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**Employer and labour provider perspectives on
Eastern European migration to the UK**

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ABSTRACT

In a relatively short space of time Eastern Europe has become one of the principal source regions of migrants to the UK and citizens from these states now constitute some of the largest foreign-born populations in the country. This paper focuses on these trends from the perspective of UK employers and labour providers. Three main topics are covered; 1. The function served by East European migrant labour in the UK labour market and how this has changed over time. 2. Employers' motivations for engaging with East European migrant labour. 3. The migration channels that shape how East European labour is sourced by UK employers. The findings demonstrate how the perspectives and practices of employers and recruiters can play an important role in influencing how East European labour migration flows to the UK are represented and produced.

KEYWORDS

A8 migration; labour migration; migrant labour channels; recruitment practices.

EDITORIAL NOTE

David McCollum and Prof. Allan Findlay are members of the ESRC Research Centre for Population Change (CPC), University of Dundee. Their research interests centre on migration issues and their CPC project explores the labour market aspects of East-Central European migration to the UK.

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EMPLOYER AND LABOUR PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES ON EASTERN EUROPEAN MIGRATION TO THE UK

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a relatively short space of time Eastern Europe has become one of the principal source regions of migrants to the UK. Citizens from these states now constitute some of the largest foreign-born populations in the country. Since their accession to the European Union in May 2004 citizens from Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia have had the right to participate in the UK labour market. Migrants from these eight accession (A8) countries were asked to register under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) if they wished to take up employment in the UK for a period of one month or longer.

The 2004 Accession Treaty allowed ‘transitional measures’ to be applied to new countries joining the EU for a maximum of up to seven years. As the A8 states joined the EU on 1st May 2004, these measures expired on 30th April 2011. For this reason individuals from the A8 countries will no longer have to register under the WRS and will have the same rights and entitlements in the UK as people from other member states. Most member states set down tougher constraints on the rights of A8 citizens to participate in their labour markets than the UK, who along with Ireland and Sweden were the only countries to allow full access in 2004. Restrictions in other EU states also expired in April 2011, meaning that A8 migrants may now choose to move to more geographically proximate countries such as Germany, Austria or the Netherlands rather than the UK. The ending of the seven year transitions period across Europe means that the research reported in this paper is particularly timely, since it comes at the end of the transitional period and at a moment of potentially significant change in labour market circumstances.

The overall aim of the research reported in this paper is to investigate labour user and provider perspectives on Eastern European migration to the UK. Three key research questions are addressed in this paper.

- 1: What function does A8 migrant labour play in the UK labour market and how has this evolved over time?
- 2: What are the motivations for using A8 migrant labour and what are the key benefits of engaging with this labour source?

3: What channels are responsible for shaping how A8 migrant labour is sourced in the UK labour market?

The ‘answers’ to the above questions are presented in the main body of this paper. These are derived from analysis of transcripts from 61 interviews with users and providers of Eastern European migrant labour. Before analysing these transcripts the context and methods used in the research are discussed in more detail.

2. PERSPECTIVES ON RECRUITING AND EMPLOYING LABOUR MIGRANTS

Recruitment and employment of labour migrants involves a range of knowledge practices which produce observable selectivity in who is recruited and from where, and for what purposes (Findlay *et al*, 2010; Kanbur and Rapoport, 2005). In contrast to the neo-classical literature which interprets labour migration as an equilibrating mechanism resolving uneven patterns of labour demand and supply (Chiswick, 2008), it can be argued that labour ‘shortages are socially, economically, culturally and politically constructed and that they need not exist’ (Geddes and Scott, 2010, 211). Many alternatives to the widespread use of migrant labour can be found such as employers offering higher wages to attract more local labour into work or the substitution of capital for labour. If it is accepted that the need for labour migrants is socially, culturally and economically constructed, then it becomes important to research the knowledge practices that underpin employers’ claims relating to their desire to recruit and employ migrant labour and to explore the social practices by which employers recruit and engage labour in production and service activities. As researchers we accept the constructivist premise. This is no way means rejecting our recognition of the material practices associated with labour market processes. For the purposes of this paper however our focus is on exploring the significance of economic, social and cultural constructions in understanding employer and labour provider perspectives on East European migration.

Ruhs and Anderson (2010) in their research on East European migrants in the UK have led the way in mapping some aspects of the cultural packaging of the ‘labour and skills needs’ that employers argue cannot be met from within the

domestic labour force. According to Ruhs and Anderson (2010) employers see migrants as more tolerant of undesirable employment conditions than domestic labour as well as holding a superior work-ethic in terms of putting significant effort into their job and monitoring their own performance without the need for continual employer surveillance. Migrants were also found to have better 'soft skills' in terms of customer care, team working and problem solving. Other research exists to support this discourse (Fife Partnership, 2007; Rolfe and Metcalfe, 2009; Green, 2007) but most research on East European workers in UK looks to other issues such as their transnational identity and issues around integration to UK society (Trevena, 2009; Cook *et al*, 2010; Metykova, 2010). This wider literature is not reviewed here. We focus instead on the research relating to employers' images of migrants. This points to the existence of some normative images of what constitutes the 'ideal' migrant worker and to a discourse around why Eastern European workers are desired relative to domestic labour. Researchers taking a cultural economy approach go further, suggesting that in some senses migrant workers are themselves produced by discourse. This takes place not only because employers seek to recruit workers that fit with their idealised image but also because some labour migrants self-regulate their actions to conform to perceived social norms (Mansfield, 2000). From this cultural economy perspective (Amin and Thrift, 2004), migrant workers are not only selected by employers to do certain types of work because of idealised images of their social and skill characteristics, but migrants self-regulate their own behaviour to conform to these characteristics.

Recruitment practices are located at the nexus between employer images of the ideal worker and the self-regulating action of migrants seeking to present themselves as best placed to take up the employment positions open to them. Geographical research on the topic not only investigates the practices that take place when employers or recruiters meet potential future employees, but also the practices that move workers over space from regions of origin to places of work. In this arena there is an established literature on recruitment agencies and international migration channels (Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Findlay and Li, 1998) which shows that channels of movement are not simply structured by the interests of international capital, but that there is a duality of structure involving the shaping of migration channels partly in response to the collective social actions of human agents (those seeking to move

and those wishing to prosper from promoting the business of international mobility). From a cultural economy perspective it can be anticipated that migration channels (and the role of recruitment agencies in relation to these channels) may change as the socially constructed needs for migrant labour alter and as the social practices associated with employing migrant labour evolve. Goss and Lindquist (1995) therefore argue that the practices of labour migration become institutionalised and that migration channels therefore can be thought of as social institutions. The nature of labour migration can thus be expected to be continually produced and reproduced by the social interactions of migrants, employers and recruitment agencies. In terms of the suggestion by Scott *et al* (2008) that East European migrants are represented in relation to idealised images of the ‘good worker’, it can therefore be anticipated that over time (for example during an economic recession) not only may the image of the good worker change, but how migrants and employers are brought together through the social institutions of migration channels and recruitment agencies will also evolve and adapt. This will produce changing geographies of labour mobility expressed not only in terms of patterning of migrant origins and destinations, but also in terms of the character of the migration flows and the employment practices associated with labour migration (Rogaly, 2008).

In terms of the three research questions listed above from which this paper set out, the research literature points to the opportunity to analyse the functions of East European migrants in the UK labour market as representing much more than so-called ‘labour market shortages’. Observed changes in the employment patterns of East Europeans reflect not only the changing spatial practices of employers and recruiters but also the fluidity of migration outcomes that one finds at the interface between human agency and systems of social production (Lefebvre, 1991). As a result, the motivations reported by employers for using East European workers can be seen as their socially constructed representations of the spaces of migration within the EU’s transnational social field (Vertovec, 2009). The channels responsible for shaping how East European labour is recruited to the UK will evolve not only because economic circumstances have changed during the course of the economic recession of 2008-10, but also because of the changing nature and representation of the social institution of migration channels.

The research described in this paper focuses on a specific aspect of East-Central European migration to the UK, that of employers and labour providers' perspectives of their experiences of engaging with this supply of labour. The following section aims to provide some context for the findings described in the report by setting out some of the key trends in A8 migration flows to the UK since 2004.

3. CONTEXT: RECENT MIGRATION TRENDS

Administrative data sources can provide a useful picture of A8 migration trends. Between May 2004 and March 2009 there were 927,870 approved Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) applications (Home Office, 2009) and 1,300,480 National Insurance Numbers were issued to migrants from A8 countries (DWP, 2010). Tables 1 and 2 below show figures for the top ten sending countries in terms of the volume of net migration to the UK 2005-2009 and the increase in the number of migrants over the same time period. Table 1 shows that Poland had by far the largest net migration of nationals to the UK, with 393,000 more Poles living in the UK in 2009 than in 2005. There were over four times as many Poles as Pakistanis, the next biggest source. In 2009 four of the top ten origins of migrants to the UK were A8 or A2 (Romania and Bulgaria) countries.

Country	Volume
1: Poland	393,000
2: Pakistan	89,000
3: India	81,000
4: Lithuania	46,000
5: Romania	38,000
6: Nigeria	31,000
7: Slovakia	28,000
8: China	25,000
9: Germany	24,000
10: Brazil	23,000

Table 1 Change in number of foreign nationals in UK, 2005-2009, (volumes)

Source: Derived from ONS 2010b (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/mig0210.pdf>)

Table 2 shows the countries which have had the largest percentage increase in the number of nationals living in the UK 2005-2009. The countries with the biggest growth have had very significant increases and are nearly all East-Central European

states which have recently joined the EU. For example, the number of Polish nationals living in the UK increased by 289% between 2005 and 2009 (136,000 to 529,000).

Country	Percentage increase
1: Poland	+289%
2: Romania	+253%
3: Cyprus	+200%
4: Bulgaria	+183%
5: Lithuania	+153%
6: Slovakia	+117%
7: Latvia	+117%
8: Brazil	+100%
9: Pakistan	+88%
10: Thailand	+83%

Table 2 Percentage change in number of foreign nationals in UK, 2005-2009, (percentage increase)

Source: Derived from ONS 2010b (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/mig0210.pdf>)

Despite well over a million migrants coming to the UK from the A8 states, it is estimated that around half have not remained here over the longer term (Blanchflower *et al*, 2007). Trends in A8 migration have changed over time, with large numbers coming following the accession and the annual net migration (immigrants minus emigrants) of A8 migrants to the UK peaking at 80,000 in 2007 (ONS, 2010a). However since then overall levels of in-migration from the A8 countries have dropped and out-migration has increased. Despite a decrease in net immigration from A8 countries, the UK is still gaining more A8 migrants than it is losing (ONS, 2010a) and it is estimated that at the beginning of 2009 migrants from these states made up 1.3% of the working age population (Dustmann *et al*, 2009).

Most A8 immigrants to the UK between May 2004 and March 2009 were Polish (66% of the total), aged 18-34 (81%) and according to the Home office on average they intended to stay for less than three months (Home Office, 2009). Analysis of WRS data over the period May 2004 – June 2010 indicates that most A8 migrants work in the business, administration and management sector (42% of registrations). The high figure in this sector is a result of the way that registrations are categorised; most migrants recorded in this group are employed through recruitment agencies but will be working in a variety of sectors. The next biggest sectors are hospitality and catering (18%), agriculture (10%), manufacturing (7%) and food processing (6%).

