

WORKING IN THE UK:

Polish migrant worker
routes into employment in
the North East and North
West construction and
food processing sectors

Ian Fitzgerald

University of Northumbria



Contents



This report has been written by Ian Fitzgerald,
at the University of Northumbria, with the
support of the TUC.

Summary of recommendations	i
Introduction	1
1: Polish migrant workers in the UK	2
2: Routes into employment for Polish workers	4
'On spec' and through family and friends	4
Direct company recruitment	6
Direct agency recruitment	7
3: Organising strategies and Polish migrant workers	11
4: Routes into employment and organising strategies in construction and food processing	12
'On spec' and family and friends – a joined up international and community approach	12
Direct company recruitment – some success to build on	13
Direct agency recruitment – grasping the nettle	14
5: Recommendations to support the recruitment of Polish migrant workers	15
Notes and references	16

This report presents the findings of a TUC-funded project that sought to identify the main routes into employment for Polish migrant workers in the North East and North West construction and food processing sectors. Its findings show that the two sectors offer real opportunities and challenges for trade unions to organise those who most need help. Indeed many unions in the sectors have already taken up the challenge and have started to see real successes in organising groups traditionally seen as hard to organise.

Recommendations

There are six key recommendations that will support organisation and recruitment in the construction and food processing sectors:

- **Recommendation one:** Trade unions should develop links with established Polish community groups.
Action: The TUC should facilitate the development of structured working partnerships with key organisations such as the Federation of Poles in Great Britain (ZPWB). These national relationships should be taken forward at a regional level through TUC Regional Councils.
- **Recommendation two:** The TUC and unions should develop a Polish language web resource, providing information to Poles living and working in the UK.
Action: The TUC should work with Solidarnosc (the largest Polish trade union federation) and other relevant UK- and Polish-based partners to develop this resource. In addition, the TUC and unions should work to support the newly constituted Migrant Workers North West, which is also developing Polish language web resources¹.
- **Recommendation three:** The TUC and unions should seize potential opportunities to engage with Polish workers before they come to the UK. Practical work in this area could involve working to support Solidarnosc's network of Information Centres, double-branding materials and literature with Polish partners and developing 'dual membership' arrangements with Polish unions.

Action: The TUC nationally should explore these opportunities and work with affiliated unions to take this work forward on a practical basis.

- **Recommendation four:** Union agreements with agencies providing Polish workers to UK employers have the potential to assist with recruitment of migrant workers at organised sites, and also at unorganised sites where an agency may be supplying labour.
Action: The TUC should work with unions such as the bakers and food union BFAWU that have negotiated agreements with agencies supplying Polish workers, to evaluate the impact of these agreements and share good practice with other affiliates.
- **Recommendation five:** This report notes that a number of unions are now using either Polish full-time officers or Polish workplace reps to support the organisation of Polish workers. This 'like recruits like' approach is vital to the development of sustainable strategies for organising migrant workers.
Action: The TUC should support a one-day conference/seminar bringing together Polish-speaking full-time officers and organisers, and if possible Polish activists, to share and discuss issues and strategies.
- **Recommendation six:** This report and others have identified that a number of Polish workers are skilled workers in low-quality jobs. This means that the learning agenda is important.
Action: The TUC should support a one-day conference/seminar for trade union education officers and key union learning representatives (ULRs) who are currently working with Polish workers. The TUC should also commission further research into the learning and skills needs of migrant workers.

This report presents the findings of a TUC-funded project that sought to identify the main routes into employment for Polish migrant workers in the North East and North West construction and food processing sectors.² It also details the organising strategies that are being employed by trade unions in these sectors and their relationship to the identified routes into employment.

Findings are based on information obtained from a range of trade union, government and non-government sources in the North East and North West, as well as key national and international migrant worker contacts.

In all the following were contacted: seven main trade unions, including Solidarnosc in Poland; two informed migrant workers – one a Pole who administers a Polish website for Newcastle upon Tyne Poles, and the other a Portuguese who acts as a middleman for Poles seeking work in the North East; both regional EURES³ advisers; a representative of the British Polish Chamber of Commerce (BPCC) in Poland; the President of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain (ZPWB); and a large migrant worker employer in the North East of England.

The sectors studied are similar in that they both feature temporary employment and/or seasonal working, poor employment conditions, and a history of migrant worker employment. For example, it was recently estimated that in the construction industry there were up to 100,000 building workers for whom English was their second language.⁴ These sectors then offer real opportunities and challenges for trade unions to organise those who most need help. Indeed, many unions have taken up this challenge already and, as this report details, have started to see real successes in the organisation of workers whom many unions would previously have regarded as virtually unorganisable.

The report is divided into five main sections. The first discusses recent Polish migration to the UK. The second identifies the main routes into employment for these workers in the construction and food processing sectors in the North East and North West of England. The third outlines the relationships, in Poland and in the UK, between Polish migrant workers and trade unions. The fourth reports on organising strategies unions are using to recruit a growing number of these workers. The final section makes six recommendations to support the recruitment of Polish migrant workers.

1 Polish migrant workers in the UK

"Everyone is clued into the Polish thing; suddenly it's a big issue that the Poles are good workers." (Divisional Officer of shop workers' union USDAW)

"For the first period it was like the gold rush. It was sad to see Poles who could not speak any English travelling for 30 hours on a bus and then arriving like nomads at Victoria station. Many of these returned." (Solidarnosc National Official)

In 2004 the Government opened up the UK labour market to workers from the new European states. This had a significant impact on the scale and nature of migration to the UK. The accession data⁵ shown at Table 1 provides the most readily available source of information on A8 migrant workers.

Table 2 presents a profile of Polish workers in relation to all A8 migrant workers in the two sectors under investigation.⁶

There are two main caveats to be considered when using this data. Firstly, it gives only a passing picture of the last 29 months (May 2004–September 2006), using cumulative quarterly totals. No account is taken of outward flows. For example, in June 2004 the Polish Foreign Ministry estimated that of the 15,000 Poles that had left Poland for London following accession in May, 8,000 had already returned.¹⁰ Workers can also sign on with one employer and then leave for another within months – or even weeks – without affecting the published figures as these are based on the applicant's first job and not subsequent

employment. This may mean there are more Polish workers in the north of England than the figures indicate, given the evidence from a number of Polish community sources that workers are beginning their UK working lives in the south and then moving north. "London is too big and expensive," explained one Polish web administrator and construction worker.

Secondly, a recent TUC-funded project,¹¹ backed up by others,¹² found that some workers simply fail to register. This may be due to a number of factors, including the cost of registration, a lack of information, and confusion over the scheme. A representative of the BPCC in Poland stated in interview that the WRS figures could be at least doubled.

The overwhelming bulk of these workers are concentrated in low-skill, low-status and low-paid employment.

Even before 1 May 2004, evidence from a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹³ showed that Polish and other A8 workers had been identified by some employers as offering a low-wage/high-skill alternative to resident workers. The findings reported that "many [A8 migrants] had qualifications and skills significantly above those required by their job. None belonged to a trade union."¹⁴ The main report based on this research also said that A8 workers "are high quality workers for 'low skilled' jobs. In practice, such 'low skilled' jobs typically involve low-waged work".¹⁵ In conclusion, employers in the sectors investigated (construction, hospitality and

agriculture) displayed a considerable reliance on migrant workers to fill semi- and non-skilled jobs.

