

# 'New migrants' in the North East Workforce

## Final Report



## About this report

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73% of reported jobs  
paid below the  
2015 Living Wage  
of £7.85/hour

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## Executive summary

This report presents findings from research conducted between 2013-2016, which included a questionnaire completed by 402 migrants, in-depth interviews with 40 migrants, 12 interviews with key stakeholders and a policy seminar with more than 50 participants. Key findings include:

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

This report presents results from a programme of research carried out between 2013 and 2016 by academics at Northumbria and Nottingham Trent Universities, the International Community Organisation of Sunderland and the Regional Refugee Forum North East.

Improving labour market outcomes for BME sections of the UK population by 2020 has been identified as a priority by the current government. Within the BME population, many of whom were born in Britain, new migrants may face particular challenges. We define ‘migrants’ using the United Nations definition, as ‘A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence’,<sup>1</sup> while acknowledging that other definitions are possible. The outcome of the UK referendum on EU membership in June 2016 raises far-reaching questions about the future of UK immigration policy and the position of migrants in British society. Charting a future course requires a thorough understanding of the needs and challenges that already exist, and this report aims to make a contribution to that understanding.

The project addressed significant gaps in the existing evidence. For example, regional data on refugee employment is sparse<sup>2</sup> and administrative data does not enable identification of refugees who have secured leave to remain. The research that has been done, points to extremely high levels of unemployment, low wages, deskilling<sup>3</sup> and, in some cases, forced labour.<sup>4</sup> Research on Eastern European migrants’ employment in the North East has often relied on Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) or National Insurance data, both of which leave gaps; for example, omitting changes in employer or region after initial registration,<sup>5</sup> and WRS data is no longer available. There is evidence of persistent ethnic inequalities in employment and significant variation between regions and localities.<sup>6</sup> Stenning and Dawley note the frequent lack of attention to the interaction between international migration and the specific characteristics of the North East.<sup>7</sup> There has also been a lack of discussion about workplace experience in the region for these groups, including the kind of formal and informal practices that can perpetuate in-work poverty.<sup>8</sup> Research has an important role to play in informing practice and policy and also challenging myths about migration.

Following an outline of the background and research methodology, the report presents some key results regarding patterns of work and worklessness among respondents, before considering some of the barriers and constraints respondents described. Illustrative case studies are presented alongside this summary, and the report concludes with recommendations for policy and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Statistics Division (2013) Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3 available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/migration/migrmethods.htm#B>

<sup>2</sup> Crossley, S. and G. Fletcher 2013. *Written out of the picture? The role of local services in tackling child poverty amongst asylum seekers and refugees*: North East Child Poverty Commission and Regional Refugee Forum North East.

<sup>3</sup> Pillai, R. 2006. *Destination North East? Harnessing the regional potential of migration*. IPPR North; Fletcher, G. 2011. *Skilled: Finding routes for Refugees to use their skills and experience and contribute to the North East region’s economic future*. Regional Refugee Forum North East.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, H., P. Dwyer, S. Hodgkinson and L. Waite 2014. *Precarious Lives: Forced Labour, Exploitation and Asylum*. Bristol: Policy Press.

<sup>5</sup> Notable exceptions to this absence include Fitzgerald, I. 2005. *Organising Migrant Workers in Construction: Experience from the North East of England*. TUC; Fitzgerald, I. 2007. *Working in the UK: Polish migrant worker routes into employment in the North East and North West construction and food processing sectors*. TUC and Northumbria University; Fitzgerald, I. 2009. Polish Migrant Workers in the North: New communities, new opportunities?, in *Community Unionism: A comparative analysis of concepts and contexts*, edited by J. McBride and I. Greenwood. Palgrave: 93-118.

<sup>6</sup> Catney, G. and A. Sabater (2015) Ethnic Minority Disadvantage in the Labour Market: Participation, skills and geographical inequalities. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> Stenning, A. and S. Dawley 2009. Poles to Newcastle: Grounding New Migrant Flows in Peripheral Regions. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 16(3), 273-294.

