

The Extent, Size and Characteristics of the
Migrant Workforce in the Vale of Evesham

Final Report

Executive Summary and

Recommendations

April 06



The Extent, Size and Characteristics of the Migrant Workforce in the Vale of Evesham

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A full copy of the Final Report is available at www.wychavon.gov.uk



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1. Project Aims and Objectives

Wychavon District Council, with support from the Worcestershire Diocese, originally commissioned Mercia Research & Strategy to undertake a small scale project to ascertain the size of the migrant workforce working primarily in the agriculture and food processing sector and who may also be living in the Vale of Evesham, as well as providing supporting information regarding their housing, travel patterns, employment terms, and overall contribution to the economy.

In particular, Mercia Research and Strategy was tasked with understanding the following:

- The size of the migrant workforce operating within the Vale of Evesham;
- The migrant workforce travel to work patterns, including inward and outward travel patterns;
- The type of accommodation used by migrant workers in the area;
- The types and contractual terms that migrants are employed on.

Subsequently, Wychavon District Council in conjunction with the South Worcestershire Primary Health Care Trust later requested an additional small scale piece of research to review the current impacts of migrant workers on primary healthcare in Evesham. In particular the research was to focus on understanding:

- Impact and awareness of migrant worker cultural issues;
- The level and type of migrant worker registration with local general practitioners i.e. whether as a fully registered patient or as a temporary resident;
- The level and type of usage by migrant workers of the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) and Out of Hours (OOH) services operated by the local general practices.
- Level and type of contact with daily migrant workers who are locally employed indirectly via gangmasters;
- The specific healthcare issues migrant workers have, and;
- The resource implications these have for primary care providers in order to meet these needs.

2. Executive Summary

Key Messages & Findings

- The term 'migrant worker' needs clear and careful definition. A migrant worker is, mostly, defined as an overseas national who has a legal right to work in the UK. However, sometimes the term is used to refer to asylum seekers or refugees, or a British Citizen that is migrating into an area to obtain work.
- The majority of migrant workers that live and work in or near the Evesham town area are overseas nationals, predominantly from the Eastern European Accession countries (mainly Polish), that since May 2004 have had a legal right to live and work in the UK. Frequently, these migrants come to the area specifically to work for a defined period of time, usually one or two years, as it is economically beneficial compared to pay rates available in their native countries. This group of migrant workers have a relatively young age profile and are generally single and without dependents.
- A smaller identifiable group are those migrants who come into the locality on a daily basis but who live in neighbouring conurbations such as Birmingham. These migrant workers are likely to be British nationals, often of Asian ethnicity, and have a much older age profile.
- The available evidence suggests that there are very few asylum seekers or refugees living within the Wychavon district area, with no asylum seekers being currently recorded as living in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation within the local authority district. The research also did not uncover any obvious group of illegal immigrants working within the study area.
- There is a general paucity of accurate data that can be drawn on to understand migration flows, levels and characteristics. Most publicly available data sources do not provide evidence at the local geography required i.e. the Vale of Evesham or even the Wychavon district area.
- Using the available data sources plus the qualitative evidence provided by agricultural and food processing employers interviewed, the report authors' best estimate of the local migrant worker population, within the agriculture and food processing sector, is:
 - 2,000-2,400 long term casual migrant workers that are directly employed in the local agriculture and food processing sectors and who live in or near Evesham;
 - 400-550 short-term (daily) employed migrant workers who are employed via agencies and who live in neighbouring conurbations i.e. Birmingham.

- Local agriculture and food processing employers are proactively targeting the recruitment of Eastern European and South African workers to work in the jobs they are unable to fill using the local or UK resident workforce. This has resulted in a noticeable rise in the local migrant worker population. This influx is supporting the local economy by filling occupations with labour shortages, and by providing additional local consumers.
- National and local evidence from the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) shows that A8 (Eastern European) migrant workers are working in a diverse number of industrial sectors and occupational areas, not just the agricultural and food processing sector. Within Wychavon 29% of those registered under the WRS are either employed in agricultural activities, 21% in the hospitality & catering sector, with 18% employed in administration, business and managerial services.
- If the influx of migrant workers working and living in the area continues to rise at a similar pace to that seen over the last two years, it is likely to put further pressure on the available housing stock in and around Evesham. This may result in either a shortage for the migrant workers and/or the local population. At the current time the housing stock appears to be sufficient to meet the increased demand, in part due to the fact that employers have increased the available stock through supplying caravans, mobile homes and the creation of HMOs¹ to house their workers.
- Eastern European and other overseas migrant workers are, in the main, highly educated and/or skilled and are motivated to improve their employment situation during the time they remain in the UK, many of whom are recent graduates. Currently, the majority are employed as pickers and packers within the locality. However, over time, as language barriers are removed, this picture may change as these workers move between employers, seeking better paid and more highly skilled work.
- The influx of migrant workers has resulted in a big expansion of ESOL² provision over the last year. Data from Evesham Further Education College shows that take-up of ESOL courses now stands at over 300 learners compared to only 20-30 learners in the first six months of 2004.
- Employers interviewed appear to be employing causal migrant workers in accordance with employment legislation, whether this is through direct employment or via an agency ('gangmaster'). Agricultural and food processing employers are regularly audited by their customers, i.e. supermarkets, to ensure compliance with standards and therefore can not afford to be in breach of legislation or trading requirements, due to the importance of these contracts to their business. Employer and other service provider interviews, e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureau, uncovered little evidence of