Evidence is also presented which shows employers are aware that some Polish workers may have lower expectations than their UK counterparts. One employer noted: "They have come from a small Polish village where they spent one hundred euros a month if they were lucky. They still live with their parents, with their animals and they come here seeing the wealth of England."¹⁶ This same view is echoed by a number of those interviewed for this and other recent projects.¹⁷ One USDAW full-time official said: "The Poles I've come across have been working in crap jobs – in dirty, smelly places you would not want to work in." One of the conclusions of the Anderson et al. (2006) report was that employers are developing a recognition not only that A8 workers showed "willingness" to do such jobs, but also of

...the discrepancies between wages in Britain and migrants' countries of origin. This means that migrants often 'accept' a trade-off between working in Britain, under employment conditions that are poor by British standards but high – at least in terms of the wages received – when compared to employment in migrants' countries of origin.¹⁸

Clearly there are important trade union issues here. It is vital that these A8 migrants not only have the same wages and conditions as the wider workforce but also that they are members of the union, to halt the growth of 'separate groups'¹⁹ in the workforce.

The scale and nature of recent migration into the UK can be seen in the demographic and cultural changes taking place in towns and cities across the country. For example, the Polish priest in Newcastle upon Tyne noted that prior to accession there were only 57 people left from the established Polish community. The city now supports two dedicated Polish language websites. The administrator of one of these websites is currently developing further sites for other cities and towns in the region. He reported that between December 2005, when the website launched, and December 2006, it had

received a million hits. He added that it was now receiving approximately 15,000 hits a day, around 50 per cent of which are from those still in Poland.²⁰

In an interview, the President of the ZPWB commented that there was little reported tension between 'established' and 'new' Polish communities, although the 'new' Poles were less likely to engage in the more traditional activities of existing Polish communities, apart from attending church. However, he believed that the younger newly arrived Polish workers had a strong respect for their 'elders', a situation commented on by several trade union interviewees.

One unknown factor is how long newly arrived Polish workers are likely to stay in the UK. While some undoubtedly stay and settle in the country – sometimes bringing their families with them – the ZPWB President believed that a large number intended to go home after saving the money they needed, a view reinforced by Polish Foreign Ministry figures.

There is one final point to make in this section. While A8 workers generally, and Polish workers specifically, are having an important impact on the UK labour market, their migration is also having an impact on the economies and labour markets of the countries they leave behind. While it has not been the remit of this project to consider this question, the effects should be noted – and have been by officers of Solidarnosc. A Solidarnosc regional Gdansk officer²¹ explained that his region was a major exporter of labour to the EU. Many of the workers that left, he said, had previously been formally employed in Poland. Their absence left the region (and the wider country) with the difficult task of bringing long-term unemployed people back into work. He said that nearly 50 per cent of these unemployed were working in the informal economy and would not engage in the sectors that had been drained of semi- and skilled workers. This means that, while traditional Polish communities in the UK are being revitalised as new workers move in, the communities and families left behind in Poland are trying to cope with the gaps left by EU accession.

Approved registered workers	Country of origin	Age profile (A8s)		Gender (A8s)	
	Poland	Up to 34	35-44	Male	Female
486,660	307,670 (63%)	402,790 (83%)	50,055 (10%)	58%	42%

	UK A8s	Polish	North East A8 ⁸	Polish	North West A8	Polish ⁹
Construction	18,925	12,525	435	288	2,190	–
Food processing	24,255	15,245	556	349	2,690	–

2 Routes into employment for Polish workers

Interviewees identified three main routes into employment for Polish workers in the construction and food processing sectors. EURES supported the latter two. The three routes are:

- ‘on spec’ and through family and friends.
- direct company recruitment.
- direct agency recruitment.

‘On spec’ and through family and friends

The term ‘on spec’ relates to Polish workers who have made the decision to migrate to the UK to work without being offered a particular job. The President of the ZPWB commented that ‘on spec’ relocation was “happening a lot”, while a Polish TGWU organiser noted that the developing transport links meant that this was “not hard to do” (see Table 3). The Polish web administrator and construction worker interviewed for this report said “people get a plane to the UK and have money to last two or three weeks – in that time they can find somewhere to work”.

There is some evidence that ‘on spec’ routes into employment are becoming less common, a trend confirmed by the BPCC representative in Poland. With a return rate of over 50 per cent in the first month of accession this is probably not surprising. The BPCC representative said: “We are trying to get more structure

to entry so that people are sure what job they will have, where they will be living, and what employment conditions they will have [when they arrive in the UK].”

One way of bringing more structure and security to the ‘on spec’ route is by using family and friends as a stepping stone to work in the UK, to avoid ‘arriving cold’. Solidarnosc and other respondents identified the growing importance of these personal channels in helping new and potential migrants find appropriate UK employment opportunities.

The use of family and friends was confirmed by a number of interviewees, ranging from workers in Poland contacting family and friends to ask where jobs were and who to approach, to agencies and companies approaching Polish workers in their workforce and asking them if they knew of anyone whom they felt was suitable to work in the UK.

Both the Polish TGWU organiser and the Portuguese middleman commented that using family and friends was a newer development for Polish workers finding jobs. The Polish TGWU organiser said: “This is a definitely a new way to get work. People come here and see if it’s a place they can settle and work in for a while, or for good. [If they like it] they will let family and friends know it is safe and they will then come over.”

Table 3 – Examples of transport links to cities in the project regions²²

Company	Transport type	Route	Timetable
Easyjet	airline	Kraków to Liverpool	Mon, Wed, Fri & Sun
Jet2	airline	Kraków to Newcastle	Mon & Fri (started October 2006)
Sky Europe	airline	Kraków to Manchester	Tues, Thurs & Sat
Wizzair	airline	Gdansk to Liverpool	Tues, Thurs & Sat
		Katowice to Liverpool	Tues, Thurs, Sat & Sun
		Warsaw to Liverpool	Mon, Thurs, Fri & Sun
Acorn	coach ²³		
Eurobus	coach		
Eurolines	coach		
EuropaExpress	coach		
Orbis	coach		
Polonia Transport	coach		

Given the scope of this project it would be wrong to talk about formalised networks here rather than family and friends, although there was clear evidence of developing Polish migrant networks in the construction industry.

Construction

In the construction sector the ‘on spec’ route was not regarded as a main contributor to routes into employment.

The North East-based Polish web administrator and construction worker was the only respondent who identified that he had come to the UK ‘on spec’ (following this, he had used an agency to gain employment in the sector²⁴).

However, the influence of ‘family and friends’, and the early signs of informal networks, were evident in both regions. In the North East this had become apparent during a recent project²⁵ which found that Polish construction workers had begun to network by passing on details of good sub-contractors and sites to work at both in and outside the North East region. At a project debriefing, the North East regional secretary of construction union UCATT reported that following the Christmas holidays in 2005/06 a number of Polish workers who had been in contact with UCATT regionally had moved to the North West. He believed this was because rates of pay were slightly higher in the North West and he claimed that as people found their feet they would pass on information to others.

A union full-time official in the North West provided an example of how the more structured ‘family and friends’ route works in practice. “The Poles seem to be settling in here. I talk to them and they talk about setting up residence and bringing their families over. This is distinctly different from other migrant A8 and Portuguese workers we talk to. They seem to be more comfortable setting up a life here than some other migrant workers.”

The recent PEMINT project²⁶ to investigate recruitment in the sector found that mid- and low-skilled recruitment often occurs at site level through informal networks, with migratory chains dominating for foreign labour.

Food processing

A recent USDAW survey²⁷ of food manufacturing found that 61 per cent of site managements had recruited migrant workers in the UK. This would suggest that Polish workers were entering the UK and then finding work either ‘on-spec’, through family and friends, or through UK-based employment agencies.