Calculations of the total number of WRS registrations (May 2004 - June 2010) against the number of employees working in particular sectors generally (in June 2010) can hint at the relative importance of A8 migrant labour in particular sectors of the UK economy. Note that these calculations are not intended to generate estimates of the specific proportion of A8 migrants in particular sectors but to give a guide to the relative importance of this labour supply across different industries. These estimates suggest that A8 migrants make up a minor segment of the workforce in most sectors analysed but that they constitute a relatively large proportion of the UK's agricultural workforce (Table 3).

Sector	Total WRS registrations May 2004 – June 2010	Total employee jobs June 2010	A8 migrants as estimated % of workforce
Agriculture	101,120	251,000*	40.3
Hospitality & catering	181,120	1,739,000	10.4
Manufacturing	68,560	2,365,000	2.9
Construction	36,800	1,281,000	2.9
Transport	23,745	1,217,000	2.0
Retail	43,800	4,328,000	1.0
Health & medical	41,025	3,685,000	1.1
Administration, business & managerial	430,155	Not comparable	Not comparable
Food processing	57,465	Not available	Not available
All sectors	1,033,915	27,007,700	3.8

Table 3 Estimates of relative importance of A8 migrants by sector

Source: Author's analysis of WRS; ONS Employee Jobs by Industry, 2011

Note: *Includes jobs in forestry and fishing

The regions with highest number of WRS registrations over the period May 2004 – June 2010 were London (162,650), the South East (138,510) and the East of England (127,560). Calculations of the ratio of regional WRS registrations to the total level of UK employment in each region indicate that A8 migrants form relatively significant proportions of the workforce in the East Midlands, Northern Ireland and the East of England. The local authorities with the largest proportions of their workforces that are A8 migrants are concentrated in the East Midlands and East of England (Boston, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Gedling, South Holland, Peterborough, Northampton and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk). Not surprisingly, the volume of WRS registrations has declined since the 2008 onset of the recession, with

the biggest decreases being in the construction sector and the smallest being in the agricultural and food processing sectors.

Not only is there evidence of a spatial selectivity in where A8 migrants have found employment, but there is also undisputed acknowledgement that the processes by which they entered the UK labour market and the practices of migrant labour providers and employers have had a selective influence on the functions and conditions of employment of A8 migrants. This is the focus of much of the data analysis reported later in this paper, but some of the differences are captured quantitatively in Table 4. This draws on the work of Dustmann *et al* (2010) that provides evidence from the UK Labour Force Survey that A8 migrants are significantly different from UK nationals in terms of their age, educational background, employment rate and wages. These measurable differences represent significant contours within the UK labour market and point to the need to research in more depth the labour migration recruitment processes and employment practices that that produces spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) in which young, well educated A8 migrants appear to be employed at much lower wages (37% less) than their UK counterparts.

Measure	A8 migrants		UK nationals	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average age	27	25	38	40
Education*				
Low	12%	10%	58%	54%
Intermediate	56%	50%	24%	30%
High	32%	40%	18%	16%
Employment rate	90%	74%	78%	71%
Median hourly wage	£6:07	£5:98	£9:76	£9:46
Claiming benefits or tax credits	12%	24%	24%	55%

Table 4 Characteristics of A8 migrants and UK nationals, pooled LFS data 2004Q2-2009Q1

Source: Based on UK Labour Force Survey Data and adapted from Dustmann *et al*, 2010, 10

Note: *Based on age at which individuals leave full-time education. Low: 16 or younger, intermediate, 17-20, high: 21 or older.

It is this remarkably different migration space which the project has focused on through primary research amongst migrant labour providers and employers.

4. METHODS

The methodological approach taken involved interviews with the users (employers) and providers (recruitment agencies) of Eastern European labour in order to gauge their experiences of engaging with this labour supply. This was addressed using evidence gathered from 61 in-depth qualitative interviews with users and providers of migrant labour which were carried out between January and October 2010. The research focused on the hospitality and food production and processing sectors and on case study areas in urban and rural England and Scotland: Southampton, Hampshire/West Sussex, Glasgow and Fife/Angus.

Four contrasting case study areas focusing on the hospitality and food producing and processing sectors were selected to capture the experiences of users and providers of A8 migrant labour across the UK. The choice of sectors to focus on was influenced by the analysis of WRS registrations between May 2004 and June 2010 as disaggregated by industry (Figure 1). This source indicates that 41.7 per cent of the 1,031,490 WRS registrations between May 2004 and June 2010 were in the administration, business and management sector. This classification however actually tells us very little about the parts of the economy that these migrants are engaged with. According to the Home Office (2009, 13) the majority of registrations in the administration, business and management sector are migrants who are employed by labour recruitment agencies, who in turn provide their labour to other firms across a variety of other sectors. Aside from this ambiguous category the next biggest sector is hospitality and catering (18% of registrations), followed by agricultural activities (10%), manufacturing (7%) and food processing (6%). Thus in focusing on the hospitality and food production and processing industries the qualitative research engaged with the key sectors of the UK labour market that A8 migrants work in. Through also focusing on labour providers, the research produced findings relevant to the prevalence of agency work amongst A8 migrants.

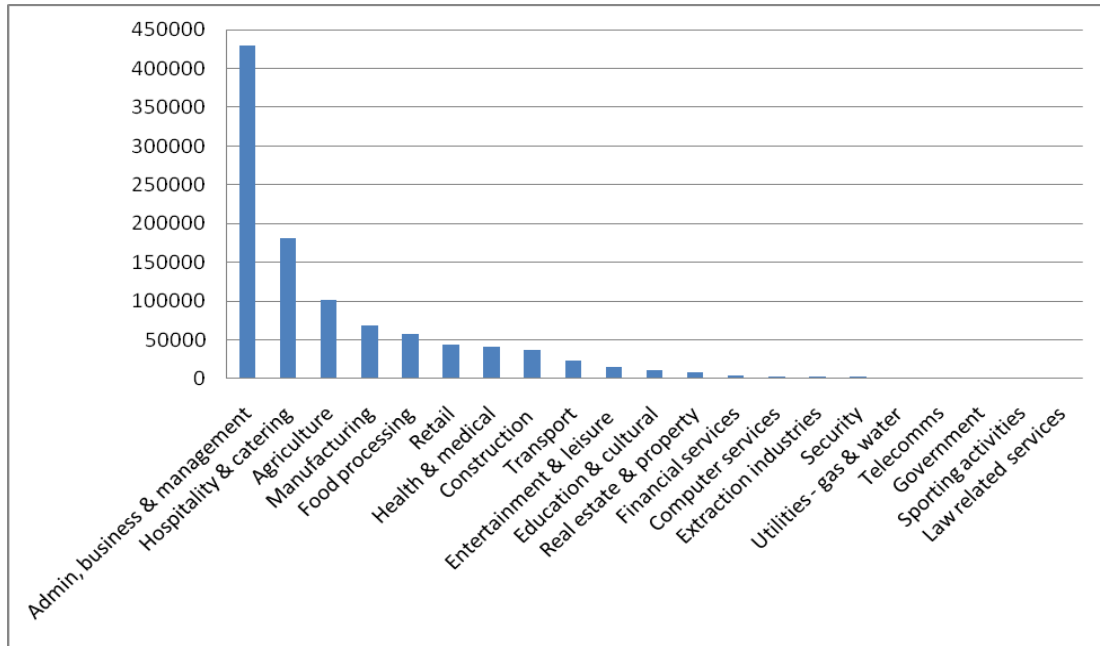


Figure 1 WRS registrations May 2004 – June 2010 by sector
Source: Author’s analysis of data from the Workers Registration Scheme

4.1. CASE STUDY AREAS

The choice of case study areas was influenced by a desire to capture the experiences of employers and recruitment agencies across a range of labour market types. Thus rural and urban areas were selected in England and Scotland representing both relatively buoyant and slack regional labour markets. Brief descriptions of the case study areas are provided below. This is followed by an overview of A8 migration trends in each area.

Glasgow is a large post-industrial city in central Scotland with a population of nearly 600,000 residents and an above average unemployment rate of 11.7% in 2010 (NOMIS). Glasgow was traditionally associated with heavy industry and manufacturing but a period of deindustrialisation and its re-emergence as a tourist and commercial centre have meant that retailing, public administration and hotels and catering are now the biggest employment sectors in the city (Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, 2004).

Fife and Angus are mainly rural counties on the East coast of Scotland. Fife has a population of around 364,000 and had an unemployment rate of 8.6% in 2010 (NOMIS). Employment in manufacturing is relatively high in Fife (Scottish

Government, 2010). Angus has a population of 110,000 and had an unemployment rate of 6.8% in 2010 (NOMIS). Employment in farming and fishing and manufacturing is relatively high in the county (Scottish Government, 2010).

Southampton is an economically buoyant city on the south coast of England with a population of 237,000 and an unemployment rate of 7.5% in 2010 (NOMIS). Transport, business services and public administration, health, defence and education are significant sectors in terms of employment in Southampton (Hantsweb, 2011).

Hampshire and West Sussex are prosperous mainly rural counties on the south coast of England. They have lower than average unemployment rates and tourism, horticulture and agriculture are key industries (ONS, 2011).

All of the case study sites have received sizeable inflows of Eastern European migrants since 2004. Table 5 provides a broad picture of A8 migrant trends in each area based on the Workers Registration Scheme. The first column shows the number of WRS registrations in each study area. The figure for Hampshire and West Sussex is much higher than the others, although this is related to this case study area comprising nine local authorities. The number of WRS registrations in Fife/Angus, Glasgow and Southampton are all roughly similar. The middle column shows the number of WRS registrations May 2004 – June 2010 divided by the workforce size of each area in 2010. This provides a crude estimate of the relative importance of A8 labour in different labour markets. This analysis suggests that Eastern Europeans make up a more significant segment of the workforce in Fife and Angus and in Southampton than they do in Glasgow and Hampshire and West Sussex. The final column shows how numbers of WRS registrations have changed since the onset of the recession. These figures indicate that the decline in inflows of A8 migrants has been more pronounced in urban (Glasgow and Southampton) than in rural areas (Fife/Angus and Hampshire/West Sussex).

Area	Total WRS registrations May 2004 – June 2010	Estimated percent of workforce	Change in WRS registrations June 2008 - June 2009
Fife & Angus (2 Local Authorities)	10,235	5.8%	-30.3%
Glasgow (1 Local Authority)	9,940	2.4%	-47.2%
Southampton (1 Local Authority)	8,240	6%	-50%
Hampshire (excluding Southampton) & West Sussex (9 Local Authorities)	27,435	3.1%	-27.5%

Table 5 Number of WRS registrations, estimated proportion of the workforce that are A8 migrants and change since the recession

Source: Author's analysis of data from the Workers Registration Scheme

The research participants targeted in this study were users and providers of Eastern European migrant labour in the hospitality and food production and processing sectors. The labour providers interviewed ranged from individuals who ran their own recruitment businesses to large nationwide and multinational recruitment agencies. Labour provider interviewees were usually the director of the firm (in the case of small and medium sized organisations) or local/regional managers in the case of large organisations. Some supplied labour specifically to the food production and processing or hospitality sectors or were general labour providers which supplied workers to a range of industries, including the above sectors. The labour users ranged from large multinational organisations to smaller employers. Most of the hospitality employers were large hotel or restaurant chains and most interviewees were general or personnel managers. The food production and processing interviews focused on farms and vegetable and meat processing companies. Most of those interviewed held the job title of operations or human resource managers within their firm.

