planning related to population movement and demographic developments, with a view to ascertaining the infrastructural (housing, education, and so on) requirements that need to be in place, to address the needs of changing and diverse populations.

- Employers should be encouraged to use only well regulated recruitment agencies with transparent fee structures, which involve migrant workers' associations, and adhere to health and safety conditions and to the payment of at least the National Minimum Wage. Information about and contact details of such recruitment agencies should be made easily available through, for example, an information pack (see below).
- More mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that migrant workers do not suffer from exploitative wages and other poor working conditions. This is linked to the provision of clear information and advice (see below).
- There is some indicative evidence that migrant workers rarely receive an induction / orientation programme nor do they benefit from formal training offers. This area merits further investigation in terms of the extent to which migrant workers may disproportionately be deprived of such benefits, and the reasons for this.

### **4.3 Information and advice**

- There is a need to develop a comprehensive information pack for migrant workers (and, indeed, all newcomers) and employers. This should be undertaken collaboratively across agencies, including the involvement of migrants, employers, local authorities and trade unions at a regional level (Highlands and Islands).
- There should be an option to insert relevant local information and an opportunity to update information as required. The packs for workers should be available in English, as well as in the predominant languages spoken by migrants. The possibility of publishing information in a variety of formats (e.g. video, audio, and internet) should also be investigated.
- There is a need for an independent source of advice and information that migrant workers can access, whether in person, by telephone, or electronically. Such an arrangement would require the support of interpreters competent in a range of languages.

### **4.4 Promoting good relations**

- Initiatives which will help to provide a bridge between migrants, other employees, and local citizens to promote social cohesion and understanding should be actively promoted and supported. These initiatives should focus on the 'assets' (for example, qualifications, skills, and experiences) that migrant workers bring to communities. A variety of mechanisms, such as mentoring/ buddying, and the use of the arts, should be explored in this context.

### **4.5 Promoting integration**

- A coherent multi-agency approach is required, which also involves the involvement of employers, in relation to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. This should address issues related to:
  - The needs of migrants in terms of level of provision, progression, and context (time and place) for learning.
  - Mapping of providers and their ability to deliver good quality provision at appropriate levels.
  - Other infrastructural issues required for effective language learning – e.g. training of ESOL tutors, including migrant workers and learning resources.
  - Delivery mechanisms given the geography of the Highlands and Islands.
  - The role of employers in the financing, actual provision of such services, and the removal of indirect barriers (for example, conflicts between work commitments and the availability of language tuition)
  - Promoting social and cultural understanding: for migrants, an understanding of Scottish society; and for settled communities, an understanding of migrants' cultures.
- Consideration should also be given to funding provision which combines language with 'social orientation' classes, which all migrants should be encouraged to access as an initial introduction. Employers should also be made aware of the importance of such classes, and encouraged to enable their workers to attend.

#### 4.6 Services

- There are three main issues that require to be addressed with regard to all services (e.g. education, careers advice, health, police, employment, and housing) :
  - Enhanced information and awareness about services available which should be addressed through the various mechanisms discussed above.
  - A multi-agency approach to interpretation and translation services which explores and uses a variety of media (e.g. telephone, face to face and video-conferencing) to provide a consistent level of service.
  - An emphasis on delivering 'culturally competent 'services tailored to a wide range of cultures.
- There is a need to explore the best way to support individuals on the issue of accrediting qualifications and experiences obtained overseas.
- The difficulties encountered with opening bank accounts and accessing debit cards requires intervention at regional (Highlands and Islands) and national (Scottish and UK) levels.
- There is a need to clarify the rights of migrant workers to housing and to provide them with information on accessing affordable housing
- In the medium and long term, the mainstreaming of migrant workers' requirements is desirable.

#### 4.7 Monitoring and evaluation

- Mechanisms and strategies designed to attract and retain migrant populations need to be monitored and evaluated.
- Indicators that have been used to measure integration of new arrivals in an urban context should be examined in order to explore their potential transferability to a rural context. This will assist the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives in support of migrants in the Highlands and Islands on a medium to long-term basis.
- Monitoring and evaluation activities should take place at the highest level possible to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach, at least where the aim is to meet well established needs across the HIE area, such as English language tuition. It will be useful to monitor and evaluate innovative practices introduced at local level (for example, types of mentoring) to consider their value for the HIE area as a whole.

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Research instruments used in the study can be requested from the authors