In the North East, the human resources officer at a food processing plant said that, following recommendations from Polish employees, her company had recruited further family members. Meanwhile, in the North West, a convenor at an Oldham bakery site reported that Poles had moved into the local community and had then directly approached the company for application forms, eventually leading to jobs.

Students were identified as a key demographic group by both the TGWU full-time official covering the North East and North West and the North East-based Portuguese middleman, although this group would have reasons other than work for coming to the UK. A Solidarnosc respondent also spoke of Polish students coming to the UK in their gap year.

The Portuguese middleman made reference to the numerous coach links (see Table 3, page 4), which he believed allowed people to come to the UK on their own to look for work in the sector ‘on spec’. He, and other Polish interviewees from prior projects,²⁸ also noted that, if money ran out whilst looking for work, people were likely to seek assistance from family and friends rather than claiming any form of benefit from the state.

He also reported that many of the large sites he dealt with no longer recruited workers who personally approached site managers. Instead employers were going through agencies. This was confirmed by a convenor at a food processing plant in Carlisle, who said that a number of the Poles she had spoken to had come to the area ‘on spec’ but had got a job at her site only after finding out which agency to approach and applying for work through it.

Summary

- The 'on spec' route will continue to have a role in Polish recruitment due to the easy transport links.
- As numbers of Polish workers in the UK increase there is growing evidence that the 'on spec' route is becoming more structured, with more people using family and friends to find work. These new routes may be better described as emerging informal Polish networks.
- The evidence from this study indicates that if people come to the UK 'on spec' they are likely to have some idea of where to go (information either from websites or through family and friends, for example).
- In construction, migrant networks have an important role in semi-skilled recruitment (PEMINT project²⁹).
- In food processing the 'on spec' route was important, with family and friends having a role. A recent USDAW survey³⁰ indicates that migrant workers are being recruited predominantly in the UK. It is clear that employment agencies have a strong grip on recruitment at many large plants in the sector.

Direct company recruitment

Employers are starting to use a number of resources to source Polish labour directly. The BPCC representative in Poland noted that there were at least two web pages³¹ and a newspaper with around a hundred pages of jobs (six pages of UK jobs) and that companies are moving away from using the Polish language and are beginning to use English to advertise UK job opportunities.

Solidarnosc reported that where it has come across direct recruitment by employers it has been focused on a particular trade, for example bus drivers, who have been recruited en masse. The President of the ZPWB noted that UK employers were going to Poland and "organising a job fair by hiring a room at a hotel and advertising in the local media. This way people are more sure of getting a guaranteed job, although I think this only accounts for a small number [of workers] who come over." He added that when Polish workers in the UK leave to return home some employers are asking them to recommend a family member or friend to take their place.

The North East EURES adviser reported that the organisation was also involved with companies who wished to recruit in this way.³² He said that following an approach from a local company he would contact a Polish EURES adviser and provide details of the company requirements. Job advertisements were then placed locally with Polish EURES, using the company requirements to shortlist applicants. If required, EURES will provide assistance (excluding financial support) to company representatives to go across to Poland to personally interview prospective employees.³³

The North East EURES adviser also gave examples of people in Poland directly contacting employers in the North East, although he believed EURES was currently responsible for finding employment for only a small number of A8 workers in the North East.

Even though this route is clearly visible, there is at present insufficient evidence for direct company recruitment making a major contribution to methods of recruitment in the sectors under consideration. This reflects the findings of a recent Home Office report,³⁴ which stated that only "a few employers" had directly advertised or established their own contacts abroad for the recruitment of migrant workers.

Construction

In construction at a sectoral level, direct company employment plays an important role in both regions.³⁵ In the North East this is the main recruitment route into employment for the majority of Poles identified, including those involved in the recent six-month long Organising Migrant Workers project.³⁶ These workers all worked for one Sunderland sub-contractor and the company directors (a Polish woman and an English man) had apparently been to Poland and directly advertised for workers through posters in newsagents promising good jobs. Polish workers had then used their own transport to the North East.

This sub-contractor caused a number of significant problems for these workers. It took the length of the project to "bring this sub-contractor into line", in the words of a UCATT official, and it has now signed an

agreement with UCATT. However, the number of Polish workers employed has dwindled as people 'walked away' and UCATT pressured the company and helped workers by opening up opportunities for a number of the Poles to be employed directly by one of the main contractors in the region. The recruitment practices of more recent sub-contractors³⁷ using Polish workers are not known.

In the North West there was no direct company or sub-contractor recruiting reported; instead agencies were playing the leading role.

Food processing

In food processing, direct company recruitment was not reported as influential. An USDAW divisional officer cited a large supermarket chain as the "only company I have come across who have gone to Poland to source direct".

Both EURES regional advisers stated that they had not assisted any food processing companies to obtain Polish workers.

A North West Regional Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) official did note that some Polish workers were coming into employment following job fairs organised by the BPCC in Poland, but he was unsure whether these were company- or agency-based fairs.

Summary

- Even though there are a number of paper- and web-based sources containing information on jobs and details of employers, respondents did not believe this to be a main source of recruitment in the sectors under investigation.
- Other evidence from a recent large-scale study³⁸ supports this conclusion, suggesting that employment agencies or family and friends may play a more important role.
- Direct recruitment was found to be the main route into construction employment in the North East. However, Polish 'networks' are starting to develop and these have been used by people to find work in the North West. Respondents in the North West reported that agencies are still the main route into construction employment for Polish workers.

- In food processing only one respondent noted the possibility of companies directly recruiting Polish workers. Instead it was felt that agencies had a dominant role.

Direct agency recruitment

The importance of agencies for gaining employment was highlighted by the BPCC representative in Poland, who noted that 38 of its member organisations were recruitment agencies, making them the largest type of employer. The Polish TGWU organiser reported that the majority of Polish migrant workers she came across had found their work through agencies advertising on the internet or in Polish papers. The President of the ZPWB agreed that agencies were important for providing employment opportunities, but added a word of caution concerning the "sizable minority who advertise in Poland, get money from people and then either leave people high and dry without a job or treat them badly".

The Polish web administrator and construction worker agreed with this point, but said Poles had become wiser to unscrupulous agencies. "The most usual way Poles find work is through agencies, but they are more careful now and don't trust them because of what they have done [in the past]. People are now turning to family and friends in the UK who help suggest good agencies."³⁹ The BPCC representative noted that his organisation is currently training Warsaw employment agency managers on work opportunities in the UK so they know "who to watch out for and who to trust".

Respondents commented that, prior to EU accession, Polish employees in the UK were offered small amounts of money to recommend workers to agencies. Following accession these payments appear to have stopped, as large numbers of migrant workers are now readily available.⁴⁰

The North East EURES adviser made the point that Polish-based EURES will not work with an agency unless it is licensed in Poland or is an 'employer in its own right'. Other A8 countries, he noted, were less particular with agencies. This requirement for an agency to be an employer in its own right is significant, as there are two

main types of agency (discussed in more detail below) – those that employ and manage their staff and those that supply labour to a company, which then adopts the status of employer.

Construction

In construction both regions have a slightly higher than average reliance on agency labour.⁴¹ In the North East the influence of agency migrant workers was not considered significant, with UCATT reporting only one agency. This agency has an allegedly poor track record,⁴² with reports that agency management have used threatening behaviour towards UCATT full-time officials and the project team on several occasions. It has also been reported by reps on site that the agency transports its workers⁴³ from the Midlands each day and that workers must pay for this. So far UCATT has failed to build a membership base, or reach an agreement, with the company.