Around half of the labour providers interviewed (48%) specialised in supplying labour to Gangmaster Licensing Agency regulated sectors (food production and processing), 13 per cent specialised on the hospitality sector and 39 per cent supplied labour to a range of sectors. Most labour providers supplied temporary (78%) as opposed to permanent placements (22%) and over half (57%) of these agencies had at least 100 temporary staff on placements at any given time. Three-quarters of the employers interviewed used temporary labour (76%), mostly to

supplement a core permanent workforce. The recession has resulted in employers reporting fewer difficulties sourcing labour (Table 6).

	Difficult	Okay	Very easy	Total
Pre-recession	49%	46%	5%	100%
Recession	14%	54%	32%	100%

Table 6 Ease/difficulty sourcing labour, prior to and during the recession

Tables 7 and 8 below show the distribution of interviewees by type and sector. The split between rural and urban areas was fairly even. More labour users were interviewed than providers. Table 7 indicates that the sampling strategy achieved a good mix between the hospitality and food production and processing sectors.

	Labour users	Labour providers	Total
Rural Scotland	12	8	20
Urban Scotland	14	6	20
Urban England	3	6	9
Rural England	8	4	12
Total	37	24	61

Table 7 Completed interviews by area and interviewee type

	Food production & processing	Hospitality	Both (i.e. general labour providers)	Total
Rural Scotland	14	2	4	20
Urban Scotland	7	10	3	20
Urban England	3	4	2	9
Rural England	5	6	1	12
Total	29	22	10	61

Table 8 Completed interviews by area and sector

The distribution of interviews as listed in Tables 7 and 8 reflect the quota sampling structure identified in the initial Economic and Social research Council (ESRC) application.

Two sampling frames formed the basis of the initial contacts with employer and labour provider organisations. The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) website contains a register of labour providers who are GLA registered on account of them supplying labour to the food production and processing sectors. This was used to identify and contact many of the recruitment agencies that were included in the research. Second, potential interviewees were identified from recruitment and supplier websites (such as Caterer.com, local produce directories and company websites)

which provided contact details for individuals within agencies or employers who were responsible for recruitment. The strategy used to recruit research participants involved initially sending a formal letter to named individuals within target organisations which introduced the nature of the research, followed by a telephone call asking them to participate.

Table 9 below shows the response rates achieved in the study. Overall, 26% of the organisations that were contacted agreed to take part in the research. The response rates were broadly similar across the four case study areas. The most common reason for non-participation was that the person that the letter had been addressed to could not be contacted in the follow up round of telephone calls (62%). In these cases the potential interviewee was not available when attempts were made to contact them and they did not return calls after the researcher had left messages requesting that they do so. Only 12% explicitly refused to participate in the research. Some of these refusals were because respondents did not think they could usefully contribute on account of them not employing international migrants or employing very few migrant workers.

Description	Rural Scotland	Urban Scotland	Urban England	Rural England	Overall
Letters posted	75 (100%)	80 (100%)	31 (100%)	48 (100%)	234 (100%)
Could not be contacted by telephone	46 (61%)	54 (67%)	19 (61%)	25 (52%)	144 (62%)
Contacted by telephone but not interviewed	9 (12%)	6 (8%)	3 (10%)	11 (23%)	29 (12%)
Contacted by telephone & interviewed	20 (27%)	20 (25%)	9 (29%)	12 (25%)	61 (26%)

Table 9 Response rates by study area

Most interviews took place at the business premises of the interviewee or at a public place such as a cafe. Interviews took place over up to two hours, although most typically lasted for around an hour. Interviews were recorded using a digital tape recorder, although one interviewee requested that the interview was not recorded. Only two interviewees occurred over the telephone due to logistical difficulties arranging a face to face meeting. The interviews were semi-structured in design to allow for a core set of questions covering the key topics of interest to be covered in a

manner that also afforded flexibility to enable avenues of enquiry that might not have been anticipated during the design stage to be explored during the interviews. The interviews were carried out between January 2010 and October 2010.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a system of pseudonyms was used to protect the anonymity of interviewees. All personal identifiers such as names of businesses have been removed from the quotations to protect anonymity. A coding framework was developed using the computer package NVivo for coding the transcripts in a manner which allowed for the segments of conversation that referred to specific points of interest to be captured and used for the generation of research findings. The generation of findings from qualitative data, as in other types of research, is inevitably related to the subjectivity of the researcher. As such steps were taken to secure the validity of the findings and to ensure that the interview data were not interpreted 'selectively' to reinforce the preconceived ideas and existing values of the researchers. A tally system of views or experiences relating to particular topics was used to identify areas of consensus and differentiation. Identifying key themes for each relevant topic, tallying them and only using quotations that typified them helped to ensure rigour and combat anecdotalism through a limited quantification of the qualitative data.

The following sections describe the key findings in relation to each of the three main research questions listed earlier.

5. THE FUNCTION AND EVOLUTION OF A8 MIGRANT LABOUR IN THE UK LABOUR MARKET: ACCESSION TO RECESSION

The functions of A8 migrant labour in the UK labour market sectors covered by this study have changed over time and fall into three main stages.

5.1. ACCESSION AND EARLY MIGRANT EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS 2004-05

The accession of eight relatively low wage Eastern European states to the European Union in May 2004 and the British government's decision to impose only negligible restrictions on the right of citizens from these countries to work in the UK came at a time of high demand for labour owing to a sustained period of steady economic and employment growth. Significant disparities in earning potential through favourable exchange rates and relatively slack conditions in Eastern European labour markets and the booming UK labour market resulted in a high demand for labour and large inflows of migrants from the new accession countries. At this point A8 migrants were described as serving an important role in addressing perceived labour shortages.

'Up until 2004 we really struggled to find people so most hotels were understaffed because they just could not find labour. And then it was a blessing to have the Accession of the Eastern European countries coming in and getting these people in because it made it so much easier to fill all of these vacancies'.

Harold, general manager, hotel, rural England

'The accession certainly made it easier to get people, it definitely made it easier. In the past everybody needed permits and if you were short of labour then it was very difficult to get it so you maybe had to walk away from crops. Now that is not such a huge issue because there are all of those extra countries to get your labour from'.

Adam, field manager, farm, rural Scotland

A8 migrant labour was represented by interviewees as serving two distinct functions at the bottom end of the labour market at this time. In many cases employers drew on A8 migrants as a highly flexible supply of labour which they could use to supplement their core workforce. In these instances firms often had two workforces performing similar tasks but under different conditions of employment. On one hand a core workforce of mainly domestic workers were employed on permanent contracts and enjoyed relatively high wages and status. This core workforce was supplemented by an almost exclusively migrant workforce either employed directly on short-term or zero hour contracts or supplied by a labour provider. The main motivation from the

employer's perspective of using migrant labour in this way was that these workers were a flexible supply of labour that they could use in response to fluctuations in their requirement for labour.

'Most of the permanent staff are locals but all of our agency workers are from overseas. We will always be able to get local people for the permanent jobs but we'd struggle to survive without the agency staff because they allow us to react to an upturn or downturn in demand, so at a days or sometimes an hour's notice you can phone up and say that you need another ten bodies and you get them straightaway'.

Maria, human resources consultant, food processing company, urban Scotland

The other function played by A8 migrants at the bottom end of the labour market was not to supplement a core domestic workforce but to actually form the core workforce itself. This was most common in the food production and processing sectors, in some back of house roles in hospitality and in rural areas, where employers often face difficulties recruiting and retaining domestic labour. In these cases the workforce was composed exclusively or almost exclusively of migrant workers and employers expressed a total reliance on their labour.

'The biggest joke is that the migrants are taking jobs away from the local people here. Because we cannot get the local population to do it and if we don't have anyone to pick the crops then we don't have a business'.

Gary, owner, soft fruit farm, rural Scotland

In terms of the function that A8 migrant labour served at this point, a common theme was that employers regarded the quality of workers as very high. Work ethic, reliability and deference to superiors, colleagues and customers were some of the traits that were most highly valued by employers, who often compared migrant workers very favourably against the supposed attitudinal shortcomings of 'local' workers. Despite being perceived as being hard working and intelligent and often highly qualified, migrant workers at, and in the years immediately following, the 2004 accession predominantly worked in menial roles. Lack of English language skills was a key factor in migrants' initial restriction to unskilled jobs.

'Most of our Eastern European workers were university graduates but they started as entry-level process workers and that was down to their language skills. But once they could master the Fife dialect and things like psychometric tests that were in English you actually started to spot the talent and you could see their natural skills and education coming through and again I think that is down to the English language so they are now finding themselves in team leading roles and HR roles and technical roles. So we are trying to keep them in the business as a long-term development thing'.

Jack, head of HR, food processing plant, rural Scotland

At this stage it was common for employers to use labour providers (variously described as recruitment agencies and gangmasters) as a means of sourcing migrant workers since they desperately needed workers but were unsure how to connect with and manage this new supply of labour.

'It is less hassle for them [employers] to use someone like me, especially if it is for quite a large number of people because it is not easy bringing people over here from a different country because you can have them over here on the Friday and starting work on the Monday and there is a hell of a lot involved in getting these people sorted out. The companies don't want to get involved in that, they are just looking for people to turn up to do their shift and go home at the end of the night and that was all that they want so if there were any problems within the factory they lift the phone and phone me. It could be language, it could be translations, it could be disciplinary, it could be anything... they did not want to take that on themselves'.

Ethan, director of labour provider firm, rural Scotland

Some of the migrant labour providers and users felt that Eastern European workers were vulnerable to exploitation in the period immediately following the accession since many workers had no clear expectations about working in the UK and what their rights were.

'I think people from Europe at first were... they didn't know what it was going to be like, they didn't know how to get here and I think at first a lot of them were really ripped off by paying agency fees for finding them work. We had people turning up at the door here who already were in Scotland, who didn't have any work lined up, who had paid a fortune to get across here and didn't have a job. But a lot of them have wised up now and they now know their rights and that is no bad thing'.

Josephine, operations director, labour provider, rural Scotland

5.2. THE BOOM YEARS: 2006-2007

The years following the 2004 accession were characterised by a buoyant labour market and a continuation of high demand for migrant labour. In the food production and processing sectors employers began to experience difficulties getting the quantity or quality of workers they needed to function effectively. This can be attributed to a number of factors. Improved proficiency in English of skilled migrants meant that those who had been in the UK for a number of years were able to progress into more desirable types of jobs as a booming economy meant that they could be more selective about where they worked. Buoyant labour market conditions also meant that domestic workers were reluctant to take such jobs. In many cases it was mainly only older, lower 'quality' migrants with little or no English that were limited, on account of their

inability to attain employment in more 'desirable' sectors, to the agribusiness industry at this point.

'It is more of a mature workforce now and these are the people that end up in these sorts of jobs and that is because they don't speak English basically. The young ones do and you will find them in catering and hospitality and cleaning and in qualified jobs because they are fluent in English. So they're not keen to do work in a field but the older workers have to do that because it's the only work they can get'.

Isabella, director, labour provider firm, rural England

Changes to the exchange rate and improving economic conditions in sending countries resulted in reduced inflows of A8 migrants from Eastern Europe and return migration of some migrants who had initially come to the UK immediately after the accession.

'Just before the recession we had big problems getting workers so there was a lot of fruit left in the fields in one of those years and farms had to get better at keeping workers happy. Last year there weren't many problems getting people but that is because the recession hit so it was much easier to source workers. Take Latvia, it is a bit of a disaster zone economically at the moment with 22% unemployment so you can find lots of people from there'

Josh, general manager, labour provider firm, rural England

The functions served by A8 migrants in the UK labour market in the period prior to the recession were perceived to become more 'mainstream' as they progressed away from being a flexible supplementary supply of labour in some cases, or a core workforce in others, towards being less distinguishable from UK workers in terms of how they were recruited and utilised by employers. This was particularly the case in urban areas and in customer facing roles in hospitality where A8 migrants often came to be regarded as 'normal' and no different from domestic workers.