<sup>8</sup> Hudson, M., G. Netto, F. Sosenko, M. Noon, P. d. Lima, A. Gilchrist and N. Kamenou-Aigbekaen 2013. *In-Work Poverty, Ethnicity and Workplace Cultures*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

## 1.1 Defining the region and target groups

The particular characteristics of the North East region include relative geographical isolation from other parts of Britain, a history of deindustrialisation, a particularly severe impact of welfare reform and above-average ratios of jobseekers to vacancies.<sup>9</sup> Industrial heritage and economic/infrastructural connections within the region have created a relatively unified, discrete and identifiable regional cultural identity. In more recent decades this sense of regional identity has been further reinforced through a process of peripheralisation within the UK economy.<sup>10</sup> The regional focus is given added urgency by renewed policy debates on regional devolution following the Scottish referendum in September 2014, highlighted as an important strategy for growth by the City Growth Commission<sup>11</sup> and a key issue in the 2015 Manifesto of the North East Chamber of Commerce.

While the North East continues to be characterised by a relative lack of ethnic diversity compared to the UK average, there has been rapid recent change in migration patterns, leading to a general increase in diversity by ethnicity and country of origin that does not have a single cause. For example, the number of North East residents recorded as born in Eastern Europe increased by 359% between the 2001 and 2011 Census, and the number of residents born in Africa increased by 112%, arriving through a variety of migration routes. Including children, there were an estimated 25,000 people born in an EU10<sup>12</sup> country resident in the North East in 2014, 24,000 born in an EU15 country outside the UK,<sup>13</sup> 49,000 from countries in Asia, and 15,000 from countries in Africa. These figures suggest that altogether people born outside the UK account for around 5.2% of the region's population.<sup>14</sup> As of 2015 up to 3,000 people in the North East were seeking asylum.<sup>15</sup> New National Insurance registrations for migrants in the North East in the year up to June 2015 were made up of 34% (4,259 people) from the EU10, 21% (2,477 people) from the EU15 outside the UK, 26% (3,088 people) from Asia and 11% (1,330 people) from Africa.<sup>16</sup> This includes people granted leave to remain and those arriving through work-based immigration pathways or to join family members. Settlement has been unevenly spread, so the pace of change in some parts of the region has been even more rapid. This adds to longer-established communities of migrants and their descendants, with the largest numbers from South Asia alongside smaller populations,<sup>17</sup> yet even these longer-established groups have been relatively under-researched in the North East compared to many other parts of Britain.

Our research focused on recent migrants who arrived in Britain, as asylum seekers since 1999 (when asylum seeker dispersal began) or as migrant workers from the new EU countries since 2004 (when the 'A8' countries in Eastern Europe joined the EU). We focused on these groups because: (1) previous research has indicated that people in these categories are concentrated in particular sectors and experience disproportionate concentrations of low pay and low status work; (2) comparing such different categories of migrants offered the potential to identify shared experiences as a newcomer to the UK and distinctive challenges for different groups of migrants.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, P., A. Jarvis, R. Crow, P. Crawshaw, K. Shaw, A. Irving and A. Whisker 2013. *The Impact of Welfare Reform in the North East*. Durham: Institute for Local Governance/ANEC; Donovan, C., J. Clayton and J. Merchant. 2012. *Localism or Pulling the Plug on Public Services? Consequences of Austerity for the Third Sector in the North East: Second Year Report, September 2012*. Sunderland.

<sup>10</sup> Tomaney, J. and N. Ward (2001) *A Region in Transition: North East England at the millennium*. Farnham: Ashgate.

<sup>11</sup> City Growth Commission. 2014. *Unleashing Metro Growth: Final Recommendations of the City Growth Commission*. London.

<sup>12</sup> The A8 countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia. They were joined in 2007 by Romania and Bulgaria, and together these countries are referred to as the EU10.

<sup>13</sup> The EU15 are those countries that joined the EU prior to 2004: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

<sup>14</sup> ONS (2015) Population by Country of Birth and Nationality Report: August 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Home Office (2015) Immigration Statistics April to June 2015.

<sup>16</sup> DWP (2015) National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals to June 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Renton, D. 2007. *Colour Blind? Race and migration in North East England since 1945*. Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press; Renton, D. 2008. Newcastle; city of migration. Available at: <http://www.dkrenton.co.uk/newcastle.html> [accessed: 15 April 2012].