In the North West, direct agency recruitment was the only reported route into employment in construction. The UCATT Regional Secretary noted that a large number of agencies have their base in Ireland; and an Amicus full-time official, although not having full details, was aware that Poles were being bought on to a Wirral site via agencies based in Poland. A UCATT full-time official who has dealt with the Poles over a long period confirmed that one of the main bases for agencies was Dublin. He reported that these agencies originally sourced Polish workers directly, providing a ‘first generation’ of Polish workers. However, a new ‘second generation’ of such workers has developed through the ‘family and friends’ route.

The UCATT full-time official stated that the highest profile agency is currently ICDS,⁴⁴ which he described as “a good agency”. He went on to say: “I have not come across any bad agencies as far as Poles are concerned.”⁴⁵ However, the UCATT official also spoke of the “large support network” that Polish workers had in the Manchester area. He said this was centred on a ‘company’⁴⁶ that helps Polish workers in Manchester and the surrounding areas with their employment status and other matters. This company, he said, has written to agencies following complaints from Polish workers to

remind agencies of employment law and asking that they follow it.

The only other agencies providing construction employment for Polish workers in the North West were identified following a review of the web,⁴⁷ although these have not been confirmed by respondents as being active in the sector.

Food processing

In food processing, the use of agencies⁴⁸ dominated in both regions, with all interviewees confirming this. The main type of agencies identified were those directly employing staff for a fee to prospective clients. The second type, which recruited staff from Poland and then ‘delivered’ them to a prospective client, was also present. USDAW confirmed that the former type was the most common in the food processing industry. A full-time officer in Cumbria of the general union the GMB shed light on how the two types of agencies can sometimes become blurred:

“Inter Continental Labour have a sales person who visits companies [in the UK] and establishes links to send people at fairly short notice, as they seem to have them on tap to send over. They do the interviewing and all that before sending them over. I understand they are quite a good company, as once they send them over they can either stay with the agency, or, if the host company pay a fee, they can go on to the books. For example, at a local seafood site they go straight on to the books on the same terms and conditions. It’s said that there’s no probationary period though, and if that is true they can get rid of them at any time in the first 12 months.”⁴⁹

A number of interviewees said that the use of temporary agency staff was increasing. A TGWU full-time official noted that at some large food processing sites employers had used natural wastage to increase temporary staffing levels from approximately 15 to over 50 per cent. The same official went on to report that, as a further cost-saving measure, a number of sites were moving to recruiting solely through agencies.

This move was also reported by an USDAW convenor at a large site in Cumbria: “The company do not have the resources to interview staff. Now even if someone comes to the site for an application form they still have to apply through the agency.”⁵⁰

A recent USDAW survey⁵¹ explored this trend further. Thirty-four food manufacturing sites organised by the union were questioned, of which 29 used agency staff (85.3 per cent), which made up around 17 per cent of the workforce at these sites.⁵² It was noted that there had been an increase in the use of agency staff at 24 of these 29 sites (82.8 per cent) over the last year (between late 2004 and late 2005). Overseas labour was used at 80 per cent of the sites, with the majority coming from Europe, and Poland being the dominant nation.⁵³ A number of respondents reported that agencies had offices in both Poland and the UK. One human resources officer at a food processing plant in the North East commented that their ‘preferred’ agency bought staff directly over from Poland, although she was aware that other companies in the group she worked for had gone directly to Poland to recruit, with or without the involvement of an agency.

A number of respondents reported on the methods used by agencies to convince employers and unions to use and accept this employment route. The BFAWU convenor at the Oldham site reported that:

“The agency” put a presentation together for the senior shop stewards and management. They told us about a property where Polish workers would be staying and said that they would initially pay for flights, which would eventually come out of Poles’ wages. We questioned the Poles when they started working here, and viewed the properties, and found that all was in order.”

This practice, of paying for flights and then providing accommodation, is a common one and is one of the most obvious ways that agencies claw back money back from immigrant workers. The majority of respondents confirmed the existence of this system and many had heard of agencies abusing the practice but not all were sure about specific cases.

A TGWU full-time official spoke of one agency in Selby, with an office in Poland, that had offered Polish workers in Poland ‘contracts of employment’, but when the workers arrived in the UK they were given English-language ‘contracts of service’ – “which they couldn’t read but which they were still pressured to sign”. He said that he had taken on seven tribunal cases around this issue so far and in all cases the workers were offered pre-tribunal settlements. A further two trade union respondents spoke of agency workers they had come across working under poor conditions.⁵⁵

More encouragingly, it seems that, as Poles spend longer in the UK, they are becoming better informed. A GMB full-time official in Carlisle said: “Because the Poles are starting to settle down here, a lot of them now know their rights and so are leaving the iffy agencies and going to job centres. The job centres send them on to Initial and Rentokil, which place them in jobs other than cleaning.”

It was also noted that in a number of plants Polish agency workers are being brought on to the permanent staff. A BFAWU full-time official said this was happening in Manchester, while at a site in Carlisle the convenor stated that following 10–12 months’ continuous work Poles are being taken on permanently. An USDAW full-time official noted that at a Cheshire site the union had put pressure on the employer locally to make Polish workers permanent. He went on to say that where they could demonstrate that there was a core number of Poles who had been at a site for a reasonable period of time they were taken on permanently. In a similar story, an Oldham site convenor reported: “We have started to take the Poles on permanently as they are very keen and have a low absentee record. Friends also often offer to do double shifts if one of them is not well.”

However, the two main regional officials covering the North East for BFAWU and USDAW felt it was too early to say if workers being offered permanent jobs was becoming a common practice. A TGWU full-time official covering the North West said the picture was mixed: “At a large site I know, Poles were moved on to the books

3 Organising strategies and Polish migrant workers

but [when the employer] realised they could rip them off better by using an agency, they moved them back.”⁵⁶

Respondents did, though, think that the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 (GLA) would have a lasting effect on how agencies operated. Unsurprisingly, all respondents welcomed the legislation. The Portuguese middleman said: “This is going to help a lot. No question that this will make a big difference to the food processing workers I deal with.” Several believed food processing would now be easier to monitor, although some questioned the policing of the legislation. One TGWU full-time official commented: “If you look at the first inspectorate report, it is only a slap on the wrist. I think it needs beefing up. It worries me that people will find a way around it.”

Some respondents believed that the GLA had hastened a restructuring in the sector, with the number of agencies being reduced. The Portuguese middleman said: “Some of the companies I deal with have had to stop using bad recruitment agencies because they can’t achieve the licence.” Trade union respondents agreed that agency consolidation was underway. “It is easier for national companies to regulate with fewer agencies supplying the labour. They don’t want to be seen as acting unlawfully.” The TGWU full-time official also commented on the power that retailers had in driving this.

The human resources officer for a large food processing plant in the North East took a different view, stating that, as it used only one main agency, “the legislation has not made a lot of difference to how we do business”.

A TGWU full-time official added that, even though a large food processing plant he was involved with had reduced the number of agencies it used from fifty-seven to four, he felt this was “partly due to a realisation, with our help, that many of the agencies were ripping them off. It was also not clear if the Polish workers supplied had the correct hygiene training.”

A GMB full-time officer also noted that consolidation and restructuring was causing a number of agencies to move their offices to Dubai and other locations outside

the EU, even though GLA legislation applies to any supplier of labour, wherever they are based.