'The Poles are normally already in the country and we interview them properly, they go through all the normal processes and they are just... normal. We don't treat them any differently so it is very strange discussing it like this where I'm thinking about them as being separate from the local English people that we have here. They are not really a special case and we don't see them as any different at all, they are just exactly the same as everyone else'.

Sean, general manager, hotel, rural England

A8 migrants by this stage had settled in many of the case study areas and interviewees felt that they had often come to be thought of as part of the local community. Although the buoyant economy meant that many employers still had to use labour providers to source labour, more migrants came to be recruited through 'mainstream' recruitment channels.

‘Three of my thirty members of staff are Eastern Europe but they were living over here and applied for the jobs and just happened to be successful... a lot of employers say stereotypical things about Scottish workers being lazier than Eastern Europeans but I don’t find any difference so I am indifferent to where people are from when I am recruiting’.

Ivan, general manager, restaurant, urban Scotland

Making use of informal networks became an increasingly common and valued way for labour providers and users to source labour. They were represented as an inexpensive, quick and stress-free way of getting good quality workers.

‘All our recruitment is done through word of mouth, they’ll be on the phone to them the very second that they hear you say you’re looking for someone and their friend or relative will be here at the restaurant within half an hour asking you for the job and that works well in this business because if someone who has been here for five or six years and then suggests someone to you, that worker is not necessarily putting his job on the line but he is putting his reputation on the person he suggests being good so there will be a lot of embarrassment if it doesn’t work out’.

Aiden, manager, restaurant, urban Scotland

5.3. MIGRANT FUNCTIONS IN A RECESSION: 2008-2010

Just prior to the onset of the recession, A8 migrants were described by employers as addressing labour shortages in many sectors and locations in the UK. The functions that they served evolved from being a predominantly flexible and secondary workforce towards roles that were thought to better reflect their skills, qualifications and experience. This resulted in some employers in sectors which claimed to have traditionally struggled to source local labour becoming concerned about a ‘drying up’ of the supply of A8 workers. However the beginning of the economic downturn around 2008 had significant implications in terms of the demand for Eastern European migrant labour and the functions served in the UK labour market.

In some cases demand for migrant labour dropped off significantly.

‘Before the recession there were probably more jobs than we had people for so that created the demand for Eastern Europeans to fill those positions. But now those jobs aren’t there and we have got quite a high number of unemployed people in the UK so the demand for bringing in the extra people to fill those jobs is just not there’

Gerald, director, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

The impact of the recession on the domestic workforce meant that migrants were now represented by interviewees as competing for often menial jobs against British workers who had previously not gone for these types of jobs but who now had to because better jobs were unavailable to them. This was most common in the hospitality sector and in the labour markets of urban areas.

'Recruitment is easy now because you get quite a lot of applications and a lot of people going for the jobs because there is quite high unemployment at the moment. But it was more difficult two years ago before the recession because you couldn't get some positions recruited for, whereas every position you put out now, you're getting lots of applications in for it and the calibre now is far superior to what it was before because people just want anything they can get. For one position you must be seeing about fifty applications whereas if you did that a few years ago you were sitting begging for them to come in'.

Cynthia, operations manager, hotel, urban Scotland

Other employers noted that the volume and quality of migrant jobseekers varied over time not only in relation to UK labour market conditions but also those prevailing in sending countries.

'At first in 2004 or so when they first came they were very qualified and then the calibre dropped down a bit because building trades and these sorts of things took those types of workers away from us. But now it is coming back again because there is no work for them. I mean you take Latvia. There is no work in Latvia at all now so for us it is one of those things where it is someone else's loss that is our gain'.

Alistair, owner, food processing firm, rural Scotland

Employers also reported that a local 'need' for migrants remained in some sectors of the economy where the unpleasant or tedious nature of the work meant local workers remained disinterested. This was most common in the food production and processing sectors and in rural areas, where interviewees often complained that the 'local' workforce was unwilling to work in physically demanding, monotonous and low-paid jobs.

'Most of my workers are Eastern Europeans and that is because the locals don't want to seem to work here. The pay isn't great and it's pretty boring work... just before the recession I was worried about getting workers, but now I've got lots of people coming in or phoning up and looking for a job but again they're all Eastern Europeans – you never get the locals doing that'.

Frank, production manager, food processing plant, rural Scotland

A key factor behind migrants dominating certain roles and sectors was not just because the jobs were menial or low-paid, but because employers required a supply of labour that was highly flexible, as in the seasonal demand for agricultural labour. The

hospitality industry also required a flexible workforce for periods such as Christmas or the summer or even weekends. Many interviewees thus argued that A8 migrant labour was essential to the effective functioning of the UK's flexible economy.

'It is all Eastern European temps that we supply and I have some clients who would never dream of taking on somebody who wasn't Eastern European, they just wouldn't entertain it and that is because they are so flexible and flexible working practices are what has made Great Britain thrive. Employers want to have the flexibility to turn labour supply on and off like a tap because it is more cost-effective to use them that way and the migrants are the ones who will do it and work whatever hours they can'.

Samantha, director, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

The recession meant that many employers felt that they could no longer afford to pay labour providers to get their staff. As a result many employers had turned to less expensive means of sourcing staff such as word of mouth recruitment and the use of Jobcentre Plus. Despite these developments labour providers were still widely used by employers as a source of temporary labour, to source permanent high-end roles like managers, chefs and agronomists and for 'try before you buy recruitment' (whereby an employer cherry picks their best temps and takes them on as permanent staff through 'temp to perm' arrangements).

Based on the functions of A8 migrant labour described above a threefold typology of the perceived experiences of migrant labour in Britain from 2004 to 2010 can be developed. Since the research did not involve speaking to migrants about their actual experiences, these inferences are based on the perceived occupational trajectories of A8 migrants elicited from labour providers and employers.

(a): Short-term migrants who worked in the UK for a short period of time before returning. Their motives were to improve their English, experience working and living in another country and to earn money. They were often students and young people and sometimes made multiple return trips. These migrants had incentives to return to Eastern Europe: such as continuing studies, reuniting with family or having good labour market prospects or having business interests there.

(b): Advantaged longer-term migrants: Migrants with skills and qualifications who initially held minimum wage jobs but who progressed in the labour market once their English improved and once they had gained experience of working in the UK. The recession, changes in the exchange rate and a narrowing of earning potential between the UK and some Eastern European countries have meant that some of these migrants

have now returned home. Many of those who have stayed are now in reasonably well paid and secure jobs, whereas others have had to take up menial jobs again as they can no longer attain higher skilled jobs because the increase in the supply of labour due to the recession has meant that employers can now be more selective regarding issues such as English language skills, relevant experience and UK recognised qualifications.

(c): Disadvantaged longer-term migrants: Older and less skilled migrants with little or no English who are restricted to low-paid and insecure work in the UK, but who have few incentives to return home as their labour market prospects there were even worse. These migrants were representing as having little prospect of upward occupational mobility due to their poor English language skills, lack of skills and qualifications, age and the recession.

5.4. THE FUNCTION OF A8 MIGRANT LABOUR: DISCUSSION

This section has focused on the reported functions served by A8 migrant labour in the UK labour market and on how this role was portrayed as evolving over time. A number of key economic mechanisms were held to be responsible for producing the change in the functions of A8 labour migrants: large disparities in earning potential, favourable exchange rates and the free movement granted to Eastern European workers following the accession resulted in a large initial influx of A8 labour migrants into the UK labour market. Buoyant labour market conditions in the UK were also instrumental in driving these processes. Thus at this point A8 migrant labour was represented as a ‘Godsend’ helping to fill perceived labour shortages. Not only did this particular labour supply address labour shortages but the migrants were lauded as being highly motivated, hard working and well educated. By the time of the second phase described above as the boom years, many of the initial migrants had returned to their source countries and the booming economy meant that some other migrants managed to attain employment in sectors with more desirable pay and conditions than those offered, for example, by agribusiness. For these reasons the agribusiness industry was described as experiencing acute labour shortages around this period and was seen as depending heavily on new inflows of migrants. Finally, in the third phase the global economic crisis was held responsible for a decrease in the demand for labour generally and for migrant labour specifically. However in sectors

such as agriculture, migrant labour still was represented by interviewees as of vital importance owing to employers struggling to source domestic labour to work within the type of intensive production regimes desired by employers.

Employers and labour providers played an important role in producing the changes described above. In the period immediately following the East European accession labour providers served to connect A8 migrant labour to work opportunities in the UK. Most migrants went through recruitment agencies as a means of entering the UK labour market. The interviews confirmed that, owing to difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, around four fifths of employers used recruitment agencies to source their workforce. In responding to labour shortages and viewing A8 migrants in a positive light, employers and labour providers thus made extensive use of this labour supply and were instrumental in the large inflow of A8 migrants into many sectors immediately following the accession. The recession was associated with labour users becoming more selective about the types of workers that they used. Interviewees reported a sharpening of their definition of the good worker to exclude migrants without good English, those without experience of working in the UK or without qualifications that were recognised in the UK. An exception to the general pattern was employers in the food production and processing sectors who retained their strong demand for A8 migrant labour. This might be attributed to the low-skilled nature of the work (making language skills, qualifications and experience less relevant) and with more weight being given to the perception that migrants had a better work ethic to domestic labour.

Migrants were almost exclusively described in positive terms by interviewees and several expressed dismay that many highly skilled and motivated individuals were underemployed and working in menial jobs. Despite this some of the terms used to describe their labour were indicative of the basic flexible workforce function that employers want them to serve. For example Maria spoke of phoning up an agency to get 'ten bodies' and getting them 'straightaway' whereas Samantha described flexible labour as being like 'a tap' that can be turned on and off very easily and that 'migrants are the only ones who will do it'. A8 migrants are highly unlikely to be serving this flexible labour supply function through choice but rather through an inability (at least initially) to access more secure and better paid work. Thus labour market structures,

such as significant differences in earning potential between the UK and Eastern Europe and the fact that agency work was often the initial route into employment for migrants, were important influences shaping the context in which labour providers and users were able to engage migrant labour in flexible labour practices. It is this difference in employment context that makes possible the distinctive functions of A8 migrant labour relative to domestic labour.

The interviewees perceived a direct relation between the different phases of recruitment and the type of labour migrant. Many of the initial migrants following the accession were represented as young, motivated and highly skilled and were regarded as having high levels of human and social capital. At first many of these migrants were limited to serving a flexible labour function, working through agencies or directly for employers on a time limited basis. However many of these migrants appear either to have returned to their source country (having only ever intended to spend a short space of time abroad) or have remained in the UK over the longer term but enjoyed upward occupational mobility. Employers and recruiters therefore felt that over time these types of migrants (those with high levels of human and social capital) had become less distinct from domestic labour because they had progressed to labour market functions not dissimilar to local workers. On the other hand later A8 arrivals were regarded by employers as being of a lower calibre and failed to achieve occupational mobility and had not advanced away from flexible labour functions and were seen as being unlikely to do so in the future (being represented as older, having poor English and few no qualifications). Interviewees therefore represented this group as remaining distinct from domestic labour in terms of the function that they serve in the UK labour market but also distinct from the initial waves of East Europeans.

