



Supporting community cohesion in rural England

The benefits and the challenges of migrant workers in rural areas and recommendations for action

Introduction

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has the following three roles:

- Listening to and representing the views of rural communities
- Giving expert advice
- Acting as an independent watchdog.

Our job is to provide independent advice to government and others to make sure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England.

We note that there are some aspects of the recent phenomenon of migrant workers coming to the United Kingdom that are particularly prevalent to parts of rural England¹.

These include:

- There is a higher *concentration* of migrant workers proportionate to the local population in certain rural areas (such as Lincolnshire, the Wash, Yorkshire and Herefordshire) than is the case in most urban areas.
- In these rural areas migrant workers can also be a significant proportion of the overall workforce.
- The arrival pattern of migrant workers in rural areas is more seasonal than in urban areas.
- Many of the rural communities affected have little experience of migration. Similarly, the providers of local public services in these areas often have comparatively little experience of, and capacity for, responding to the service delivery and other challenges posed.

The CRC recognises and welcomes the contribution that migrant workers make to local rural economies and communities. However, we are also aware of the local impacts that migrant workers can have on rural society. We are also aware that migrant workers are

not always treated fairly by employers nor by society more widely.

This paper addresses these impacts and makes recommendations for action. Our recommendations try and focus on the *rural* aspects of the migrant worker phenomenon, although many of these issues are shared across the country.

Recommendations for action - Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships

All service providers at the local level need to continue to provide high quality services to all sectors of their communities, incomers as well as more established residents. We recommend that LSPs in the areas most affected review all relevant plans and strategies and budgets to make sure that this happens, including their Local Area Agreements, local housing plans, health plans, education and training plans and local development and economic regeneration plans. Wherever this makes sense, they need to do this in partnership with each other, including joining up delivery and budgets.

Service providers may also need to review internal training and development strategies to help ensure that their own staff and those working on their behalf have the right knowledge and skills to help meet the needs of migrant worker communities along with other sectors of their communities.

Service providers also need to continue to learn from examples of good practice in service delivery from across the country. This includes the programme of good practice learning on 'migration' being managed for the Department of Communities and Local Government by the Improvement and Development Agency.

Recommendations for action - Regional Government

The CRC recommends that regional government organisations commit to reviewing their strategies and delivery to help meet the needs of migrant workers and locals alike.

RDAs should ensure that the Regional Economic Strategies recognise the contribution of migrant workers to regional economies and set out policies and good practices to maximise the contributions migrant workers can make to regional economies and societies more widely.

There may also be benefit in RDAs, working in partnership with others, undertaking mapping of training provision for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in their regions and looking at the location, content, timing and access to courses to meet the needs of rural, and other, migrant workers and their employers. RDAs may also want to undertake economic risk analysis to local economies from any sudden disruptions to the supply of migrant labour, and to put in hand contingency planning if this is considered necessary.

Recommendations for action - Central Government

There is evidence that resource allocations from central government to support public services are failing to reflect the spending pressures caused by significant numbers of migrant workers entering urban and rural areas in recent yearsⁱⁱ. Local Government Association Chairman, Lord Bruce-Lockhart, has stated:

“Councils are finding it difficult to provide services to growing populations that are not recognised by government statistics. If funding is not provided to cope with migration the ultimate consequence will be a deterioration in services”ⁱⁱⁱ.

These services include translation services, local authority services, education, training, police, health and maternity services and also advice and support services provided by the churches^{iv} and by the voluntary and community sectors^v.

It is widely accepted that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year estimates (on which many resource allocation decisions are based) significantly understate the number of migrants within different district areas^{vi}. This means that public service providers do not receive the necessary support from central Government to cover the costs of service adjustments and provision needed.

Tax revenues coming from migrant workers are generally accruing to central government, rather than to local government (through income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT and also through corporation tax).

We strongly urge central government to review and adjust resource allocations supporting locally delivered public services to reflect the cost pressures being faced.

This should follow on from reforms that the ONS is currently researching and implementing in its collection of population estimates^{vii}.