It is evident that large sites have moved to one or two key agency suppliers. For example, the respondent at the North East food processing plant said it had one agency and a secondary back-up one for when the first could not supply their requirements. Research in the food manufacturing sector in the East Midlands confirmed this trend over two years ago.⁵⁷ USDAW nationally reported that companies often changed agencies after a period to keep them ‘on their toes’.

Summary

- Agency recruitment was identified by a number of respondents as being a key access route into employment.
- While agencies are legally bound to be licensed in Poland, there was evidence that many are operating otherwise. Positively, respondents reported that Polish workers are becoming aware of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ agencies.
- In construction, even though the North East has the second highest reported rate of agency labour, agencies do not play a key role. In contrast, it was reported that agencies dominated routes into employment in the North West.
- A North West UCATT official also commented on the importance of Polish community organisations in relation to agencies and employment problems.
- Agencies dominated the food processing sector, with all respondents reporting their presence. These agencies recruited their staff in both Poland and the UK.
- Agencies have started to become the sole route into employment at a number of large food processing manufacturers, and respondents commented on the growth of agency labour at sites. This is supported by recent evidence from an USDAW sector study.⁵⁸
- Even though there were reports of agency staff being moved on to the permanent staff at some plants, some abuse by agencies was apparent. It was felt, though, that the recent gangmasters legislation would assist in reducing abuse and had further accelerated agency restructuring in the sector.

Before discussing the recruitment strategies at play in both the construction and food processing sectors, it is worth reflecting on the comments of some respondents, in particular those of two Polish interviewees, on Polish workers and trade unions.

It is documented⁵⁹ that Poles and other Eastern European workers can be suspicious of trade unions, although Solidarnosc was a major force for social change in the early 1980s. As the President of the ZPWB commented: “UK unions cannot treat Polish workers like those from the UK, who have a trade union ethos. It is a different ethos in Poland and they must make an effort to bring Polish people in.”

The TWGU full-time Polish organiser went into the reasons for this suspicion:

“The experience Poles have of unions is totally different to English workers. The general unions in Poland do not work across sectors and a number of unions are workplace-based. A lot of these have deals with the companies and people do not trust them. They work well for a short period and then individuals are ‘bought off’.”

It is understandable then that many Polish workers will have to be ‘won over’ by UK unions, and this means trust is critical. “It is to do with communications,” the TWGU full-time Polish organiser said. “You have to show them that you will be there for them; if they can see this, you will get them into membership. For example, if there is a problem across the whole agency and the union can solve it, then they will all join.”

The President of the ZPWB believes that unions can be:

“...too rigid, as they will not take a tribunal case for six months, even though many people only come for a short period. If the union said “we will help you” from day one then their message would spread like wildfire through the community and membership would rise. Unions must work with groups like ours – we can help spread the message.”

A TGWU full-time officer agreed with these comments, noting the importance of Polish language newsletters for communication. He also said he had started to investigate organising in the Polish community and had had some successes with Poles who had joined at organised sites, and at unorganised sites asking for application forms for family and friends.

Significantly, the TGWU is beginning to develop a small group of Polish organisers who will be able to contribute to workplace as well as community organising. A number of other trade union respondents said they had Polish shop stewards and Poles on trade union site committees, which will clearly be important for any future recruitment. These activist and full-time officer links with the Polish community will allow unions to break down barriers and gain the trust of newly resident workers.

But the TWGU full-time Polish organiser believed this was not enough and that a national officer to deal specifically with migrant worker issues was needed in the union. “I sometimes feel that I’m on my own, that there is not the focus at a national level. Others I have spoken to say the same thing. I have no central point to go to and it is hard to find information. The TUC have a good information point but that is not enough.”

The TGWU in the North West Region in association with UNISON (among others) and the North West Development Agency has formed Migrant Workers North West. The Polish organiser felt this was a move in the right direction, but the President of the ZPWB believed that a Polish language telephone contact point would be more influential.⁶⁰

4 Routes into employment and organising strategies in construction and food processing

The fit between the current organising strategies being used and the main routes into employment identified requires a continuation of current developments and, importantly, a concerted effort to develop new initiatives.

Trade unions must share information and the newly formed multi-union Migrant Workers North West provides an excellent opportunity for information sharing.

With the 'on spec' and family and friends route into employment there is a clear need to consider community organising. Direct links between UK and Polish unions are also important.⁶¹

Direct company recruitment is also reliant on international trade union links and trade union influence with governmental 'agencies' such as EURES and BPC, who are assisting in this process. There is, of course, always an opportunity to organise and recruit these workers once they are inside the UK, but this relies on trade union strength at the workplace level and attention being given to the recruitment of migrant workers by reps and full-time officials.

Direct agency recruitment is much the same as the company scenario but harder to crack.

All three of the above scenarios had to varying degrees influenced the strategies being used by those spoken to and the following details the scope of each.

'On spec' and family and friends – a joined up international and community approach

As the 'on spec' route to finding work in Britain is becoming more structured, with a greater reliance on family and friends, Polish UK communities are now even more central to potential organising efforts. Solidarnosc officials commented that people look for an 'anchor' in the UK before travelling over.⁶² This suggests that many new Polish migrants are looking to live in either established or newly developing UK Polish communities. However, just one union in the study noted this as an important resource for their recruitment of Polish workers. A UCATT official in the North West construction sector said the main way he had organised

Poles was through direct contact, in their houses, and through the Polish Church. "With the Poles, it has predominantly been community organising, and I think it's because they were organised themselves and they said, 'this is the guy we need to be talking to'."

The actual process of undertaking community organising initially involved using established routes such as visiting sites. The official then met Poles after work, but noted the common problem of gaining their trust. The defining moment for him was the international link provided by a Solidarnosc national organiser, Tomasz Laskowski:

"Tomasz was a middleman who went into the communities and spoke to people and asked if they would meet with me. After he had introduced me he would step aside and I carried it on, giving my number and details to people. When Tomasz got involved we came forward so very quickly and so very far. He has great drive and his drive became their drive."

The only other respondent who hinted at community engagement was a GMB full-time training officer in Cumbria who deals with a large number of food processing sites. He stated that they had used the learning agenda to gain access to Polish workers, but had found it difficult to put forward the union argument on company sites. They had therefore begun to approach groups off-site, but no further details were given.

Moving on to international links, one of the most important of recent times has been the use of Tomasz Laskowski in both sectors in the North West and, for a short period, in the North East (mainly construction).

The series of interviews and discussions undertaken with leading Solidarnosc national and Gdansk regional officers opened a number of discussion areas on this issue. The main conclusion from these was that Solidarnosc is willing to help and be involved with other unions in the EU with regard to migration.⁶³ A Solidarnosc International Officer felt that an effective way to engage was through campaigns orchestrated by UK trade unions, with Solidarnosc assisting in Poland.

However, the same officer also noted that "it will be hard for us to help organise people who pay their dues elsewhere", a sentiment reinforced by others. This is a clear impediment to both Polish and UK trade unions.

