



“Migration – Multicultural South Holland” South Holland CAB – Report on the effect on the CAB service of a large influx of non-UK clients, 2006-7

The Work of CAB

As a Citizens Advice Bureau, we offer free, confidential, impartial advice, throughout the district of South Holland and further afield (telephone and e-mail advice), on a wide range of subjects, including welfare benefits, debt, employment, housing, immigration (level one only), family issues, legal issues, etc. We offer specialist advice in debt and welfare benefits and Shelter provides a fortnightly surgery in our offices for specialist housing advice. Apart from our advice service, we also seek to influence policy makers by feeding back issues of unfairness, discrimination, etc, to policy makers, via our national association.

Our service is provided daily in Spalding and twice a week at Holbeach and Long Sutton. We also give advice by telephone, as part of a countywide telephone advice service, covered by seven Lincolnshire bureaux. We give e-mail advice and also provide home visits where necessary and as funding allows.

Our staff, made up largely of volunteers, is dealing with migrant worker issues on a daily basis, offering advice and advocacy. We regularly write letters or make telephone calls on behalf of migrant workers, to employers, landlords, etc.

Nations represented within South Holland

*Afghanistan
Algeria
Austria
Bangladesh
Bhutan
Bolivia
Brazil
Bulgaria
China
Cuba
Czech Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
Estonia
France
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Hungary
India
Iraq
Italy
(continued)*

We work closely with South Holland District Council and the manager represents the bureau on the Migrant Worker Steering Group and Integration Lincolnshire.

The Citizens Advice Bureau is usually the first port of call for migrant workers – some are even referred by their respective embassies. Within the past year South Holland CAB has seen a significant increase in the numbers of clients from different ethnic backgrounds. These people have come from countries as diverse as Bhutan, Portugal and New Zealand, and all of these have had an impact upon the Bureau and its staff.

- Clients from 47 countries visited South Holland CAB in the last year – this in a district of just 79,425 inhabitants. Some reports have put the total number of migrants living within South Holland at 10-12,000.¹
- A further 5 groups were identified, though they were not country specific, such as ‘Africa’ or ‘Non-EU European country’.
- 26% of migrant clients were from Portugal, 20% came from Poland.

¹ University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research; Learning Skills Council; “EU Migrant Workers in Southern Lincolnshire”.

Variations in nationalities from quarter to quarter are also evident. Those from Portugal initially formed the clear majority of clients within the first quarter (April to June); however, significantly, during the final quarter from January to March 2007, Polish migrants increased in number to become the overall majority. Will the majority in 2007-8 be Romanian and Bulgarian? The overall trend for South Holland CAB is an increasing number of migrants as a percentage of total clients, between 12% and 17% over the last year

Migrant Worker Concerns

The bureau is involved with migrant workers on a daily basis as it appears to be the main organisation providing free advice. The issues that migrant workers present seldom exist in isolation. Issues are inter-related and often form part of a wider, more complex set of problems.

The most common enquiries related to employment, 21% of clients had a problem associated with this issue, whilst the second largest enquiry related to benefits (20%). Due to the needs of local employers within the agricultural sector, as well as in food processing factories, many migrants have been attracted to the area. The main issues involve employment, benefits and housing:

- **Employment issues**

Involves problems with employers, employment agencies and gangmasters, such as:

- Refusals to honour holiday and sickness entitlements, statutory maternity pay and statutory wage rates
- Inadequate information on migrant workers' rights, entitlements and obligations
- Illegal deductions from wages to cover costs of housing, transport and training
- Failure to honour commitments regarding skills development and training
- Provision of poor quality working conditions and standards
- Unfair dismissal
- Discrimination – denial to migrant workers of small privileges enjoyed at work by local workers.

There are sometimes problems with fellow workers including harassment and racially prejudiced behaviour.

The bureau expected to use the newly formed Gangmasters' Licensing Authority on a regular basis. However, migrant workers often refuse to take further action on these issues for fear of losing their jobs and their accommodation, which is very often provided by the same agency. This is a source of frustration for CAB advisers and, in addition, we also come across indigenous workers, some of whom are working for less than the



minimum wage because, they tell us, if they make a fuss there are 10 Polish workers waiting in line for their jobs.

Most enquiries stayed at relatively constant levels throughout the year, though seasonal variations are evident. This can be seen with employment. During the month of August employment issues rose from a mean value of 10 in July to a yearly high of 24 – such a jump may well have been related to enquiries associated with holiday pay (many migrants are simply not paid the money that they are entitled to).

It has been estimated that migrant workers' value to local employers is up to £38m per annum in South Holland and Boston.²

- **Benefits**

Problems include:

- The many complex rules and regulations for different nationalities, causing difficulties in understanding the range of benefits available and the procedures for claiming;
- Employers' lack of understanding – often failing to make tax credit payments because they don't understand them or don't want to be bothered;
- Procedural delays and administrative errors.

One area with the biggest rise over the period was housing, from 1 enquiry in April to 13 in November. This may also keep track with changes in the season, such as a need within the autumn and winter months to have adequate heating or issues associated with landlords, as the majority of migrants rent property

- **Housing**

As the provision of accommodation is often part of the 'package' offered to migrant workers by agencies and employers, housing problems figure prominently:

- Tied housing means that loss of job can result in loss of housing;
- Seasonal work and lack of continuous employment can lead to rent arrears and debt, threat of eviction;
- Accommodation often poor quality, sub-standard and overcrowded;
- Often no tenancy agreement;
- Rent often high and is deducted from wages.
- Difficulty in accessing private lets or owner-occupation because of high rents, deposits needed in advance, need for references.