Comparing such different groups offered the opportunity to examine how cross-cutting differences within and between migrant flows affect individuals' position in the workforce. In practice, when we went to community spaces where we thought we would find individuals from these backgrounds, and asked the people we met there to refer us to other migrants they knew, we encountered a much more diverse group – participants in our research came from 59 different countries and a wide range of different migration routes. The largest groups who answered our survey by country of origin were from Romania (15%), Sudan (12%), Poland (11%) and Bangladesh (7%). Often research focuses on particular groups of migrants, but this super-diversity raises a further value in taking a view across multiple groups of migrants.

## ***1.2 Methodology in brief***

402 migrants completed our survey, of whom 51% were men and 49% women, with a wide spread of ages from 16-64, but the majority aged between 25-44. Around a quarter of respondents were EU10 migrants, a quarter asylum seekers, a quarter refugees who had secured some form of leave to remain and some of whom now had British citizenship, and the remaining quarter was made up of people with various other immigration statuses. Respondents provided information about 214 distinct jobs they had undertaken in the UK, as well as their employment prior to coming to the UK. The sample was not random – there is no list of migrants in the region to generate such a sample – so it cannot be used to generalise to all migrants in the region or to all members of particular groups of migrants. Because our main starting point for meeting participants was via services directed at migrants, and taking referrals from there to other family and friends, it is likely that our sample under-represented both those migrants who are most marginalised, who may not access services or even have contact with those who do, and those who are the most integrated and comfortable, who may have no need to access dedicated services and might not have much contact with other migrants. This limitation was responded to through a process of triangulation, comparing our survey data with other sources, described below.

Comparisons are made in this report between our data and the general population of the North East aged 16-64, across all ethnicities, countries of origin and immigration statuses, using Annual Population Survey data for April 2014-March 2015.<sup>18</sup> Where possible comparisons are also made between our survey data and data on Polish respondents in the APS (the only single country of origin group large enough to be identified in both sets of data). Comparisons for refugees are made with the Survey of New Refugees.<sup>19</sup> The questionnaire was supplemented with in-depth qualitative interviews with 40 migrants, of whom 14 were EU10 migrants, 16 were refugees, 9 were asylum seekers and one was a migrant from outside the EU who was the spouse of an EU citizen; these form the basis for the case studies presented in this report and on the accompanying website, [www.migrantworkinglives.org](http://www.migrantworkinglives.org) (website launch due early 2017). Emerging findings were presented to 12 key stakeholders in the region, including representatives of migrant organisations, service providers that conduct extensive work with new migrants, an employers' organisation, and a trade union, and in-depth interviews with these stakeholders were used to validate the results of the survey and interviews. In general, stakeholders confirmed our findings based on their own knowledge and experience, and where they questioned our results it was usually to suggest that in places our data might have under-recorded levels of inequality and exclusion or concentrations of new migrants in some sectors. These points are noted in the report below. Draft findings were presented at a policy seminar to more than 50 people including some of the migrant participants in the research and key stakeholders, and discussions at this event helped to inform the final version of the report and recommendations. A more detailed account of the methodology is given as an appendix.

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<sup>18</sup> The APS for this period contains data on 12,781 individuals in the North East, of which 843 were born outside the UK, the largest country of origin being Poland with 92 respondents. There is no record of how many of those surveyed in the APS may have passed through the asylum system.

<sup>19</sup> The Survey of New Refugees was conducted by the Home Office between 2005-2009 and contains data on 1,312 refugees in the North East.

## 2. Patterns of Work and Worklessness

### 2.1 Access to work

For those with an immigration status that made it likely they have the right to work, 54% of survey respondents said they had not had any paid employment or self-employment in the UK in the last 12 months, and excluding more recent arrivals and focusing on those who arrived between 1999-2011 the percentage was 43%. This compares to 32% of 16-64 year olds in the general population of the North East not in paid employment at the time of Labour Force Survey (LFS) waves in 2014-2015, and 35% of BME 16-64 year olds.<sup>20</sup> For EU10 migrants in our survey the percentage who had not been in paid work in the UK in the previous 12 months was 38% and for Polish migrants 26%, which is similar to the 24% of Polish migrants in the LFS statistics and lower than the figure for the general population of the region. When comparing these figures is important to bear in mind that the LFS figures were a snapshot whereas our figures represent people who have been without paid work either for a year or more or since arrival in the UK, so these figures are not directly comparable.