Until such a review is completed, the Government should firstly 'top up', on a temporary basis, existing budgets allocated to service providers and secondly, it should then 'top slice' these budgets to create a temporary and adequate fund. This fund should be used to help support local services in the localities most affected. This will require consultation with the Local Government Association and other interests to determine the size and management of such a fund.

Whilst the cost of providing English language courses is not a distinctly rural issue, we feel that recent reports by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Audit Commission^{viii} made a series of strong recommendations, which we would advise the Government and others to respond to positively. There are some distinctly rural *aspects* to this issue, mainly surrounding the additional difficulties migrant workers in rural areas may have in accessing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses in terms of distance and time and modes of transport.

We are aware that the DfES has been responding to these concerns. It is important that National ESOL Forum, funded by the DfES, continues to monitor the position on ESOL provision, particularly the rural aspects mentioned above.

The CRC has advised the Government's Commission on Integration & Cohesion, which will be reporting this summer, to include in its analysis and recommendations the situation and needs of rural communities, including the position of migrant workers. Similarly, in any further work by the Low Pay Commission into the operation of the National Minimum Wage we urge that attention is paid to any rural aspects of the labour market and minimum wage levels. We suggest that Defra consider the remit of the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority. At present its operations are limited largely to agriculture. Yet gangmasters also supply labour to other significant industries in rural (and other) areas, such as tourism and hospitality, care homes and hospitals.

Recommendations for action – Inspectorates

Building on its recent 'Crossing border' study on migrant workers we suggest that the Audit Commission now consider how migration flows should be addressed within new Comprehensive Area Assessments. Whilst this is not specifically a rural issue, this new

area assessment regime will be as important to the inspection of public services in rural areas as elsewhere. This is a matter that the Local Government Association has recently raised^{ix}.

Recommendations for action - Private sector

We urge private sector organisations, including their representative bodies, such as the Association of Labour Providers (ALP), to continue to build on the good practice that exists. This includes signing and adhering to voluntary codes of practice on employing migrant labour (such as that developed by the ALP and by Business in the Community in Northern Ireland). It also includes being prepared to contribute to the costs of providing ESOL courses for employees.

Recommendations for action – Representation

Whilst this is not a distinctly rural issue, we do believe that there are questions about the representation and voice of migrant workers within our society that need to be addressed. At present their issues, needs and concerns are seldom articulated and represented by migrant workers themselves, rather than by others on their behalf. It might be that this is an issue that can be addressed in the recommendations from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

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ⁱ See: 'A8 migrant workers in rural areas – a briefing paper' (CRC, 2007) available from www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk

ⁱⁱ See for example evidence presented at a national seminar on migration hosted by Slough Borough Council in July 2006. Available from www.slough.gov.uk.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quote from speech at the national seminar on migration hosted by Slough Borough Council in July 2006.

^{iv} The churches have been at the forefront of responding to some of the more challenging consequences of rural migration. See, for example, the article on the work of the Churches in Lincolnshire by David de Verny, the Ecumenical Chaplain with New Arrival Communities in Southeast Lincolnshire: <http://www.crc-online.org.uk/downloads/Migrant%20Workers%20paper%20David%20de%20Verny.doc>

^v For example the advice work provided by many Citizens Advice Bureaux and the project work of a number of rural community councils.

^{vi} For example, Immigration Minister, Liam Byrne recent stated: "The Office of National Statistics acknowledges that the figures on which key local financing decisions are pre-based require more work. Getting this right must almost be a precondition for our policy in the future" (from 'rethinking immigration and integration' the Policy Network 2007). The Audit Commission in 'Crossing Borders: Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers' (2007) stated "accurate and detailed data on all migration is limited". Last year the Chairman of the Statistics Commission, Professor David Rhind, stated "The current measurement of migration into and around the country is widely regarded as unsatisfactory".

^{vii} The ONS, together with an inter-departmental task force it established last year into international migration statistics, is looking to introduce a number of changes from 2007 onwards.

^{viii} NIACE (2006) 'More than a language' and Audit Commission (2007), 'Crossing Borders: Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers'

^{ix} See the LGA's submission of views to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, available at:

http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Briefing/2007-01-31_cohesion_response.pdf