This issue notwithstanding, Solidarnosc officials recognised that, if Poles in the UK realised that Solidarnosc had played a joint leading role in campaigns and the recruitment of Polish workers in the UK, then there was every prospect that when they returned to Poland they would retain trade union membership, with every likelihood that Solidarnosc would gain.⁶⁴

During these discussions four main areas were identified:

- Using the Solidarnosc 'brand' to 'double-badge' literature, leaflets etc. used by unions when communicating with, or campaigning for engagement with, newly arrived Polish workers.lxv
- A Polish language web resource.
- Joint engagement in Solidarnosc Information Centres.
- Complementary joint agreements with UK trade unions where a Polish worker would hold dual membership rights.⁶⁶

Probably the least costly method would be branding, although, as noted, this does carry a cautionary note – it would entail confirming this initiative with the union formally and then informing national UK unions.⁶⁷ A web resource would need seed funding, and the TUC and Solidarnosc are already in talks about taking this initiative forward. The Information Centres are probably the most developed idea. A senior regional officer reported that in the Gdansk region, a leading exporter of Polish labour to the EU, the union had a number of local offices with staff and these could be used as places where union information and contact details could be placed for those seeking employment in the UK.⁶⁸ Complementary joint agreements, which could include dual membership arrangements, would provide a sustainable reason for Solidarnosc to engage in the migration process but will take senior support and ongoing discussion in both countries.

Direct company recruitment – some success to build on

Much of the food processing engagement was at organised sites, and the North East construction work was carried out in the same vein. To take construction first, it was only in the North East that it was confirmed that companies had direct engagement in Polish migration. The North East account is reported fully elsewhere,⁶⁹ where the established recruitment strategy of site visits was used. This was bolstered by mobile phone contact with Polish workers and, crucially, supporting Polish workers even though they were not members of the union. As reported, North West recruitment was carried out predominantly through a community-based approach.

In food processing much of the recruitment was based on organised sites where Poles were beginning to be taken on permanently. As the Polish TGWU organiser said: "[When there is a union presence in a workplace]... the Poles see that the union can be trusted. But if it is not already organised it is very difficult because the Poles do not trust unions." A number of trade union respondents agreed with this sentiment, with a GMB full-time official noting the difficulty where the union is not recognised, as this was "where people are desperately in need of a trade union".

The GMB full-time training officer in Cumbria commented that site agreements were important here and this was the case with other unions. For example, with BFAWU the site agreement has allowed access to Polish workers during the induction process. A BFAWU full-time official stated: "We get in at inductions and prove ourselves because they are wary of unions as some have had bad experiences with unions in their own country." The BFAWU convenor at the site in Oldham agreed, noting that all the Polish workers there had joined the union. This followed inductions where the union put together a short presentation for new workers. "They [the Poles] had no issue with joining the union. We have also used the Learning Centre – they visit it to learn English and use it as a 'drop-in' centre to email friends and book flights home to Poland." An USDAW convenor at a large site in Carlisle also said she intended to use this approach. She

5 Recommendations to support the recruitment of Polish migrant workers

reported that she had been able to get “quite a few” Poles into the union and was able to enlist one of these workers as a shop steward. This steward now “looks after the Poles” and all permanent Polish workers have joined the union. She noted that it was “easy to recruit if they [Polish workers] are on the books, as it goes through the payroll”, but added that those working for agencies had been harder to get into membership.

The issue of ‘like recruiting like’ has been put into practice here and the GMB full-time training officer in Cumbria reported that the union had trained some of the Poles to carry out translation work. This occurred after shop stewards identified Polish workers who would assist. As noted earlier, the TGWU has taken on a number of Polish organisers, and USDAW in the North East reported that it was beginning to train a Polish representative for a full-time official’s role.

The learning agenda can also be a useful recruitment tool. A GMB full-time training officer in Cumbria described how company learning agreements, which, for example, support the Investors In People process, allow the union to do an initial skills-for-life diagnostic with workers, including Polish workers. This provides a ‘foot in the door’ at companies with weak or no organisation.

Direct agency recruitment – grasping the nettle

Agencies are playing a leading role in both sectors and it was only in North East construction where it was felt they were not the main route into employment for Polish workers.

The recruitment of agency workers in construction in the North West was carried out through a community organising approach, as reported above.

With regard to food processing, it is worth first returning to the USDAW survey⁷⁰ for an overview of the recruitment of agency workers. This found that there were only a few sites where the majority of agency staff were in the union; the main reasons for non-recruitment were language barriers (20.5 per cent of respondents) and a non-union culture (17.6 per cent). Importantly, only

37 per cent of agency staff received the same rate of pay as directly employed staff and a mere 32 per cent had access to lifelong learning.⁷¹

However, the most strategically important case reported by respondents to this survey was one concerning BFAWU. Here the union had negotiated an agreement with a locally based agency,⁷² which meant the company ‘opened its books’, with the union having a right to inspect any accommodation provided by the agency. A BFAWU District Officer said: “We’ve had an influence from the start, and as we’re a recognised trade union it gives us the opportunity to bring people into employment on the same terms and conditions.” The Poles being employed are receiving a recommendation from the agency in Poland to join the union and BFAWU now has a number of members who have joined in this way. An USDAW full-time official also reported that its Deputy General Secretary was pursuing a recognition agreement with one of the main agencies providing Polish labour in the sector.

Elsewhere, though, the picture was not good. “The agencies have been absolutely hostile, there’s too much money to be made in the game,” said the TGWU full-time official. Because of this hostility, the TGWU has targeted not only agencies but also the main employers who use agency workers, pressuring them to support initiatives for the better treatment of migrant workers. “It’s about embarrassing them. Some of these large company CEOs are signatories to a code of practice on migrant workers but they are turning a blind eye to the treatment of their agency migrant workers.”

A GMB convenor on one of the large Carlisle sites noted that, even though it had had some success with agency staff, the problem is the transient nature of some of the Polish workers and the twilight shifts they work.

Finally, an USDAW full-time official in the North West talked about the difficulty of regularising union membership arrangements with workers who often struggle to set up or access bank accounts, noting “if we had got check-off we would have cracked it”.

This report has demonstrated that a number of different routes into employment exist for Polish workers entering the UK labour market. These differing routes and the different nature of employment by sector and region should inform union organising strategies.

While this report contains many positive examples of unions developing organising strategies to reach out effectively to Polish migrant workers, it has also shown that these strategies are often not consistent; are not always effective; and that unions have much to learn from each other and community-based organisations. It makes strategic sense then to suggest that experience and best practice are shared, so that real gains can be made as a whole.

There have been a number of innovative and important strategies identified in this report, many of which are still at an early stage. With this in mind the following six recommendations offer a series of concrete actions that will help foster shared progress.

- **Recommendation one:** The example of UCATT in Manchester shows that Polish workers are already organising themselves and are potentially open to approaches from unions. It would be an opportunity lost if co-ordinated meetings are not organised with the ZPWB to begin and then structure this process. Union organising strategies should complement, rather than substitute, community-based organising efforts. **Action:** The TUC should facilitate the development of structured working partnerships with key organisations such as the ZPWB. These national relationships should be taken forward practically at a regional level through TUC Regional Councils.
- **Recommendation two:** The TUC and unions should develop a Polish language web resource, providing information to Poles living and working in the UK. **Action:** The TUC should work with Solidarnosc and other relevant UK- and Polish-based partners to develop this resource. In addition, the TUC and unions should work to support the newly constituted Migrant Workers North West, which is also developing Polish language web resources.
- **Recommendation three:** The TUC and unions should seize potential opportunities to engage with Polish workers before they come to the UK. Practical work in this area could involve working to support Solidarnosc’s network of Information Centres, double-branding materials and literature with Polish partners and developing ‘dual membership’ arrangements with Polish unions. **Action:** The TUC should explore these opportunities nationally and work with affiliated unions to take this work forward on a practical basis.
- **Recommendation four:** Union agreements with agencies providing Polish workers to UK employers have the potential to assist with recruitment of migrant workers at organised sites, and also unorganised sites where an agency may be supplying labour. **Action:** The TUC should work with unions such as BFAWU that have negotiated agreements with agencies supplying Polish workers, to evaluate the impact of these agreements and share good practice with other affiliates.
- **Recommendation five:** This report notes that a number of unions are now using either Polish full-time officers or workplace reps to support the organisation of Polish workers. This ‘like recruits like’ approach is vital to the development of sustainable strategies for organising migrant workers. **Action:** The TUC should support a one-day conference/seminar bringing together Polish-speaking full-time officers and organisers, and if possible Polish activists, to share and discuss issues and recruitment strategies being used.
- **Recommendation six:** This report and others have identified that a number of these Polish workers are skilled workers in low-quality jobs. This means that the learning agenda is important. **Action:** The TUC should support a one-day conference/seminar for trade union education officers and key URLs who are currently working with Polish workers. The TUC should also commission further research into the learning and skills needs of migrant workers.