For those who had been through the asylum system and now had some form of leave to remain or British citizenship, the proportion of our respondents who had not been in paid work in the last 12 months was 65%. Excluding more recent arrivals and focusing on those who arrived during 1999-2011, the figure was 53%. This might suggest there is some progression with more refugees moving into employment the longer they are in the UK, but suggests continuing high levels of worklessness since the Survey of New Refugees found 56% of North East respondents not in paid employment or self-employment during 2005-2009, and is similar to the 71% of workless refugees in a much earlier study commissioned by the DWP.<sup>21</sup>

89% of those who answered our survey and were currently out of work said they would like to take paid work, a very high figure considering reasons given in the in-depth interviews by those who said they would prefer not to take work at this moment, including factors such as caring responsibilities in the home, studying full time and poor health.

### 2.2 Types of Work

Most common work roles reported by respondents, grouped within International Labor Organisation categories, were Services and Sales Workers (particularly catering and care work) (31%, compared to 9% for the general North East work force), Elementary Occupations (particularly manual factory work and cleaning) (21%, compared to 11% for the general North East work force), Technicians and Associate Professionals (10%, compared to 12% for the general North East work force), and Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers (10%, compared to 8% for the general North East work force).<sup>22</sup> In other words, our respondents were disproportionately concentrated in types of work designated 'lower skilled', which are generally lower paid and lower status. Before coming to the UK, 39% of participants had been working as Managers, Professionals, Technicians or Associate Professionals, compared to only 25% of jobs respondents reported in the UK that fell into these categories. Comparing roles reported by respondents before and after migration to the UK, there was a pronounced shift toward 'lower skilled' roles, as shown in Table 1:

<sup>20</sup> Office for National Statistics. Social Survey Division. (2015). *Annual Population Survey, April 2014 - March 2015*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 7742, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7742-1>.

<sup>21</sup> Bloch, A. 2002. *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*. London. Department for Work and Pensions.

<sup>22</sup> Craft and Related Trades, which includes food processing, accounted for only 6% of our respondents. Some stakeholders considered this last figure surprisingly low, and it is likely to significantly underestimate the real numbers because it did not prove possible to gather responses to the questionnaire in the north of the region, where there are significant concentrations of EU10 migrants working in food processing.



Table 1: Work roles before and after migration to the UK

	Last role before coming to the UK	Roles in the UK
Managers	9 %	7 %
Professionals	22 %	7 %
Technicians and Association Professionals	8 %	10 %
Clerical Support Workers	8 %	4 %
Services and Sales Workers	23 %	31 %
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers	6 %	0 %
Craft and Related Trades Workers	7 %	6 %
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	4 %	10 %
Elementary Occupations	13 %	24 %

This suggests significant downward class mobility which were shown in our in-depth interviews to provoke various feelings of frustration, anger, and demoralisation and could be seen as a waste of experience and skills. Small numbers make comparisons of the roles undertaken by different groups of migrants difficult.

The main concentrations by employment sector, using Office for National Statistics categories, were Catering and Hospitality (25%, compared to 6% of the general North East work force employed in Hotels and Restaurants), Manufacturing (17%, compared to 11% for the general North East workforce), Health/Social Care (11%, compared to 17% in Health and Social Work for the general North East work force<sup>23</sup>) and Other Services (11%, compared to 5% for the North East). There were notable differences by gender, with 17% of female respondents' jobs in Health/Social Care, and 17% of male respondents' jobs in Transport/Deliveries and Communications. There were significant differences by migration route, with 20% of refugees working in Health/Social Care compared to 13% of EU10 migrants and 22% of EU10 migrants' jobs in Manufacturing compared to 10% of refugees'. There were also higher percentages from both of these groups working in 'Other Services' (many of these cleaning jobs) – 13% of EU10 migrants and 15% of refugees. In-depth interviews demonstrated some of the reasons for these concentrations, with agencies and family contacts both playing a major role in channelling people into particular types of work (e.g. case study Helena, p.18).

23% of UK jobs reported by our respondents were self-employed, compared to 11% for the general North East workforce, and of those not self-employed 57% said they would like to be. The desire for self-employment was highest for those of African origin at 71%. In-depth interviews suggested the desire to escape negative experiences of employment was a common factor motivating the desire for self-employment. Reported self-employment roles were overwhelmingly lower paid and lower status, 38% in elementary occupations and often consisting of work such as cleaning, washing cars, painting and decorating or various types of kitchen work. The high rate of self-employment therefore represents a prevalence of precarious forms of employment with limited rights, rather than a large proportion of entrepreneurs. Interpreting and translation was also a common area of self-employment, directly linked to these individuals' migrant backgrounds.