¹ Homes of Multiple Occupation

² English for Speakers of Other Languages

exploitative employment practices, with pay levels received by migrants meeting minimum pay legislation requirements. Many employers are also assisting employees with their food and other shopping needs by providing minibus services into Evesham town centre.

- The influx of migrant workers has also impacted on local healthcare providers. The Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) at Evesham's community hospital is seeing an increasing number of migrant workers, many of whom (approximately 50%) are not registered with a GP. Unregistered migrant workers who require immediate or follow up care from a GP have to be referred by the MIU to the 'out of towners' local scheme run between the general practices thereby putting an increasing strain on this scheme.
- Generally, migrant workers are infrequent users of health care as they are young and healthy, they generally access healthcare because of an accident or as a result of an illness that requires a doctor's note.
- Healthcare providers felt that migrant workers often go back to work too early, sometimes aggravating or infecting a wound or injury thereby prolonging their healthcare treatment unnecessarily. There may also be some other health or food safety issues given the nature of their employment in the agriculture, food processing and hospitality sectors. Furthermore, additional resources are also used by healthcare providers in caring for those who aggravate the injury by returning to quickly to work.
- Employers, and the labour agencies they use, do not seem to be doing much in terms of providing occupational healthcare or providing information on healthcare access to overseas employees new to the area. Awareness and understanding amongst migrant workers is ad hoc, and passed on by word of mouth. This may result in low registration levels and also some practices getting a higher share of overseas registrations than others, as those who are registered will sign-post friends or colleagues to the same practice.

3. Recommendations

1. There is a need for an on-going partnership to be formed with the few main local, i.e. Vale of Evesham, employers who are employing large numbers of overseas migrant workers to better understand how many they employ, their patterns of employment throughout the year, and whether the overall employment trend is an increasing one. Information on overseas nationals NI allocations should also be obtained from DWP, and WRS data from the Home Office, on a regular basis as a method of monitoring the number of overseas workers registering to work in the Wychavon district area.
2. There is a need to better determine the demand being placed on the local housing stock by the rising numbers of overseas migrant workers residing in or near Evesham, to judge whether possible housing shortages are likely to occur in the future. The housing strategy team should work with the main employers of migrant workers to better estimate the available employer housing stock and the number of migrants this houses, as well as how many are housed through other means.
3. Key information on gangmaster legislation should be circulated to all local agricultural and food processing employers, and where possible to known employment agencies (gangmasters) working for local employers, to ensure that labour users and labour providers are aware of their new responsibilities and remain compliant with the new legislation, and with imposed customer trading requirements.
4. Evesham College, the main provider of ESOL provision, in partnership with Pershore College, which runs the Worcestershire Rural Hub³, should work collaboratively to create employer interest in ESOL provision delivered more widely within the work-place. Given the significant increase in ESOL demand this should also be raised as an issue with the local Learning and Skills Council to ensure there is adequate funding to support this area of learning need.
5. To work with the local Citizens Advice Bureau and JobcentrePlus to provide data to the council that relates specifically to migrant workers.
6. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have published the leaflet 'Your health, your safety: A guide for workers', that provides information about safety rights at work, the level of safety training workers should expect from their employers, and who they should complain to if they believe their safety is being compromised by poor workplace practices. Copies of this leaflet can be accessed on the TUC website, www.tuc.org.uk, and have been translated into 19 different languages. The district council, working in partnership with the PCT, should access available information and expertise through these organisations, and

³ The Worcestershire Rural Hub brings farmers together to highlight and find planned solutions to their business issues.

then devise a co-ordinated way of providing this readily available information, as well as information relating to healthcare access, to migrant workers and their employers.

7. The district council should take the lead in contacting other authorities that are facing similar issues in relation to an influx of migrant workers who have undertaken research work to understand the issues. The report authors are aware of three such areas, Wrexham, the Breckland area of Norfolk and West Norfolk. Information on similarity of issues and approaches being taken in other areas will aid local planning.
8. Create a collaborative in the Vale of Evesham between the NHS, the local authorities and employers' organisations to develop a patient-centred information system for migrant workers to enable their effective and appropriate use of and access to local healthcare services; and to provide support for healthcare professionals in providing such care.
9. Ensure that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Local Unit of the Health Protection Agency has an opportunity to review this report for any implications it may have for infection control and health and safety procedures in the horticulture and food processing sectors.