6. EMPLOYER MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING WITH A8 MIGRANT LABOUR

6.1. THE REQUIREMENT FOR MIGRANT LABOUR

It is estimated that over a million migrants from the A8 countries have participated in the UK labour market since the 2004 accession (Blanchflower *et al*, 2007). A pertinent question relates to why so many employers chose to draw on this supply of labour. In answering this question we would argue that two discourses emerged. One

was to present migrant labour as complementary (i.e. offering different characteristics to domestic labour) linked to views presented in the previous chapter. The second discourse was more complex, presenting migrant labour as substitutional (i.e. offering the same qualities as local labour but with economic advantages to the employer over domestic worker).

6.1.1. MIGRANT LABOUR AS COMPLEMENTARY

In the food production and food processing sectors the most commonly cited reason offered by employers for their dependence on migrant labour related not necessarily to an insufficient quantity of local workers but concerns about their quality. Eastern Europeans were often lauded as having a superior work ethic to British workers, which meant that they were perceived as being harder workers, more reliable and having a better attitude towards work and their superiors.

‘Because it is minimum wage work on a factory floor no Scottish people want to do it and the Eastern Europeans are the only ones that will. The locals are not really interested unfortunately because they’d rather be on benefits but our European workers are a great bunch, really hard working and diligent and if we didn’t have them we’d be in real trouble. So it gets on my nerves when people complain about migrant workers because this country could not do without them’.

June, operations director, food processing company, rural Scotland

Thus in many cases rural employers argued that they were reliant on migrant workers because they form the core of their workforce, because they struggle to recruit and retain domestic workers and because overseas workers are seen as being of a superior quality to the local workforce.

In other instances employers did not have a workforce that was dominated by migrant workers but were still dependent on overseas labour to function efficiently. This occurred when they had a requirement for a flexible supply of labour in response to short-term fluctuations in their demand for workers. These employers often reported being able to source domestic labour to fill their permanent vacancies, but relied on migrants to serve their flexible labour function, either through using a labour provider or employing them directly on fixed term or zero-hour contracts.

‘We have about 500 permanent staff and we use agency workers too because our production is always going up and down so there can be 100 of them here at any one time out on the production line. Most of the permanent staff are British but the big majority of the agency people are from Eastern Europe. To get into a permanent position you have got to have a certain level of spoken and written English for health

and safety and for food hygiene purposes but the agencies can do their inductions in different languages so that is why they find it easier to go through an agency if their English is poor’.

Norma, HR officer, food processing plant, rural England

Due to the highly seasonal requirement for labour and the pressures on margins created by the dominance of supermarkets, agribusiness presents itself as having a need for a highly flexible and efficient workforce. The fact that the work involved is physically demanding and inherently insecure and temporary means that Eastern European migrant labour (A8 migrants or A2 temporary workers through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme) are regarded as essential to the functioning of agribusiness.

‘There has always been, dare I use the term, “cheap labour” associated with horticultural and agricultural work and at the minute it is Eastern Europeans. But the big supermarkets have got huge buying power and customer demand keeps the price down which then squeezes the producer. So then the only physical way that they can produce the goods is by paying the minimum wage and structured avoidance of paying overtime rates and that sort of thing. And because its minimum wage the Brits won’t do it, so the Eastern Europeans are critical to the running of it all, and it is perverse because these are not kids that we are talking about. We are talking about highly educated people, but it is difficult to see a way out of that situation’.

Peter, managing director, labour provider firm, rural England

In agriculture employers and labour providers often stated that Eastern Europeans were essential to the functioning of the sector not only because it was difficult to source the labour locally but because of migrant attitudes to work. To an extent this was also the case with regards to the hospitality sector in some rural areas.

‘The European workers see hospitality as a profession, but UK people see it as a fill-in thing while they’re waiting to find a ‘proper’ job. So in the UK trying to get somebody to wash dishes or be a room attendant is really hard so we need people from overseas to do those jobs because we can’t get people who live locally to come and clean our toilets and wash our pots and pans. I have got around four vacancies permanently and it is really difficult to fill them, even with overseas workers available because we’re situated in the middle of the forest and have got limited live-in accommodation’.

Cecilia, HR manager, hotel, rural England

‘Before when it was all Scots I always had to cover for people and it just appeared that they didn’t want to work and the turnover was sickening. But having the Eastern Europeans has completely eradicated all of that because in my view they just work a lot harder and their reliability and work ethic is amazing so I now feel that I have got a much better standard of staff because they are here all the time and they put in a

real shift for you. I mean I have still got a few Scots but they are the diamonds in the rough really’.

Daniel, managing director, food production firm, urban Scotland

It was in urban areas and in hospitality that employers were least likely to compare local workers unfavourably with Eastern European workers. Front of house roles were less difficult to fill than back of house functions, which were often dominated by migrant workers with poor English language skills.

‘There are roles like housekeeping and washing up in the kitchens and cleaning and a lot of these roles, but English people just don’t want to do them, so that why it’s all Eastern Europeans in those positions. For the bar and restaurant staff you tend to get more English students on gap years and that type of thing. But there is a communication level that you have to be able to achieve to take a role at the bar or in the restaurant. So that’s why so many of the foreigners are in back of house roles, at least until their English improves’.

Carl, general manager, hotel, rural England

6.1.2. MIGRANT LABOUR AS SUBSTITUTIONAL

For many employers struggling to source workers was something which had happened in the period between the accession and the onset of the recession but some claimed that they no longer experienced this challenge.

‘There is a lot more indigenous UK people coming to work for us now and they are better quality now than they were before the recession so the pressures on us to find good quality Eastern European labour isn’t as strong now. So we have been able to be a bit more selective about who we take on, so although the standard of Eastern Europeans is still high we haven’t had to take any chances on bringing them over directly because we’ve been able to increase the proportion of UK labour’

Sam, regional manager, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

In these cases the substitutability of migrant and domestic labour meant that demand for overseas workers might be represented as following neo-classical expectations of migrant labour acting as a ‘buffer’ against domestic job losses in the event of recession (Ahearne *et al*, 2009, 36). This narrative suggests that migrant labour is drawn on in economic boom times but is dismissed in an economic downturn, producing exaggerated swings in the scale of labour migration in relation to business cycles. In cases where migrant labour was represented as substitutional for domestic labour, it was also reported as highly sensitive to the business cycle. This situation was more common in the two urban case study areas.

6.2. REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GOOD MIGRANT WORKER

The employers and labour providers interviewed reported positive experiences of engaging with A8 workers, often comparing them very favourably with British workers. The main positive factors associated with A8 labour to emerge from the interviews are listed in Table 10.

Prepared to be flexible in terms of hours worked & shift patterns
Culture of good customer service & care
Intelligent /quality staff for basic roles
Prepared to work in menial & insecure jobs for low pay
High standards in their work & professional attitude
Versatile/flexible
Independently minded & self-reliant – no benefits culture
Appreciative of the better working conditions in the UK
Captured/desperate workforce (SAWS/not eligible for benefits)
Competition raised standards of existing workforce
Good work ethic & hard working
Deference to managers & easy to manage
Don't see menial work as beneath them
Good attendance and sickness records
Pleasant and good attitude/soft skills
Keen to work overtime & long hours
Low staff turnover & loyal
Internal promotions & recruitment
Reliable so allows business to grow
Family & community orientated
Cheap and easy to recruit

Table 10 'Good' A8 migrant labour: Interviewee representations

Representations of what constituted the 'good worker' (Scott *et al*, 2008) were widely shared by employers. These stereotypical representations were often produced in terms of a binary, with local workers positioned as different in type. Despite being complicit in the reproduction of the good migrant worker, interviewees often expressed dissatisfaction that highly skilled and motivated workers were reduced to filling menial and insecure roles whilst some British people were seen as preferring out of work benefits rather than taking jobs at the bottom end of the occupational hierarchy.

'A lot of the Eastern Europeans that we've taken on have been highly qualified so we had engineers and that kind of thing applying for our minimum wage jobs and we even had a doctor working for us for a while - God what a waste. And that's a big difference from the locals because getting the people that are exploiting the benefits system to get out of their beds in the morning and work has always been a problem because they won't come off benefits to take a job on'.

June, operations director, food processing firm, rural Scotland

Although expressing annoyance that many Eastern Europeans were underemployed, interviewees often justified the potential exploitation of staff working in minimum wage jobs in the UK on the basis that it was more profitable for them than working in more highly skilled roles in their countries of origin.

'The Eastern Europeans are the hardest working people that I have ever worked with and they want to work every hour that God sends because they are here to make money so that they can send it home. But sometimes you get CVs in and you're like you are a qualified accountant or whatever and you want to work in housekeeping? But then you have to remember what it is like over there for them so they are getting more money here cleaning rooms than what they get over there doing qualified jobs'.

Caroline, deputy general manager, hotel, urban Scotland

A8 migrants were generally represented by employers and labour providers as motivated and knowledgeable individuals who were taking advantage of European migration legislation to work in the UK for financial gain. This was reported as being positive for both the migrants and the employers.

Interviewees often reported that they valued migrant employees having a good attitude to work and that this was more important than specific skills, qualifications or experience. This was because the skills required to fulfil the roles could be taught quickly and positive attitudes were highly valued by employers.

'I am looking for personality and a smile so whilst we ask for skills, pretty much any skills can be trained whereas personality can't. You can teach the skill of pouring a pint or making coffee or carrying food but what you can't teach is a warm welcome, a smile, being good at greeting people and identifying their needs'.

Carl, general manager, hotel, rural England

Those interviewed often applauded the attitude and work-ethic of A8 migrants and stated that this was one of the attributes associated with this workforce that they valued most. They also described the attitude towards work by Eastern Europeans as superior to British workers.

'The Brits are not good at service, and customer care is absolutely vital in this industry. But the calibre of the Eastern European is far higher than the local because they are willing to work and they smile and they have a happy demeanour and it is all about behaviour because I can train skills, but what I can't do is train someone to smile. So it is not whether they can make a coffee because I can train them to do that but I can't train them to do it with a smile on their face and to be happy about it'.

Jeff, catering manager, restaurant, urban England

Thus, not only did the interviews with employers provide evidence for what recruitment agents and employers valued as “positive attributes” of migrant workers, but the representations were presented as “other” in relation to local employers. As Gavin noted “people were coming across because of the exchange rate and basically they could in one day what they were getting paid per week back home. And most of them were teachers, accountants, high class student graduates etc and they all had a very good work ethic”. This “good worker ethic” (Gavin) that produced the “hardest working people I have ever worked with” (Caroline) was therefore contrasted with local populations and their propensity for “exploiting the benefits system” (June). Yet employers expressed little remorse for the low wages paid to the highly qualified migrants employed in the UK in national minimum wage jobs because their labour market position had been produced by what was represented as external economic processes such as the ‘exchange rate’.

6.3. EMPLOYER MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING WITH A8 MIGRANT LABOUR: DISCUSSION

This section has sought to explore how employers and labour providers perceive A8 migrant labour and how they represent their motives for engaging them. In contrast with irregular migrants (Koser, 2009), the legal status of A8 migrants means that they have the same recourse to legal protection from employment laws as British citizens. However the downward pressure exerted on expenditure in sectors such as agribusiness and hospitality means that employers often focus attention on keeping labour costs to a minimum, as this is usually their most significant outlay. As a consequence employers, and the recruitment agencies who provide labour to them, predominantly pay their staff as little as they can (usually the National Minimum Wage) and undertake other measures to keep labour costs low, such as ‘structured avoidance of paying overtime rates’ (Peter) whilst keeping procedures as ‘legal as you can’ (Alex). As a result of pressure on margins, the pay and employment conditions offered to migrant workers are often at the minimum standard permitted under employment legislation.