There were also much higher concentrations of our respondents in small workplaces compared to the general workforce for the region – 52% of reported jobs were in workplaces employing 10 or

<sup>23</sup> The figure for our respondents working in Health/Social Care was surprisingly low, and contrary to stakeholders' perceptions so may reflect sampling bias.

fewer people, compared to 19% of the general North East workforce. Previous research suggests this may have a relationship to pay, with those working for smaller companies tending to be paid less.<sup>24</sup> Our respondents reported 14% of jobs as being paid via an agency, but this may be an under-reporting of the actual number of jobs involving an agency at some point, as in-depth interviews provided examples of people gaining employment through an agency and then moving to direct employment following an initial period. This was not always the case, however, and one respondent described attempts by an agency to actively block them from moving on to direct employment.

Conditions of forced labour have been identified elsewhere in Northern England amongst asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants.<sup>25</sup> Our research did not allow for the time that would have been necessary to find people working under conditions of forced labour, who may be totally distanced from services, or to build the necessary trust for participants to reveal information that could be used against themselves or others by immigration authorities. Data gathered through our stakeholder interviews suggests that there are migrants working in the North East under conditions of forced labour, but we are not in a position to assess the scale of this issue on the basis of our data.

## 2.3 Pay

Low pay was reported across all parts of our survey sample. 40% of jobs respondents reported paid less than £6.50/hour, and only 15% paid £10/hour or more. 73% of jobs paid below the 2015 Living Wage of £7.85/hour. Median pay was £6.50/hour, and there were a number of jobs reported on car washes for less than £4/hour, and jobs in restaurants and construction for less than £5/hour. This compares to a regional median of £10.00/hour for the 'main job' reported in the Labour Force Survey. 22% of respondents reported being paid late or less than they were owed on at least one occasion in the last year, and for EU10 respondents this went up to 30%. Wage levels were not reported for 46% of respondents' jobs, and Fitzgerald's research suggests this may partly reflect people working in exploitative conditions that include a lack of knowledge about the level of pay they are formally receiving.<sup>26</sup>

The year that respondents arrived in the UK appeared to make a considerable difference to pay, with median wages rising to £9.55/hour for those who arrived during 1999-2003 compared to £6.50/hour across the whole sample. Furthermore our data may understate this progression because it includes the wages of some jobs respondents undertook some time prior to completing the questionnaire. This may be partly to do with sector, as although we are dealing with very small numbers at this level, the highest proportions of our respondents who were working in Health/Social Care or Other Services were those who had arrived most recently. It may also reflect a more difficult labour market encountered in more recent years. Progression to better paid roles was evident from our in-depth interviews with migrants, although we also found cases of people being 'stuck' for a long time in involuntary worklessness or low paid roles, in spite of successfully completing education and training in the UK (e.g. case study Natalia, p.13).

## 2.4 Hours

The jobs respondents listed had shorter hours than the region's average (a median of 34 hours per week compared to 37 for the general workforce), and hours were particularly low for migrants from Asia, while migrants from Africa matched the regional median and EU10 migrants slightly exceeded it. Overall 57% said they would prefer to work more hours, compared to 9% of the general workforce in the region. Wanting more hours does not necessarily indicate a small number of hours are currently worked, as a trade union organiser interviewed as part of the stakeholder interviews reported his perception of a pattern of migrants wanting to work as many hours as

<sup>24</sup> Schmuecker, K. 2014. *Future of the UK Labour Market*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, H., P. Dwyer, S. Hodkinson and L. Waite 2014. *Precarious Lives: Forced Labour, Exploitation and Asylum*. Bristol: Policy Press.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald, I. 2005. *Organising Migrant Workers in Construction: Experience from the North East of England*. Northern TUC.

possible in order to save as much money as possible, to send back to their country of origin or to reach the income threshold to qualify for family reunification. There were few reports amongst respondents of people undertaking multiple jobs at the same time, which has been associated with long total working hours elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> Those already working very long hours are likely to be under-represented in our sample because the vast majority of responses were gathered outside of the workplace, where such individuals are likely to spend less time than those working fewer hours.

