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## ‘New Migrants’ in the North East Workforce

Between 2013-16 research examined the position and experiences of ‘new migrants’ in the workforce in North East England, carried out by Nottingham Trent and Northumbria Universities, the International Community Organisation of Sunderland and the Regional Refugee Forum North East. Methods included a survey completed by 402 migrants, in-depth interviews with 40 migrants, interviews with 12 key stakeholders, and a policy seminar attended by more than 50 people from a range of backgrounds.

Our primary focus was refugees who arrived since Dispersal began in 1999 and migrant workers from the countries in Eastern Europe that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 – one quarter of survey respondents were refugees with some form of leave to remain, one quarter were asylum seekers, one quarter were EU migrants, and the remainder came from a variety of different immigration routes. The most frequent countries of origin were Romania (15%), Sudan (12%), Poland (11%) and Bangladesh (7%).

Key findings include:

- 54% of survey respondents who had a legal right to work said they had not had any paid employment or self-employment in the UK in the last year. For people who had been through the asylum system and had secured leave to remain the figure was 65%, while for some groups of migrants it was much lower, for example 26% for Polish migrants. This compares to 32% of the general population in the region not in work.
- 89% of those currently out of work said they would like a paid job – those who said they wouldn’t cited reasons including caring responsibilities in the home, studying full time and poor health.
- Respondents who had paid work in the UK were disproportionately concentrated in ‘lower skilled’ roles, and in sectors including catering and hospitality, manufacturing and social care.
- 23% of UK jobs reported by our respondents were self-employed, compared to 11% for the general North East workforce, and of those not self-employed 57% said they would like to be. Many of these ‘self-employed’ jobs were in low paid and low status roles, representing precarious forms of work.
- Low pay was reported across all parts of our sample. 40% of jobs paid less than £6.50/hour, and only 15% paid £10/hour or more. 73% of jobs paid below the 2015 Living Wage of £7.85/hour.
- 22% of respondents reported having applications for state welfare refused, 33% reported delayed payments, and 20% felt they had been discriminated against by staff dealing with their payments.
- The data indicates a mutually beneficial relationship between English proficiency and employment, with employment providing an important route to improving confidence in English and confidence in English helping to find any, or a more preferable, job.
- Immigration status was a direct barrier to employment for those prohibited from working. In other cases immigration status had an indirect impact, for example a limited period of leave to remain leading to restricted access to training and student loans, making it more difficult to plan ahead, or contributing to a loss of confidence and skills.
- Difficulties gaining recognition for qualifications, skills and experience gained outside the UK was suggested as an important and frequent barrier to migrants accessing employment, and difficulties were also reported accessing training and education in the UK.
- Limited employment opportunities, especially in higher paid and higher skilled work, is a general characteristic of the North East region, but combines with other factors in a unique way for migrants and particular groups of migrants.
- Childcare is an issue that cuts across all groups and affects the ability to secure employment, particularly when families are headed by single parents who have to juggle multiple responsibilities and may lack social networks able to provide informal care.
- Discrimination was not identified in the survey as a barrier to accessing work but it was reported in in-depth interviews. Significant levels of in-work discrimination were also reported – in some cases from employers and in others from colleagues or members of the public encountered at work. Respondents also talked about the workplace acting as an important site of support, solidarity and integration.
- Respondents employed a variety of individual strategies in response to difficulties they encountered accessing work or at work, but collective responses were rarer. 11% reported belonging to a trade union in the UK, compared to 33% of North East employees overall. However, in-depth interviews identified cases of voluntary sector organisations playing trade union-type roles.
- 54% of survey respondents said they were not aware of organisations that could provide employment or self-employment advice, and this was highest for EU10 migrants at 65%.

The full report is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/NEmigrants> and further materials including summaries of findings translated into French, Arabic, Farsi, Tigrinya, Polish and Romanian will be available at a new website <http://www.migrantworkinglives.org> due for launch in January 2017. A small number of printed copies of the report are also available on request by emailing [tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk).

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