One of the key motivations cited by employers for their use of Eastern European labour was their positive attitude towards work, in other words their

willingness to accept unfavourable pay and employment conditions. Thus having a willing labour supply available, which for example regarded working in hospitality as ‘a profession’ (Cecilia), was potentially one of the main reasons that employers so freely engaged with A8 migrant labour. The readiness of migrants to accept low pay and poor employment conditions and ‘put in a real shift for you’ (Daniel) was compared with the aversion of domestic labour to undertake and put the same level of effort into menial jobs.

The representations of migrants as being content to work in menial roles in many ways differ from the experiences and feelings of the migrant workers as reported by other researchers engaged on the same project as the authors but involving interviews with the migrants themselves (Heath *et al*, 2010). It is not our purpose here to highlight conflicting representations. Our purpose is only to note how those involved in the production of migrant spaces have interpreted their roles as recruiters and employers and to highlight the consequences of their practices in terms of shaping the workspaces of A8 migrant workers. The paper now turns to one specific practice: that of actually recruiting migrant labour.

7. LABOUR CHANNELS THAT SHAPE LABOUR MIGRATION FLOWS BETWEEN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE UK

7.1. SPATIAL PRACTICES OF RECRUITING MIGRANT LABOUR

The previous section focused on the differing requirement for A8 migrant labour in different types of labour markets and on how the functions they serve has been affected by swings in the business cycle. This section explores the spatial practices used by employers to source migrant labour.

7.1.1. SOURCING WORKERS DIRECTLY FROM OVERSEAS

Some large employers and many labour providers sourced workers directly from Eastern Europe by either going there themselves and hosting recruitment events or through forming partnerships with organisations based in those countries. This was most common in the years immediately following the accession, when there was significant demand for Eastern European workers and thus incentives to source them directly from there. This has become less common over time as Eastern European communities have settled here, making it common for Eastern European labour to be

recruited locally. Wallace, a managing director of a labour providing firm describes the trend:

'We wanted to connect with workers in the accession states, so we opened up offices in seven of those countries and they ended up being a source of supply to us. In the early days we did a lot of interviewing in the countries and brought people over so we did things like pay for their WRS and set them up with banks, doctors and dentists and we even rented flats and sub-leased them to the EU folks. So that was probably five years ago and that happened for about a year. Then we found that there was just plenty of them and that we didn't need to go there. So we just hired them locally through word of mouth [recruitment]. So 95 per cent are already in Scotland when they join us nowadays, so it is no different from if they were Scottish'.

Wallace, managing director, labour provider firm, urban Scotland

As Wallace notes, the practices of actually sourcing labour directly from abroad took a number of forms. In many cases UK based organisations made frequent visits to Eastern Europe where they hired a hotel or university conference room or office space and interviewed and selected individuals for work for them. These visits usually lasted between a few days and a week. Once companies had a significant Eastern European workforce, these workers were used on the recruitment visits owing to their language skills and local knowledge.

'Everyone that we employ is Eastern European and we go out and get them ourselves. So this year I think we went to Latvia three times, Poland twice and the Czech Republic once. We place adverts in the newspapers and on the internet as well and we get people to go to specific locations when we are there for us to meet them. And we see about 100 people at a time in a big room in a hotel and we play them DVDs to show them what it is like and then we can answer any questions that they have. And then we do a one to one interview to see if they have got past experience and things. So it's all the selection processes you'd normally follow if you are interviewing someone for a job'.

Alex, director, labour provider firm, urban England

In the case of the food production and processing sectors, these recruitment trips were almost exclusively to Eastern Europe, whereas hospitality employers tended to source directly from overseas from a more diverse range of countries. Organisations that recruited directly from overseas often provided information regarding getting to and living in the UK or were actually involved in arranging transport and accommodation for their workers. In almost all of these cases the migrants funded their own transport to the UK. The actual selection of potential workers was usually based on ideas regarding the 'good' worker.

'At the minute we have at least three applicants for every place, so that gives us the ability to do some selection and select the right people. And the ideal people for

agriculture are not people from the big cities like Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria or Bucharest, they are the people from rural areas that have got some experience of rural life. So people that work best are the people from rural areas in the countries that we recruit from. But in terms of what makes a good worker it is someone who is prepared to work hard, understands what they are there to do and understands the needs of the grower, would stay for the length of the period that the grower needs them for, yet also understands the flexibility around agriculture - that actually there are going to be peaks and troughs and they might finish early or it might extend. So we are asking quite a lot of them really'.

Danny, labour provider, rural England

A smaller number of the organisations interviewed recruited directly from overseas through partner organisations as opposed going there and selecting individuals themselves. However many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement, mainly due to third parties' poor selection of candidates and issues relating to their trustworthiness. In most cases connections with overseas organisations as a means of sourcing staff have diminished drastically, principally because they are no longer viewed as being necessary due to the large number of A8 migrants already in the UK.

'We used to do our recruitment through organisations like third party agencies but the problem was they were very corrupt and unreliable. So if you needed 50 people for a farm you would have to source 80. So it was a lot of wasted work and you had no idea where you were with things. So we started to use people who were from that country and they were usually a very good ex-participant. And we gave them so many places and told them to go and get the quality of selection we need, because it has to be right. If a farmer wants 100 people then he wants 100 people. But with these third party recruitment agencies, we basically got to a point where our systems and results were as good as they were going to get... so you have to have a person in the country of source to do it properly, you really do. There is no two ways about that'

Josh, general manager, labour provider firm, rural England

Whilst direct recruitment from Eastern Europe is in some respects becoming less common, since many migrants are already in the UK when they are recruited by labour providers, elements of seasonal labour are still brought across to work in agribusiness for specific periods of time. In these cases some very large employers continued to recruit directly from overseas themselves, but most sourced their seasonal labour through labour providers. Much of this labour has been secured through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, which currently allows 21,250 workers from Romania and Bulgaria to work on farms on a temporary basis. Nine organisations in the UK are permitted to bring in labour using the SAWS scheme, most of whom are large labour providers who supply seasonal workers to farms

across the country. Many of those who work on farms as seasonal labour are students who come to the UK during their summer break through SAWS.

'90% of our seasonal workers are students, although now with the current economic climate in Romania and Bulgaria we are getting a lot of older people. But we use an agency for the Bulgarians and Romanians because they aren't allowed to come unless they have got a seasonal work permit and only a handful of agencies can supply them and that does restrict us a bit sometimes because we can only go through those providers to get the workers and we have to be aware of that and it means that we can only employ 200 of them'.

Adam, field manager, soft fruit farm, rural Scotland

7.1.2. FORMAL TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES

Some labour providers and employers had formal transnational connections with organisations based abroad which they used to source labour directly from overseas. Some hotels had connections with specialist hospitality colleges in Europe which enabled them to get skilled seasonal staff by giving them placements for a summer season. These connections also allowed them to get graduates of these institutions as permanent staff. Large hotel brands were able to source workers from their other hotels overseas through intra-company transfers. Some employers and labour providers had links with jobcentres throughout Europe, where they advertised vacancies. Seasonal workers in the food production and processing sectors were usually sourced directly from abroad, with labour providers and employers having connections with universities, overseas work-experience organisation and recruitment agencies to facilitate the recruitment of seasonal staff. In some cases the nature of these relationships had changed so that UK-based organisations either went abroad and sourced directly (either through frequent visits or opening their own branches) or by having people who they used to supply to businesses (i.e. ex-candidates) actually working with them in Eastern Europe in order to manage their relationships with institutions there.

'Historically we have worked with a lot of universities and we still have those links but we now have our overseas representatives and they are usually former candidates who have gone back and said we want to help give someone a similar experience to us. So we have contractual arrangements with autonomous places like universities and student recruitment organisations and our representatives pretty much do the recruitment for us by promoting the placements at student fairs and things and by putting people forward for them'.

Danny, labour provider, rural England

Some UK labour providers had connections with agencies in Eastern Europe whereby the former mainly sourced placements from clients whereas the latter's role was mainly in sourcing candidates for these positions. These relationships usually developed as a result of overseas agencies approaching UK agencies and offering to help them source labour. The connections are maintained through frequent visits, telephone calls, email and video conferencing. Such links were useful to UK agencies prior to the recession, when they had difficulties sourcing staff, but were now considered largely superfluous.

'About six years ago we established a connection with an agency in Lithuania because at that point we needed help to recruit workers but we haven't used them for years because there's simply been no need so we don't need to bother with the hassle of overseas partnerships anymore'.

Isabella, director, labour provider firm, rural England

The benefits to organisations in the UK of having connections with overseas organisations are that they can act as 'middlemen' between themselves and people who are overseas and looking for work. Thus connections with overseas agencies have been seen as important in sourcing labour directly from overseas. Interviewees argued that key benefits included being able to source and make a selection of candidates on behalf of UK labour users and providers by assessing candidate skill and qualification levels and their work ethic and suitability as a potentially 'good worker' prior to them coming to the UK. Linking with overseas agencies in this way often improved the supply of foreign labour and meant that they could source 'appropriate' workers for existing roles.

'Having those connections with organisations based in Eastern Europe is very important to our functioning, and that's mainly because they are effectively our eyes and ears in a country and they are the people who make sure that our selection process is spot-on'.

Danny, labour provider, rural England

Partner organisations in Eastern Europe were often viewed as providing a set of 'eyes and ears' on the ground and being able to promote working for their company and in the UK to potential candidates and staff members. The use of connections with overseas organisations and sourcing labour directly from abroad is now much less common and is now mainly used in the case of seasonal labour.

About a third of the employers and recruitment agencies interviewed had formed connections with overseas based organisations in order to source migrant labour. However in many cases these relationships had dwindled in recent years as interviewees felt that they were no longer necessary. Thus these connections were often initially formed in response to organisations facing difficulties in terms of sourcing the quantity or quality of workers that they needed. They had let these linkages slide as they were no longer seen as being necessary. Reasons for this were first that most migrant labour was now already in the UK and was sourced 'locally' and second that migrant's informal networks were the main route through which migrant labour was now sourced from abroad.

As economic conditions changed so did recruitment practices. At the time of the interviews most employers only recruited A&S workers who were already in the UK. This was especially the case with small and medium size enterprises, who felt that they did not have the necessary infrastructure for setting up and maintaining international relationships and that their margins were now too tight to get involved in subcontracting to third parties.

Some of those who had engaged with overseas-based organisations complained that they were untrustworthy and unreliable. The main issues were that overseas based organisations charged candidates for finding them work and even for nonexistent jobs and that they misled them about how much they were likely to earn in the UK. They were also criticised for poor staff selection and putting forward inappropriate candidates.

'We used to have links to other agencies where they would organise interviews for us and we would go over to Poland and interview the people on their premises with our clients and then we brought them across and helped them to source accommodation and things like that. But we didn't do that for very long because we were getting huge problems where they'd promise us 13 people to interview and only 4 would turn up and some of them would be drunk. So we found that it was easier for us just to focus on the people that were already in the country because a lot of companies don't want people that have just been brought over because they might need to help them find accommodation and things like that when they would rather have people here who can just turn up and do their job'.

Josephine, operations director, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

Finally, over time tighter Gangmaster Licensing Agency (GLA) regulations were reported as having prevented some labour providers from using overseas based agencies to source workers.