In interviews a lack of control over hours emerged as a significant concern, particularly where the hours of available jobs clashed with family responsibilities. In some cases this was reported as the main barrier for people to enter any work, or severely limited their choices of job. In other cases respondents took what work was available but felt their ability to fulfil family roles was severely impaired as a result. Unpredictability of hours from week to week was also a concern for some, often linked to agency work.

## 2.5 State support

22% of respondents reported having applications for state welfare refused, 33% reported delayed payments, and 20% felt they had been discriminated against by staff dealing with their welfare payments. There was significant variation according to where people were from, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Experiences of State Support by Region of Origin

Region of Origin	Support Refused	Support Delayed	Perceived Discrimination in Support
EU10	47 %	48 %	21 %
Africa	12 %	25 %	16 %
Asia	16 %	28 %	25 %

Nearly half EU10 respondents reported refusals of support (47%) and delayed payments (48%), and respondents from Asia were the most likely to report feeling discriminated against (25%). For refugees and asylum seekers, 27% reported delayed payments, 15% reported applications for support being refused, and 20% reported experiences of perceived discrimination.

<sup>27</sup> Datta, K. 2011. Last Hired and First Fired? The Impact of the Economic Downturn on Low-Paid Bulgarian Migrant Workers in London. *Journal of International Development*, 23, 565-582.

**Gabi** was born in Hungary. He moved to the UK in 2008, is now in his early 50s and is currently employed. In Hungary he was employed in a prestigious position with a major newspaper. In the past he has also worked in other parts of the world including the Caribbean, Spain, and Romania, says that in these places he found getting professional work more straightforward than in the UK. His working life in the UK has been very different. Unable to get positions in the media, due to a lack of open positions, a lack of social connections and he suggests perhaps his age, he has been working in a range of factories and warehouses, as a night manager of a hotel and more recently in the care industry. At first he was treated with some suspicion by potential employers, apart from the warehouse work, through an agency, where he was not required to have any references. After getting his first post in the UK and having references to rely on, getting work became easier, though not in his established profession. In his role at the hotel, he experienced some difficulties in that his wages were not being fully paid. After leaving that role following a dispute with his employer, he went through a few months of unemployment – a period in which his family struggled as a delay in their habitual residency test outcome meant a delay in receipt of benefits. Despite the contrast in his experiences between countries, he draws some interesting parallels between photography and care work. While his current job is not financially rewarding, he works largely independently and enjoys the fact that he gets to meet interesting people in his working life. He is also able to apply his communication skills in speaking with clients from a range of backgrounds. He has now completed an NVQ in social care, although he suggests that life experience in this work is the most valuable skill to have. He clearly gets a lot out of his work, although because of his high level of competence, but also the fact he's on a zero hour contract, he is sometimes asked to work very long hours, which severely impacts on his family life and sometimes means he does not see his child for several days at a time because of early starts and late finishes. He is also making ends meet with occasional one off photography work at weekends. In the future he has ideas about setting up his own photography company incorporating elements of community and youth work – something he already has experience of. However, in order to achieve this he will require finance. He has a commitment to remaining in the region in the future, particularly as his child is now settled in a local school.

### 3. Barriers and Constraints

This section discusses both barriers facing migrants as they seek to enter work, and constraints on the type of work available and the qualitative experience of work. Most frequently reported barriers for those who wanted a job but weren't currently in work related to Language (32%), Immigration Status (20%), Qualifications and Training (10%), Availability of Jobs (9%), and Caring Responsibilities (8%). These barriers are discussed below, together with other significant factors that emerged from the survey and in-depth interviews. Only four respondents who had experience of self-employment in the UK provided information on the barriers they had faced, with the most common being legal regulations, reported by three out of the four, together with one person each reporting language, finance and problems with customers. For those who had not experienced self-employment but said they would like to be self-employed, the anticipated barriers were quite different, with language and finance featuring most prominently and a very small percentage of people anticipating that legal regulations would be barrier. The way different factors interact in individuals' lives are illustrated using case studies based on the in-depth interviews. Some of these are presented in this report (see boxes), and the full range of case studies will be available at [www.migrantworkinglives.org](http://www.migrantworkinglives.org) (due to launch early 2017).