Notes and references

- 1 This currently has a co-ordinator and project worker. The new organisation's website is www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org/ More details about the genesis of the organisation from www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-12163-f0.cfm
- 2 The data for the construction sector is drawn mainly from UCATT. In total three trade union respondents provided data, as well as a Solidarnosc national organiser. It is also informed by a recent TUC-funded project (Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *Organising Migrant Workers in Construction: Experience from the North East of England*, Northern TUC and UCATT joint project, March 2006). The food processing sector has the bulk of data, which was dictated by the response of regional officials to the initial inquiry for information and the number of unions active in the sector (four contacted). It also contains information from three convenors at key sites in both regions, one in the North West (Oldham) and at two of the largest sites in Cumbria. In all 14 trade unionists, one employer and one Portuguese middleman responded.
- 3 EURES is a network of public employment services and partners within the European economic area (EEA). It is based on a database of vacancies and information, administered in the UK by Jobcentre Plus, which seeks to facilitate the free movement of workers within the EEA. The TUC adviser to EURES is Les Ford (email: lford.sertuc@virgin.net).
- 4 Considerate Constructors Scheme (2004) survey, reported in Anderson B., Ruhs M., Rogaly B. and Spencer S. (2006) *Fair Enough? Central and East European migrants in low-wage employment in the UK*. Available at www.compas.ox.ac.uk/changingstatus
- 5 WRS (2006) *Accession Monitoring Report May 2004–September 2006*, joint report by the Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs and Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/reports/accession_monitoring_report
- 6 The accession data covers all A8 workers seeking employment in the UK, who have to register each time they take up a new job for the first year of continuous employment. It does not, however, cover those who are self employed; those who were working legally in the UK for a year prior to May 2004; those who were working legally and remained in the same job following May 2004; those working less than a month with a particular employer; and au pairs.
- 7 All data, unless otherwise indicated, is sourced from WRS (2006) *ibid.*
- 8 Totals were obtained through freedom of information as the 'North East' in the Accession Reports includes Yorkshire and Humber. North East accession occupation totals are the lowest in England.
- 9 Accession Reports do not identify nationalities at the sector level regionally. The North East totals were obtained through freedom of information.
- 10 Ford, R. and Boyes, R. (2004) 'New Europeans drift home with broken dreams', *The Times*, 5 June 2004. Available at www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1134666,00.html
- 11 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *Organising Migrant Workers in Construction: Experience from the North East of England*, Northern TUC and UCATT joint project, March 2006. Available at www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-11712-f0.cfm
- 12 For a fuller discussion of WRS problems see: Currie, S. (2006) 'The Role Played by Agencies and Employers in Facilitating Post-Accession Polish Migration to the UK', COMPAS International Conference 'International Labour Migration: In Whose Interests?', University of Oxford, 5–6 July 2006; also see McKay S. and Winklemann-Gleed A. (2005) 'Migrant Workers in the East of England', East of England Development Agency project, June 2005, available at www.eeda.org.uk/application.asp?app=publication_full.asp&process=full_record&id=1000109&nid=1001855
- 13 See Joseph Rowntree Foundation findings, www.jrf.org/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/0226.asp and full report by Anderson B., Ruhs M., Rogaly B. and Spencer S. (2006) *Fair Enough? Central and East European Migrants in Low-Wage Employment in the UK*, available at www.compas.ox.ac.uk/changingstatus
- 14 Anderson *et al.* (2006) *ibid.*, p69
- 15 Anderson *et al.* (2006) *ibid.*, p69
- 16 Anderson *et al.* (2006) *ibid.*, p70.
- 17 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *ibid.*; Fitzgerald, I. (2006a) *Migrant Workers in the North East of England: Supplementary Report*, Northern TUC.
- 18 Anderson *et al.* (2006) *ibid.*, p70.
- 19 A number of interviewees spoke about this with a key USDAW official, noting that wages and conditions had gone down in certain parts of the food processing sector as migrant workers were bought in on minimum wages. The spectre of racism is present as officials in both sectors spoke of the sporadic and growing hostility towards migrant workers, particularly those who have accepted less money and poorer conditions.
- 20 Interview with Polish web administrator and construction worker.
- 21 This official was also a member of the union's Presidium and heavily involved in regional projects bringing European funding to Poland. He is currently involved in 'Mayday' (<https://equal.cec.eu.int/equal/jsp/dpComplete.jsp?cip=PL&national=72>), an innovative project run by Solidarnosc that brings together employers, the union and state officials to tackle a number of labour market problems in the maritime industry.
- 22 Edited from Stenning, A., Champion, A., Conway, C., Coombes, M., Dawley, S., Dixon, L., Raybould, S., Richardson, R. (2006) *Migration and Demographic Change: Assessing the Local and Regional Impacts of International Migration*, report for the Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at www.ncl.ac.uk/curds/publications/pdf/A8Final.pdf
- 23 These coach routes connect between most medium and large towns in Poland and, through local operators, most medium and large cities in the UK. Timetables are available at www.aura.pl There are also two buses connecting Newcastle with Kraków and Warsaw (Mon, Thurs & Sat).
- 24 1st Fix Recruitment based in Newcastle upon Tyne (www.1stfixrecruitment.com/).
- 25 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *ibid.*
- 26 Balch, A., Fellini, I., Ferro, A., Fullin, G., and Hunger, U. (2004) 'The Political Economy of Labour Migration in the European Construction Sector', special issue of *IMIS-Beiträge* edited by Michael Bommers, Kirsten Hoesch, Uwe Hunger and Holger Kolb, 25 December 2004. Available at www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/pdf/files/imis25.pdf
- 27 USDAW (2006) 'Agency and Migrant Workers', Executive Council Statement to the 2006 ADM. Available at www.usdaw.org.uk/equality/resource_library/1146131674_14901.html
- 28 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *ibid.*
- 29 Balch *et al.* (2004) *ibid.*
- 30 USDAW (2006) *ibid.*
- 31 www.jobapilot.pl and www.praccuj.pl
- 32 EURES has a European-wide contact centre and website (europa.eu.int/eures/), where people can search for EU employment by country and region.
- 33 EURES assists BPCC with recruitment fairs in Poland and is selective in which Polish areas it advertises, making sure it does not go to one that has just had a recruitment drive for the positions in question.
- 34 Dench S., Hurstfield J., Hill D. and Akroyd, K. (2006) *Employers' Use of Migrant Labour*, Home Office Online Report 04/06. Available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr0406.pdf
- 35 See IFF Research (2005) *Workforce Mobility and Skills in the UK Construction Sector*, research report for ConstructionSkills, Department of Trade and Industry and ECITB, IFF Research Ltd, February 2005. Available at www.constructionskills.net/research/researchactivity/nationalandregionalreports/regionalworkforcemobility.asp This report identified that nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of its North East workers had been directly employed by a company; this is the highest in the UK. At 16 per cent, it has by far the lowest incidence of self-employment (UK 35 per cent). The North West also has a high number of construction