7.1.3. EMPLOYER MOTIVATIONS FOR USING LABOUR PROVIDERS

Labour providers are an integral part of the supply and recruitment of Eastern European workers in the UK labour market. This section explores employers' motivations for using labour providers.

The most commonly cited reason for using agencies was that many employers experienced variations in their need for labour as a result of changes in orders from their customers or harvesting periods or holiday times (Table 11). In these circumstances being able to suddenly recruit extra staff through an agency was seen as a quick solution to their perceived needs.

Sector	Reason for variations in demand for labour
Food production	Seasonality of production
Food processing	Frequent variations in demand for product
Hospitality	Seasonality of demand for hospitality services

Table 11 Primary motivation for using agency labour by sector

Interviewees therefore made a distinction between their core workforce and other staff, such as agency temps brought in during periods of peak labour demand.

'We don't even know what production is going to be like next week because we are so dependent on the weather and customer orders so the number of people we need changes constantly. So we have about 500 permanent people and we use an agency to top-up our numbers whenever we need them during the high production spells... we contact the agency and they get the people in at very short notice and then they take them away again when production slows and that's better for us than hiring then making people redundant all the time'.

Norma, HR officer, food processing plant, rural England

Agency temps were often described as a 'tap' of labour that could be turned on in times of peak labour demand and easily turned off again when the extra workers are no longer required. This was mainly due to variations in demand for labour but also to cover core staff holidays and sickness. Employers also enjoyed the freedom of being able to 'get rid of' temps which they felt were unsuitable very easily, as all it took was a telephone call to the agency to ensure that they were not sent back to them again. Being able to use labour on a temporary basis and without the responsibilities

associated with employing them directly was seen as a key benefit to employers of using labour providers.

Another key benefit from employers' perspectives was that using temps was a useful and popular means of recruiting staff. Employers' main recruitment method was often cherry picking their best temps and taking them on as their own members of staff ('try before you buy' recruitment).

'All our clients have a temp to permanent contract arrangement where we don't charge the employer finder's fees. So a lot of employers use having temps as almost a beauty contest where they are looking for the best workers to take on as permanent members of staff. So what they are doing is they are using the time they spend with them as a temporary worker to actually eyeball them and say you know this is type of quality of person we're looking for, we can take them on full-time and if they're not very good they'll either use them as a temp for a short space of time or get us to take them away immediately'

Sam, regional manager, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

The recession has seen an increase in the appeal of temporary workers since employers were reluctant to commit to taking on permanent staff in the face of continuing economic uncertainty. This observation may explain why in the UK the recession has seen rise in unemployment levels amongst the UK population but not amongst migrants (Fix *et al*, 2009).

Another reason that agency staff appeared increasingly popular according to some interviewees was that it allows employers in effect to get free labour for a short time period and then to pay for it later.

'Forget service levels, compliance and health and safety and all the other stuff - what you are doing when you open up a timesheet for a client is that you are granting them an unsecured overdraft. It is as simple as that and as a company we have incurred hundreds of thousands of pounds in bad debt in the past a year through client failure. And that's the difficulty in the current economic climate in that the client will pretend that he wants quality service and reliable delivery and all those other corny clichés but, when it comes down to it, all they want is credit. So it comes down to cash flow and if you or I were to walk into a bank and ask for a £10,000 overdraft we would have to go through hops for several weeks, but these people ring us today and expect the candidates tomorrow'

Peter, managing director, labour provider firm, rural England

For employers the attraction of using a labour provider often went beyond them being a source of flexible labour, but also that they managed a big part of their business. This was particularly attractive to small and medium size enterprises as the

agencies, in supplying and managing staff, reduced pressure on their payroll and human resources functions. In many cases they also had experience, expertise and infrastructure that meant they were well equipped to act as a 'one stop shop' for employers by reducing the time, expense and hassle involved in recruiting and managing staff in the workplace on a day to day basis.

'Using someone like us gives them that flexibility...they might not have the facilities or be able to manage the hassle of taking them on themselves because then they've got to go out and buy them work wear and put them through health and safety training and they have got to do the interviewing for them. And they have got to payroll them and look after the administration side, or when they are off on holiday they have got to pay them. Whereas with us it is just one stop, we will give you that man and we'll pay them what we want and that is it. The holiday pay is taken care of, the employers National Insurance is taken care of so there is no hassle'.

Barry, managing director, labour provider firm, urban Scotland

Having a labour provider on board was seen as useful when dealing with migrant workers because they often trained, inducted and supervised candidates in their native languages, meaning that language barriers became less of an issue for employers. Effectively labour providers became charged with 'producing' the good worker. Agencies also gave clients, and in turn their clients' customers, peace of mind by ensuring that candidates were legal, dealing with legislation and checking references.

In some cases employers used recruitment agencies to get staff for menial roles because they struggled to source workers through other means or because they made a conscious effort to 'try out' Eastern European workers. However the interviews revealed that this is now less common than in the past because migrants could now be recruited through informal networks and other conventional recruitment channels.

As well as using agencies to recruit temporary or seasonal staff it was common for employers to use them as a means of sourcing more specialist or senior roles. Employers often found getting the 'right person' for these positions difficult, even in recessionary times.

'It is more common for employers to use recruitment agencies in the oil and gas sector than it is elsewhere and that's because there has historically always been a shortage of candidates for this industry. So finding people with the right skills can be very difficult and very time consuming and of course the client doesn't have the time

to commit to doing all of that - they want to put the advert up and get the applications themselves but they also don't want to have to sort out through all of the dross that they get. Lots of the applications that they get are from people who are completely under qualified so by doing all of that for them I think we prove our worth to them'

Stuart, consultant, labour provider firm, rural Scotland

In agriculture farmers typically used providers to supply seasonal workers directly from Eastern Europe. The fact that there is only a limited window when crops can be harvested and that a high volume of workers are required for this short space of time means that these employers are heavily reliant on agencies to supply them with seasonal labour. In recent years the agricultural sector has become increasingly reliant on SAWS workers (Romanians and Bulgarians), who are tied to particular farms and so are in effect a captive market. The small number of large nationwide providers who can supply SAWS workers are thus popular sources of seasonal farm labour across the UK. Employers also liked using a large reputable provider because they wanted to be seen by their customers (such as the supermarkets) as recruiting and using migrant labour in an ethical manner.

'Some of the growers probably like being with us because for want of a better word they are over-audited in a number of ways, so when the supermarkets make a visit and they see that we are supplying people, then they know that there is a certain minimum standard that is met'.

Danny, labour provider, rural England

The survey only interviewed employers and recruitment agencies, but in these meetings it became evident that our interviewees not only admitted to sourcing migrant workers that fitted with their ideal image through these channels, but that they believed that the channels were also considered beneficial from the perspective of some migrants. Consider Samantha's comment for example;

'Working as an agency worker gives them flexibility – we have plenty of work so they know that all they have to do is come to us and we can get it for them. So they'll come here and work 70 hours a week doing temping for 6 months, take all their money home and live like a lord for 6 months and then come back and do it all over again the following season'.

Samantha, director, labour provider firm, rural England

Migrants were therefore represented as also seeking 'flexibility' and exploited this for their own ends. Samantha, while admitting to labour practices involving long hours on low wages in the UK, extends the image of temporary workers as people who "live like a lord" on their return home. This contrasts with the benevolent self-

representation she attributes to UK employers. This is not a position repeated by Janice (labour provider firm, rural Scotland), who in referring to her companies engagement with agency staff stressed that “we have a lot of experience in helping people in a similar situation”. Thus while UK employers made mainly economic efficiency arguments for sourcing labour via international labour providers their self-image was of being benevolent and helpful towards foreign staff.

7.1.4. THE EMERGENCE OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL FOR EMPLOYERS

Over time the role of labour providers in channelling A8 labour migration flows has become less prominent but the main driver of this has not been the change in economic circumstances brought about by the recession but the opportunities that employers reported in recruiting labour through informal transnational networks. Interviewees often lauded the ‘community spirit’ of these groups, claiming that they supported each other and ‘helped each other’ to find employment.

From the employers perspective this new channel was encouraged because it too was seen to have advantages in ‘producing’ certain types of worker. The positives of the ‘word of mouth’ approach to recruitment were that it was an inexpensive, reliable and convenient means of getting good quality members of staff. The recession simply accelerated the use of these networks as a recruitment tool since employers had greater incentives to reduce recruitment costs and migrant communities had reasons for developing these connections.

‘Normally we get staff because people that work here just recommend us to people they know and everyday we have about ten applications and 95% of them are from people from Eastern Europe who are already living in Scotland and are friends of people that work here and it is also good to have someone that someone else has already recommended because if we have our own employees and they are great and they recommend their friends or someone they know usually they are good as well. So the recruitment is all done through those family and friends networks and we don’t have to do anything else because we get plenty of people that way. We used to work with Jobcentres in Poland but we don’t do it anymore now there are so many people giving in applications for work’.

Beatrice, HR consultant, food processing plant, rural Scotland

A key positive aspect of word of mouth recruitment from interviewee’s perspective was that it functioned as an informal means of filtering good workers.

'I just speak to the guys and say 'look we are looking for someone else' and they'll say 'so and so is coming over in two weeks time' and we take him. That works well for us. We have had one or two people come over and it is so and so's father-in-law and they have been absolute duffers and we have had to say 'look your father-in-law is absolutely useless, we can't employ him'. And the guy is going 'yeah I know he's useless, sorry'. So they will put pressure from within for the people coming over to perform well, because it embarrasses them and puts pressure on them as well.

Martin, owner, building materials production company, rural Scotland

In comments such as this there is clear evidence of the self-regulating nature of labour migration, with 'pressure from within' (Martin) becoming a means of encouraging conformity to the image of the ideal migrant worker.

7.2. LABOUR MIGRATION CHANNELS: DISCUSSION

This research has described some of the main channels that are responsible for shaping how employers source A8 migrants and has noted how these channels have changed over time. Previous research on migration channels has tended to present a rather static image of how these channels recruit selectively from certain cities or regions within a country of origin and shape patterns of migration in a selective geographical fashion in destination regions (Findlay and Li, 1998). The interviews reported in this paper suggest a more dynamic structuring of migration channels as represented in Figure 2. Aspects of the original channels framework are maintained in Figure 2 with the channels being represented as arrows linking origin and destination countries (large rectangles), sourcing labour in particular locations within Eastern Europe and providing labour differentially to particular employers in specific destination locations (small spheres).

The three phases of mobility identified in the interviews suggest that over time some channels grow in importance while others decline. This in turn impacts on the geographical production of migration spaces origin and destination. This paper has not been able to map these spatial outcomes, although the authors (Findlay *et al*, 2010; McCollum and Findlay, 2011) have presented evidence elsewhere of how variable East European geographies are in countries of destination.

What this paper has shown is that the nature of migration channels is not merely a function of economic forces but that they are also culturally produced social

institutions (Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Geddes and Scott, 2010). As such it is not surprising to have learned that they interact and affect one another, as a reflection of how social and cultural practices operate over time. Research remains to be done to explore more fully the geographical consequences of these recruitment practices (e.g. the switch to increased sourcing of labour by informal networks) in producing new emigration geographies in countries such as Poland and Latvia.