#### 3.1 Language

Those with better language skills appeared to be at an advantage and this is related to country of origin and particularly historical links with the UK or social/occupational positions in the country of origin prior to moving. There was evident awareness amongst those who saw themselves as having less English language capability that they would need to improve this to increase their chances of decent employment opportunities and there is clear evidence of dedication to this (e.g. case studies Ruth, Elena, Aleksy). Relationships between language, employment, mental health and confidence are illustrated by the following statement from one of the in-depth interviews:

*"I find it's very hard because the big barrier is the communication...sometimes it's difficult for me to tell something by phone, you know, I miss many jobs because I don't listen properly, what is the instructions...so the people who are not patient cannot call you the second time, they find just you don't know anything. The language is a barrier for everything for me now. It is difficult. I'm depressed." (Woman from Iran with temporary leave to remain, arrived 2013)*

Excluding those prohibited from working because of immigration status, survey respondents who reported

**Natalia** was born in Zimbabwe. She arrived in 2002 seeking asylum and is now a British citizen. Before she arrived in the UK her confidence in English was already high. In Zimbabwe she worked as a qualified secretary and Personal Assistant as well as setting up her own secretarial business. This work gave her both 'skills and freedom'. Following the drastic deterioration of the Zimbabwean economy she lost her main work.

In the UK, she has found getting work very challenging and decided to pursue educational qualifications to enhance her employability. She enrolled at a local college, passed A Level qualifications and applied for a degree related to her career plans in a social field. However, there were problems relating to her application and she was enrolled on a different course instead. Following this, she applied for work with a local school, but despite doing well at interview, she was unsuccessful. She decided she would need a Masters level degree, which she enjoyed and anticipated this could open doors in employment with a local authority. However, her graduation coincided with the financial crisis and there was very limited availability of work in these areas. She attempted to apply for work at a secretarial level, but was told she was over-qualified. Whilst looking for a more long term and full time job she has been doing part time support work at two organisations, initially through an agency, in a field related to her degree but in a role that she feels is not fulfilling given her training. Her working hours are inflexible, making childcare, particularly for her child with special needs, very challenging and meaning that she can only take the night shifts. She is also living 'hand to mouth'. With one employer she identifies discrimination in relation to how both she and service users from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated. She is hoping to leave this organisation as a result. In addition her family suffered from a series of racist incidents in and around their home, which after multiple requests resulted in the council moving them to another area. She has tried to open up a hair salon - receiving business planning advice arranged through a refugee support organisation. She had received a loan for a lease on a property, and renovated the premises, but the lease ended. She is now involved in establishing a charity working in her area of expertise in Zimbabwe and the UK. She is looking to one day manage this herself, and is happy to remain in the North East where she has established important friendships.

more confidence in spoken English were much more likely to have had a paid job in the UK in the last 12 months. This was particularly pronounced for those who rated their confidence in English at 8/10 or above, with the proportions who had not had a paid job in the last year 36% for those rating their English at 8/10, 33% for those rating 9/10, and 27% for those rating 10/10 – lower than for the general population in the region. Because the survey was only available in English, although intermediaries helped to orally translate the survey on some occasions, it is likely that those with the most basic levels of English were underrepresented.

Our in-depth interviews with migrants suggested that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between language and employment, with employment providing an important route to improving confidence in English and confidence in English helping to find any, or a more preferable, job. This supports the findings of previous research.<sup>28</sup> Language skills are also critical for self-employment. It is important to emphasise that even for those with the lowest level of confidence in English, some were working, although this limited the range of jobs available to them (e.g. case study Helena).

We found a range of sources of English language learning, from contacts between migrants and non-migrants whose children were friends, to informal activities such as cake-making, formal activities such as those organised by Sure Start and voluntary sector organisations, and college courses. There are gaps in provision in some parts of the region, for example participants reported there is currently no accredited ESOL course in Northumberland, although a community organisation is working with the WEA to develop one, and a lack of consistent ESOL provision was also reported in County Durham.

### 3.2 Immigration Status

Immigration status was a direct barrier for those prohibited from working, and some reported that a combination of not being allowed to work and receiving little or no state support left them feeling they had no choice but to attempt to find paid work despite this not being legal; in such a situation choices of employment are extremely limited and respondents reported employers using their legal status to enforce low pay and poor conditions:

*"I had to wait nine years [before being granted leave to remain], between that...there are three years or four years where I had no recourse to public funds...the survival ethos...while you are waiting, I had no choice, I had no right*

<sup>28</sup> Bloch, c. 2002. *Refugees' opportunities and barriers in employment and training*. London. DWP.

