

The impacts of new A8 migration in Leeds

New arrivals from Eastern Europe have made regular headlines in the popular press in recent times, not only for the unprecedented magnitude of the flows involved, but also for their impacts – positive and negative – on regions and localities up and down the country. This paper reports on a recently completed research project aimed at finding out more about A8 migrants in Leeds.



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In an era characterised by increasing global mobility and economic migration (King, 1995), the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 saw rights to reside and work in the UK extended to Accession 8 (A8) nationals for the first time. A8 members include Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The expansion of the EU has triggered both a growth and increased diversity of migration flows into Britain. Consequently immigration as a process has entered both public and political discourses and is frequently associated with debates around community cohesion (Zetter *et al.*, 2006).

The impact of this new wave of migration is felt most deeply at the local level; local authorities and city councils in areas like Leeds are often faced with the reality of ensuring 'good' neighbourhood and community relations in the face of increased migration in localities already characterised by multi-ethnic communities. The challenge of meeting the welfare needs of these new migrant communities, with little or no additional resources, is an issue of prime importance to local authorities.

This objective is made more difficult by the absence or inadequacy of existing data on the scale, character, needs and experiences of A8 migrant communities. No definitive data on the number of A8 migrants living and working in a particular area exists.

In 2006-07, over 23,000 new national insurance (NI) numbers (i.e. 9 per cent of the total A8 registrations in England), were registered to A8 nationals in the Yorkshire and Humber region and Leeds was ranked eighth in the national list of local authorities in England to receive A8 NI registrations (the only non-London local authorities to receive more A8 NI registrations than Leeds were Birmingham and Manchester).

Research project

These factors led Leeds City Council's Regeneration Service to commission a research project as part of a wide-ranging strategy for developing a better understanding of the situation of new A8 migrant communities living in Leeds.

The project was based around the need to gather information on the experiences and needs of A8 migrants, the implications for service provision and the impact upon Leeds communities. The overall aim of the research, therefore, was to provide recommendations to service providers within the city.

The New A8 Migrant Communities project was a qualitative study carried out in Leeds. The study undertook semi-structured interviews and focus groups (FG) with 89 participants. This included: 34 new A8 migrants from Polish, Slovak and Roma communities; 24 members of established communities in Leeds comprised of White, Pakistani and West Indian residents; 10 key informants (I) drawn from employers, employment agencies, trade unions and community workers and 21 service providers (SP) directly involved in the provision and/or administration of local public services. All fieldwork was conducted in January and February 2008. Interpreters were present at interviews and focus groups as required.

Project findings are grouped under four key themes; migration patterns, work, neighbourhood and community relations and welfare service provision. We will briefly report on these here and then conclude with key recommendations.

Migration patterns

The key motivation for migration for participants was the desire to enter the UK for paid work which is enhanced by the favourable disparity in wage earning potential between countries of origin and the UK.

Importantly, alongside a desire to work, the Roma migrants interviewed saw migration to the UK as a chance to escape persecution and discrimination in their country of origin.

"It is better here because in my country there are no jobs and the racism in Slovakia is bad. In Slovakia they know we are gypsies and they don't like us."
(Roma 3 Son)

The population of A8 migrants resident in Leeds is characterised by diversity, both in terms of length of stay which varied from a few months to permanent settlement, and type of migrant. Alongside the more stereotypical young single male migrant, we found evidence of couples migrating together and family joiners.

"It fluctuates. It's different. Like I said before with the students they very often come for just three months and go back and the next summer they come again. There is a certain percentage of people who have stayed and are planning to stay... How many? Probably 50 per cent."

(KI 1 recruitment agency)

"Initially it was singles, a high proportion of males to females, 18-25 year olds. But now a lot more families are coming in, family joiners, who have started to settle down." (SP 2 asylum/migration services)

Work

The four companies that participated in the study operated in sectors in which a high concentration of new migrant workers (NMW) are employed, i.e. the hotel/leisure sector, warehousing and manufacturing/processing. NMW were employed in a range of largely low-skilled, manual jobs, e.g. warehouse operatives, packers, porters, bar and hotel workers and chefs.

All the employers interviewed believed it would be problematic if A8 migration ceased. For example,

"We would be very much in dire straits. In the kitchen, in housekeeping and in conference. ... The whole of my team, we've got a team of seven kitchen porters and five of them are Polish. Very reliant on them."
(KI 2 hotel/hospitality company)

The NMW in this study were taking up previously unfilled vacancies in local paid labour markets. In this sense, they cannot be considered to be taking jobs away from local people.

We found some evidence of hierarchies in the new migrant labour force. Some Polish workers were employed across a wider range of labour market sectors (including high skilled and non-manual work) but this was not the case for Slovakian and Roma workers.

For example, Slovakian participants explained how they believed that they were employed in the worst jobs in their factory, and both Slovakian and Roma participants discussed feeling disadvantaged compared to Poles and other NMW who had specialist employment agencies and good support networks. These hierarchies, however, also relate to proficiency in English language and recognition of qualifications.

With regard to relationships at work, examples of positive mixing in the workplace were identified. However, it is also true to say that there was reluctance amongst both A8 NMW and established workers to mix and integrate within the workplace.