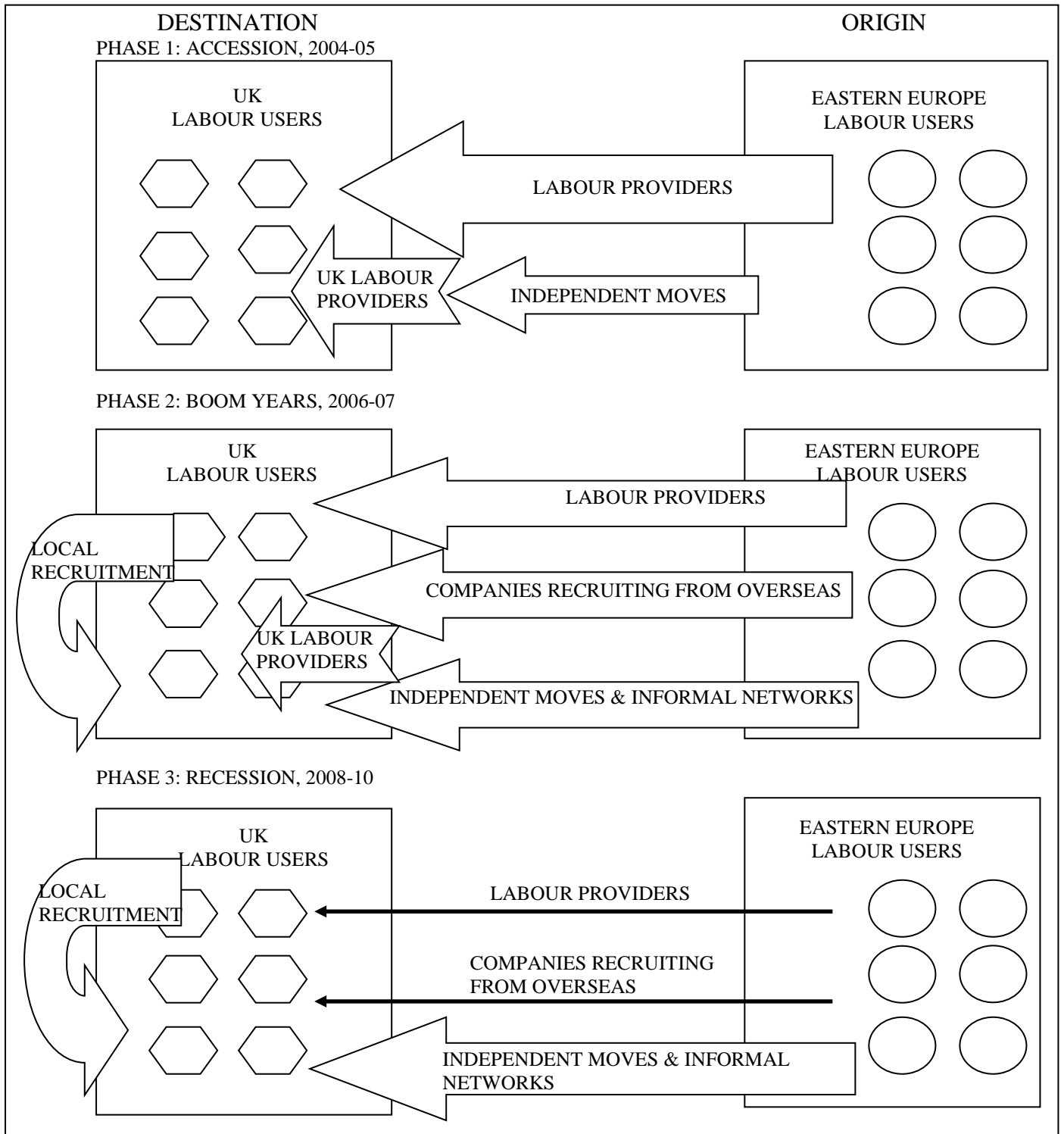


Figure 2 Evolution of East European labour migration channels

The analysis has also focused on employer perceptions and representations of the ‘good worker’. Figure 3 schematises some of the processes that are responsible for producing ‘good workers’. If this schema is meaningful, then East European migrants in the UK labour market are not simply a broad representation of Eastern Europeans

per se but are the product of a range of social and cultural filtering processes that produce ‘good workers’.

If as the literature suggests migrants are self-selecting, then only those who are sufficiently motivated and interested in promoting an appropriate image to potential employers will seek to move. These tend to be individuals who are ambitious, skilled and young. Recruitment agencies in sending countries act as another filtering layer in only putting forward suitable candidates for consideration for positions in the UK. Likewise UK-based labour providers further filter migrants so that they provide UK employers with the most ‘suitable’ candidates. Figure 3, drawing on the interview transcripts then shows how employers filter out the worst performing temps by getting their labour provider to ‘take them away’ (Sam, labour provider, rural Scotland). Finally employers cherry pick the best temps and take them on as permanent members of staff. This filtering process therefore contributes to producing the good worker by selecting out ‘bad’ or ‘not so good’ workers, meaning that only the best workers pass through the various filtering stages and are rewarded by being taken on and given a job by an employer.

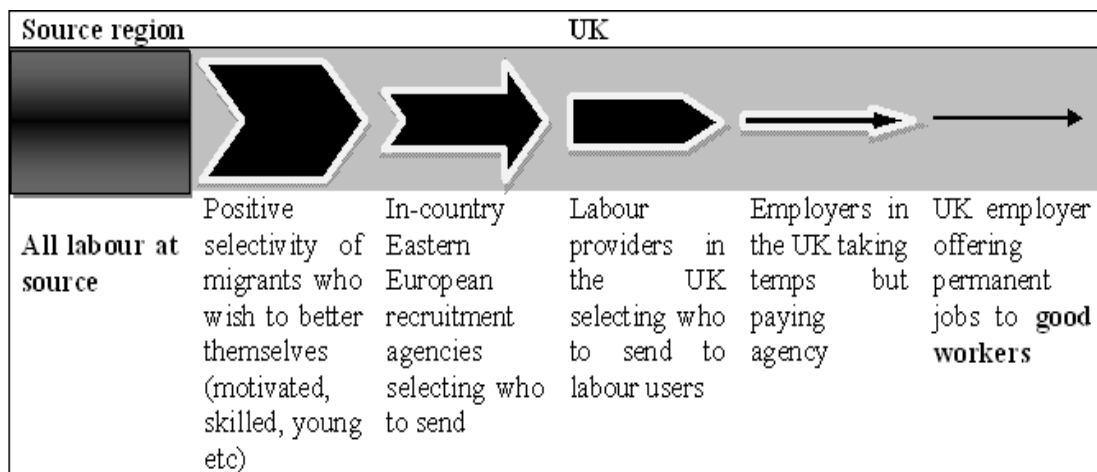


Figure 3 Filtering to ‘produce’ the ‘good worker’

8. CONCLUSIONS

Much has been written of the experiences of East European migrant workers in the UK since EU enlargement in May 2004, and of the impact that these migrants have had not only on the tight labour markets of South East England but also on other parts of the UK economy (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Green, 2007; Stenning and Dawley, 2009). This paper has focused on just one dimension of this process: the perspective of employers and labour providers (recruiters) on East European migration to the UK. We emphasise once again that this does not mean that we repudiate the value of other approaches to examining the relation between international migration and labour market change, as illustrated in our paper on the spatialities of East European migration (Findlay *et al*, 2010).

Not only did the interviews produce evidence of images of the ‘ideal’ migrant worker, but subtexts also emerged about migrants complementing or substituting for local labour. In cases where migrant labour was represented as a substitute for domestic labour, it was suggested that the recession meant that the requirement for migrants had greatly diminished. The recession it was claimed had resulted in an improvement in the quantity and quality of domestic labour available to employers. This became an adequate reason for switching back to using local staff especially in the urban case study areas and in front of house hospitality roles. In other contexts, specifically food production and processing and remote rural areas, employers maintained that migrant labour was complementary rather than substitutional. Despite recession only migrant workers had the ‘soft skills’ and ‘work ethic’ that employers had constructed as necessary. Migrant spaces were shown to be produced through employers recruiting A8 labour to serve particular functions as ‘flexible’ labour. Migrant spaces were represented via discourses of migrants being ‘hard working’, ‘reliable’ and ‘flexible’ whereas indigenous labour was portrayed as ‘workshy’, ‘undependable’ and ‘inflexible’.

Employers engaged with East European labour migrants through a variety of labour channels: recruiting directly from overseas, using labour providers, drawing on migrant’s informal networks and ‘mainstream’ recruitment strategies. Direct recruitment from overseas and the use of labour providers to source staff has decreased somewhat over time whereas informal networks have emerged as a more

prominent labour channel as Eastern European communities have developed in the UK and as businesses have switched to using existing employee connections to recruit new members of staff. This is regarded as an inexpensive, quick and reliable means of getting good quality staff which provides greater opportunity for the employer to enrol staff willing to self-regulate their behaviour or who find themselves under pressure from other migrants to conform to certain norms.

The changing nature of the social institutions of migration channels also points to new transnational practices. Although some employers and labour providers still maintained transnational connections in the form of formal partnerships with organisations in Eastern Europe as a means of sourcing migrant labour, this formal networking was seen to be in decline. Employers appeared eager to develop strategies which enabled them to ‘tap into’ migrant’s informal transnational networks as a recruitment method, through hiring Eastern European consultants who are well known and respected within their local migrant communities. These practices are of interest because they encourage a conception of informal transnational practices as being something which not only migrants develop and use as depicted in the traditional transnational literature (Vertovec, 2009) but also as something that commercial organisations draw on in order to source, select and channel labour migration flows in new ways.

The research has sought to gauge how employers go about sourcing A8 migrant workers and what their representations are of their motives for engaging with them. It has also sought to shed light on the nuances of the labour market aspects of Eastern European migration by examining temporal, sectoral and spatial trends in how it functions in the UK labour market. By suggesting that the labour ‘shortages’ which A8 labour migrants were purported to ‘fill’ were to some extent economically, socially and culturally ‘produced’ (Geddes and Scott, 2010), the paper has aimed to problematise the motives behind the social practices of recruiting and employing Eastern Europeans.

The normative representations of East Europeans as ‘good workers’ willing to engage in precarious labour market situations has been shown to be powerful in explaining why migrants rather than local workers were recruited and employed.

However spatial differences between rural and urban labour markets required different representations to be produced accounting for why East European workers were 'ideal' for intensive agricultural work in quite different ways from the economically and socially constructed roles deemed appropriate for migrants working in the hospitality sector in an urban environment. Moreover, the economic sequence of events that saw the UK labour market switch from boom to recession has been shown to demand subtexts to emerge justifying the continuation of on the one hand of migrants that are 'complementary' to rural local labour markets even during recession, while in tighter urban labour markets 'substitutional' migrant labour was now re-positioned as dispensable in certain circumstances.

One particular contribution of the paper has been the focus on labour migration channels. These have been deemed to be structures that not only are important in accounting for the changing geography of migration at origin and destination, but also to operate as social institutions manipulated by employers (and maybe also by migrants) in different ways during conditions of economic boom and recession. The practices of migrant recruitment have been argued to be powerful as filters producing the 'good worker' (Scott *et al*, 2008), but they have also been shown to be more than that; offering a social switching mechanism allowing employers and migrants to engage in the regulation of social norms (Mansfield, 2000) about the employment expectations of migrants.

Once the UK economy moves towards recovery it will be interesting to see whether employers return to a discourse citing labour shortages as a reason for recruiting East Europeans and whether A8 labour will return to fulfilling the same functions as before. This seems improbable given that by the end of 2013 citizens from the so-called A2 countries (Romania and Bulgaria) will almost certainly have full access to the UK labour market and also given the changing migration geographies that seem inevitable to follow from the opening of much of the rest of the EU to the A8 countries (in May 2011).

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