Social Policy

Apart from the CAB's advice service, we also seek to influence policy makers by feeding back issues of unfairness, discrimination and injustice to policy makers, via our national association. Within the past year there has been a large increase in the number of cases referred as social policy issues – thus giving an added impetus to the work that is carried out.

- 18.9% of all clients seen for employment issues also had social policy issues - a far higher percentage than benefits, just 2.1% or 2 out of 93 cases.

² East Midlands Development Agency; "Seasonal and Casual Working in South Lincolnshire".

A clear conclusion can be drawn from this – migrant workers may be subject to a greater degree of exploitation by unscrupulous employers. One social policy case study is illustrated below in case study 1.0. This study, as with many others, relates to agency work, which forms the majority of employment related social policy issues.

Migrants visit the bureau with a variety of problems; no one issue takes precedence for any particular nationality. However, those from more developed EU nations, such as France and Austria, tended to have problems associated with relationships, tax or debt – which can be seen as more quality of life issues. Those from the less developed³ EU nations, such as Poland, Slovenia and Lithuania, as well as those from less developed nations around the world, tended to enquire about employment, housing, immigration and benefits, thus reflecting the relative importance of issues within the lives of CAB clients.

Lost in Translation

A significant impact upon the bureau relates to the ability of a client to speak English.

- 78% of migrant clients can speak English, 14% speak 'a little', 8% cannot speak English at all.

It is worth stipulating that, although some may say that they speak English or speak 'a little' English, this varies from a bare minimum to the ability to construct

sentences, which are often broken. This, overall, means that 22% of clients will have problems with communication, and many of the remaining 78% will be very slow speakers – thus putting an added strain upon advisers' time – this is highlighted in case study 2.0. Most cases involving foreign nationals take longer on average than a case involving an indigenous person. Even when English is spoken, understanding is reduced dramatically across the translation barrier. This means that the Bureau has to rely in many cases upon 'affordable' translators, when they are available. South Holland CAB currently has access to translators that cater for Italian, French, Brazilian, Polish, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese. However, the use of a translator often involves additional transport costs – this cost is unavoidable if the bureau is to give good quality advice to the client. As so many have insufficient command of English, this leads to insufficient understanding of procedures, practices and legalities eg motor insurance, MOT, etc.

Case Study 1.0 – 'Abominable agencies exploit migrant workers'

"A Single Latvian female, aged 42 years old was previously employed by a local agency. When the client left in May 2006 she was still owed pay for 31 hours of work over the previous 3 month period. The agency continually told the client that they would contact her shortly, yet for 3 months she heard nothing – her phone calls were not followed up and her letters were not answered."

This case, sadly, is by no means unique and the impacts are all too common. The client, like nearly all other migrant workers, was on low wages. When this nominal sum was not received it caused financial hardship for her and her family. No worker can afford to lose money, yet agencies seem to be trying to avoid paying clients all too often.

Case Study 2.0

In November a Polish client came to CAB seeking assistance with some benefit application forms, for Child and Working Tax Credits. Due to the client's level of English a translator was required to assist the adviser. The total time taken was 1 hour 30 minutes – about 40 minutes longer than an equivalent case involving an English speaking client.

³ Less developed, for the purpose of this report, is defined as having a HDI (Human Development Index) score of less than 0.89, which allows for an adequate socio-economic separation of nations within Europe.

Communication issues often pose other problems for advisers: –

- Does the client really understand the nature of the problem with which s/he needs help?; and
- Does the client fully grasp the advice being given and its implications?

These problems pose significant issues for the management of the CAB service – the availability of translators in a variety of languages and the cost of these services, as well as the time constraints on an ever increasing client base. Advisers can often feel frustrated because they feel inadequate in giving the help that is needed, which gives rise to a lack of job satisfaction.

Community/integration issues

The arrival of significant numbers of foreign nationals in rural communities, such as South Holland, can be a source of tension and conflict with the local indigenous population. This can also be evidenced in CABx where the waiting rooms can be overcrowded due to high numbers of migrant workers seeking advice. These tensions are increased when migrant workers agree to work for less than the minimum wage or in less favourable conditions, thus giving local people no choice but to do the same or lose their jobs. Racism is often considered as just an urban issue, but it is a significant problem in rural areas, as we are now beginning to see in South Holland.

The CAB service is for all sections of the community and we are doing our best to improve links with the various communities. However, there is a work-dominated existence for most migrant workers, which hinders social interaction with local communities. The CAB manager has attended a meeting of the local Latvian group which meets at SHDC, where she explained about the various benefits available. Meetings such as this help to make foreign nationals feel more welcome and to know there is somewhere to go for help, but the bureau has to ensure that it does not build up expectations which can't be satisfied, with the many demands on its services.

The impact upon the Citizens Advice Bureau should not be underestimated. The increasing numbers of migrants has placed added pressure upon the Bureau and its staff, with new issues being brought to light in the fields of immigration, employment and the benefit system. Larger numbers of clients with poor levels of English result in longer consultation times and, consequently, increased waiting times for other service users. Unfortunately, the bureau is looking at a deficit budget for the coming year, which does not give any scope for development. The ever-increasing number of service users is a huge cause for concern for the staff and Trustee board, with everyone working at full capacity which gives no room for expansion.

Report compiled by Diane Clay, CAB Manager

(with input by Laurie Drake, and statistics provided by Muriel Good (both volunteers at South Holland Citizens Advice Bureau)

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