- workers directly employed (66 per cent), which is the second highest in England and third highest in the UK. Its self-employment is also low (25 per cent) compared to the UK.
- 36 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *ibid*.
- 37 Examples of sub-contractors in the North East using Polish labour are: Cleerey, no details known; Whitsled UK, which has recently introduced German, Polish and Turkish labour to EGGER (UK) Limited (www.egger.co.uk/co-uk-eng/egger-co-uk.htm), an established Northumberland woodchip plant; and an agency based in Alnwick, Northumberland. Unions have found this latter company difficult to deal with, leading to UCATT reporting it to the Inland Revenue construction section. This followed repeated attempts to initiate a meeting regarding the Polish workers it employs.
- 38 Dench S. *et al.* (2006) *ibid*.
- 39 Employment agencies operating in Poland are required to have a state-issued certificate, although many were reported not to have one. For a full discussion of this see: *New Labour Market Legislation Adopted*, EIRO Online. Available at www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2004/05/feature/pl0405105f.html
- 40 Interviews with full-time officers and site convenors.
- 41 See IFF Research (2005) *ibid*. This report identifies that 10 per cent of North East construction workers are employed by agencies, which is second highest in the UK. In the North West 8 per cent of construction workers are employed by agencies, which is slightly higher than the national average of 7 per cent.
- 42 This agency, based in Wolverhampton, advertises itself as a specialist in “trades such as builders, plumbers and plasterers on a seasonal, contract or temporary basis”. UCATT believes it is related to a sub-contractor that obtains work and then uses the agency to supply the labour.
- 43 These include both Indian Asians and Poles.
- 44 ICDS Group, Connacht House, 24 Upper Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin, Eire (www.icds.ie).
- 45 However, a Solidarnosc national organiser working in the construction sector noted a recruitment agency that had caused problems for Polish workers with changes in contracts and working conditions.
- 46 Following enquiries it would seem that this is not a private company but a combination of two linked community groups, one a group working through the Polish Church in Manchester and the other the Manchester federated branch of the ZPWB (information from the President of the ZPWB).
- 47 My-Resource International Construction (www.my-resource.co.uk/index2.htm) and Euroresource International Ltd (www.euro-resource.co.uk/); both have the same contact: Peter Levchenko, BCR House, 3 Bredbury Business Park, Stockport Cheshire SK6 2SN.
- 48 Where possible, agencies have been related to comments but the following were given without attributing particular sites and were NOT noted for poor practices. North East: Adecco, an internationally based agency (www.adecco.co.uk and www.adecco.pl); Prime Time Recruitment, nationally based (www.primetime.co.uk); Riverside Recruitment, based in Cumbria (www.riverside-recruitment.co.uk); Sunrise Solutions, based in Blackpool; North West: 24 Seven, no details; Best Connections, based in Lancaster; Consistent, no details but has been active at Grampian Foods in Winsford, Cheshire.
- 49 Inter Continental Labour Ltd based in Mauritius (www.iclglobal.com/), a full-time official reported that this was a Lithuanian/Polish owned agency, which is based in Warsaw, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.
- 50 Right-4-Staff, originally called Draefern, a national agency (www.right4staff.com), covered both the plants in Cumbria. One convenor reported they were part of United Biscuits Group but this is unconfirmed.
- 51 USDAW (2006) *ibid*.
- 52 USDAW (2006) *ibid*, p6.
- 53 A number of respondents also identified that there were ‘waves’ of migration, with particular nationalities being bought into plants, that is initially Kurds, though Iraqis to A8 nationalities. This was also picked up on in the Home Office report into employers’ use of migrant workers.
- 54 Horizon Recruitment PLC based in Bradford (www.horizon-recruitment.co.uk), reported that they bring staff in and leave an interpreter on site.
- 55 Some agencies had caused problems: North East: a London-based national agency with an office in Poland provided staff for one of the Carlisle plants and no one could speak English; the GMB has pressured companies not to use a certain recruitment agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne because of poor employment practices; North West: a London-based agency with an office in Poland and agents operating throughout Eastern Europe was reported to have 24-hour notice contracts, with all workers self-employed (companies are set-up in workers’ names); an accountant gives workers a statement every two weeks, which in essence is a wage slip.
- 56 The President of the ZPWB also reported that he was fighting a case for a Polish worker who had come to the UK to directly work for an employer. Following six months employment this worker had been moved on to an agency’s books and was now paid less.
- 57 Taylor, K. and Burch, N. (2004) *English for Non-English Speakers in the Food Manufacturing Sector*, East Midlands Agency (unpublished).
- 58 USDAW (2006) *ibid*.
- 59 For example see Hardy, J. and Clark, C. (2005) *EU Enlargement, Workers and Migration: Implications for Trade Unions in the UK and Poland*, paper presented at the Global Unions Research Network International Workshop ‘Trade Unions, Globalisation and Development – Strengthening Rights and Capabilities of Workers’, Novo Hamburgo, Brazil, January 2005.
- 60 A previous effort with the TUC to develop such a contact point faltered, which the interviewee felt raised questions about union commitment to the issue.
- 61 For example the TUC and USDAW have links with Solidarnosc and these are being cultivated.
- 62 Interviews with Solidarnosc International Officers.
- 63 This was already underway in conjunction with a Norwegian trade union, and some links have been developed with the TUC at a national and regional level.
- 64 A point made strongly by the President of the ZPWB.
- 65 Since the Solidarnosc discussions took place further investigation has revealed that this should be considered carefully. On the positive side, the GMB is in the process of undertaking this type of action with regard to Polish workers arriving at Victoria coach station. However, on the more cautious side, trade union organisers in Ireland have stated to the author that they have found some antagonism when mentioning Solidarnosc to Polish workers.
- 66 This had been tried before when, in 1997, the GMB signed a joint union membership agreement with IG Chemie.
- 67 One area where there are opportunities for loose partnerships, which Solidarnosc is exploring, is through a company called Rift International (www.riftuk.com). This company is working with UCATT and Polish workers, with some recruitment success. The company assists migrant workers in all sectors to reclaim tax and benefits that are owed to them. In the recent visit to Solidarnosc the Regional Officer working on the Information Centres noted that a problem for Poles was tax, and it was suggested that Rift may be able to help. This was welcomed and after communications with the company it has agreed to translate leaflets into Polish and carry the logos of Solidarnosc, the TUC and other trade unions if required. This will allow contact details for each organisation to be listed, allowing a simple introduction to union contacts.
- 68 This was already underway in conjunction with a Norwegian trade union.
- 69 Fitzgerald, I. (2006) *ibid*.
- 70 USDAW (2006) *ibid*.
- 71 USDAW (2006) *ibid*, p7.
- 72 Sunrise Solutions has offices in Blackpool, Bolton and Wakefield.

Published by the Trades Union Congress

Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS

Design www.design-mill.co.uk
Cover picture by Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk
Printed by Newnorth

March 2007

For more copies of this title contact our ordering point on
020 7467 1294 or smills@tuc.org.uk. Bulk discounts are offered.

Readers with dyslexia or a visual impairment may ask for any TUC
publication to be made available in a suitable electronic format or in
an accessible format such as Braille, audiotape, or large print, at no
extra cost. Contact TUC Publications on 020 7467 1294.

ISBN 978 1 85006 795 5

£5 (TUC member unions)