"You get the pockets of indigenous population who won't talk to people with a different accent. You've got Polish people who just want to come to work and not integrate. And then you've got, and its getting bigger, where you know it's a classic example when one of my security guards says, I can say twelve words in Polish now. That sort of thing. But there is still going to be the core. And in fairness its not, there's no hostility, there's just lack of integration. But you see that blurring more and more." (KI 4 logistics/distribution company)

Neighbourhood and community relations

The research provides evidence of positive encounters between newly arrived A8 migrants and more established Leeds communities. Some participants in both the Slovak and Polish groups spoke of having good neighbours. Others spoke of activities for their children providing spaces for interaction with established community members.

In general, the members of the West Indian focus group were more positively disposed towards the arrival of A8 NMW in their neighbourhood than their counterparts in the Pakistani or White focus groups. For example;

"You make yourself more like available to help them because of the experience that you had when you came here. Because of the difficulty that we had when we arrived in the early 50s ... if we see a strange face you try to make that face feel welcome." (FG 7 West Indian)

Other respondents were more critical of the impact that A8 migration has had on their communities. Genuine concerns were raised around competing for jobs, finite welfare resources and A8 migrants receiving preferential treatment. These concerns should be addressed through breaking down assumptions about NMW and opening up opportunities for interaction between established and new migrant communities.

It needs to be recognised that members of all three NMW communities interviewed spoke of experiencing prejudice and harassment from certain sections of the established communities, particularly anti-social youths.

"The problem is with the teenagers. ... My friend had a brick through his window, just missed his daughter."
(Roma 1 Brother)

"The only problem is teenagers. Youth. They gather together on the street. ... The other people are fine, but the youngsters between 10 and 16 are actually worst."
(FG 2 Polish men)

Welfare service provision

The research illustrates that A8 NMW have had some impact on welfare service provision in Leeds but this varies across sectors. In line with other research (see, for example, ICoCo, 2007; Robinson, 2007), we found that NMW had very little impact in relation to social housing. However, increased demand is evident in respect of maternity services and school places.

"We've got between 20-25 per cent of children from Eastern European countries over the last year, the school has grown from a predicted 320 to 420 over the last year." (SP 3 school)

There is evidence that some members of established Leeds communities believe that NMW get preferential treatment in respect of certain welfare services. This can cause resentment between established communities and their more recently arrived neighbours.

"There is a perception that if you come in as an immigrant group, and the A8s are a big group at present, then you will get preferential treatment for services ... This causes a lot of conflict. If the son/daughter of someone who has lived on an estate for 20 years can't access a property it breeds resentment and frustration." (SP 1 social housing provider)

Discussions with established Leeds residents further illustrated how access to, and the allocation of, at times, scarce welfare resources can breed resentment among established residents who perceived their needs to be secondary to those of new arrivals.

"All the tax that people have paid from this country. ... That will only hold so much won't it [pointing to cup]. If you start trying to take more and more out of it, you can't because its not there. Why should we support all these people, when we've got plenty of our own people to support." (FG 6 white residents)

Key recommendations

Firstly, significant gaps in data collection exist which hinder the ability of service providers to understand the changing makeup of their populations and meet new community needs. As a priority, a range of agencies, including Leeds City Council (LCC), should work together to develop a systematic and open approach to gathering and sharing data on new A8 migrants across services.

Secondly, this study found that some welfare services were being impacted by increases in A8 migrants, notably education and maternity services. In light of such impacts, funding structures need to be re-examined to take account of the gaps in resources. For example, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) funding could usefully reflect these emerging needs.

Thirdly, associated with this, A8 migrants have triggered additional costs for service providers in respect of translation and interpreting services. Whilst we recognise that the stated long-term goal of national policy is to improve English language proficiency among migrant groups, in the short-term at least, additional funding should be provided to meet the needs of new A8 migrants for accessible information. Simultaneously, more provision for accessible and affordable English classes needs to be made including ESOL for work.

Fourthly, to ensure good community relations, service providers need to develop a better understanding of the diverse perspectives present amongst the established communities in Leeds around the impact of new A8 migrants on their neighbourhoods. For example, tensions between A8 migrants and established communities are likely to emerge if more established residents perceive themselves as competing with the newly arrived A8 migrants for jobs and local resources/services. Alongside developing a myth-busting campaign, interventions to create shared spaces for greater interaction are important ways of achieving this aim.

Finally, the somewhat common experience amongst new A8 migrants of exposure to harassment and prejudice from certain sections of the established communities, particularly from anti-social youths, needs to be recognised and appropriate action taken by relevant agencies.

Conclusions

The sudden, unexpected arrival of significant numbers of A8 migrants in UK cities following the expansion of the EU in 2004 took central government by surprise and presented local authorities with new challenges. A8 migration has led to an overall growth in economic migrants in the UK and also increased the diversity of resident migrant populations.

A8 migration is one element within a wider and more complex pattern of migration into the UK, that includes for example, new commonwealth migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

It should be recognised that many of the impacts of these new migrant populations, in respect of service provision and community cohesion, are felt most keenly within particular, local communities that are often relatively disadvantaged when compared to more affluent areas of the city.

The allocation of additional resources to the specific localities where new migrant populations are present will be required if community cohesion is to genuinely flourish.

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