**Aleksy** was born in Poland, is in his early 30s and lives in a rural part of the region. He arrived in the UK in 2005. Prior to Poland joining the EU, as a teenager, he moved for both personal and economic reasons and initially lived in Holland picking flowers on a seasonal basis before temporarily returning to Poland. He then also tried to travel to the UK to work in a restaurant in London with a friend, but was stopped at the airport. Shortly after that, Poland joined the EU and he took the opportunity to move to his current home town as he knew others who had made a similar move.

As with most of his friends his initial intentions were not to stay in the UK permanently. He was limited in terms of his employment opportunities at first because of his English language ability, which he admits was low. He managed to get work in a restaurant through a friend who moved to the area at a slightly earlier stage. He committed himself to learning the language without any formal classes or tutoring and once his language had improved, after about a year he started his current work at a leisure centre – doing work for which he had extensive experience and passion. However, his work also includes more routine tasks such as cleaning, lifting, and electric repairs, as he trained as an electrician in Poland. While others friends have moved to other town and cities to find work – this position allowed him to settle in his current location. His wife, who had been working elsewhere in the EU, joined him after a few years and with his wife, child and another child on the way he sees his future in the area. In his eyes migration from Poland is changing – less about earning and saving and then returning home, than about establishing a more permanent new life. He also notes that Polish migrants are becoming more aware of their employment rights, something which was an issue when he worked at the restaurant where holidays were not paid – and also something that continues for others in the region. Despite being very happy with his life and his main job, he does need to supplement his income through other cash in hand manual jobs for neighbours and friends, and has ambitions for future work in politics.

*to it [state support], so I had to work illegally.” (Man, arrived 2002, now with indefinite leave to remain)*

Examples like this, where someone feels they have no choice but to work illegally, and are later granted leave to remain, contradict the neat separation in government policy between those who have a right to be in Britain and those who do not.

In other cases we identified through our interviews immigration status had an indirect impact, for example a limited period of leave to remain leading to restricted access to training and student loans, making it more difficult to plan ahead, or contributing to a loss of confidence and skills where a person had spent a long period barred from work and had now secured the right to work (e.g. case study Ruth).

### ***3.3 Recognition of and access to skills, qualifications and experience***

Recognition of qualifications, skills and experience was suggested by in-depth interviews to be very important for almost all types of work, and frequently a lack of recognition for skills and qualifications gained outside the UK was reported as a barrier to work. Respondents reported having to access education in the UK to stand a chance of competing on a level footing with others even in terms of very basic qualifications (e.g. case study Habon), and even where they had extensive qualifications prior to arriving in the UK. This disadvantages migrants who may have to repeat qualifications they have already completed outside the UK, and where skills and qualifications are not recognised it makes it more difficult for employers to accurately assess the contribution migrants could make. This cuts across different groups' experiences - in some cases over time migrants were able to work their way into employment that allowed them to use the skills they developed elsewhere, but rarely in similar industries/sectors and often with less prestige (e.g. case study Gabi) – or not in areas that related to their educational qualifications if previously a student. For some the fact that qualifications or experiences were not recognised meant that they could not see a future in those more skilled and prestigious occupations. It also means employers and wider society miss out on the potential contribution migrants could make, when their skills are not recognised.

Nobody we interviewed seemed to be doing work that was either equivalent or better/more professionally regarded than they had been doing in their home country - apart from those that had been students. That is not to say that all participants were in well paid or prestigious professions prior to coming to the UK, although certainly there was an impressive range of skills and experiences that they brought with them. Some expressed an interest in having their qualifications recognised in the UK, but were unsure of the process (e.g. case study Elena). Skills and experiences developed in countries of origin were extensive across the sample. However, in some countries this was not always reflected through official or formal

**Fabrice** was born in Burkina Faso. He arrived in the UK in 2009 without the rest of his family and now has temporary leave to remain. Back home, he went straight out of school to work in the family business – in retail – until he set up his own business involving international imports. He would periodically travel to European countries as part of this business and served a market around West Africa. He didn't need any formal skills or qualifications to do this work – something seen to be very different from his situation in the UK. This business closed down and the stock was sold off when he left the country.

He currently works at a food processing warehouse, a job that initially came through a recruitment agency, and has done so for the last two years. He works either a 2 day on/off or 3 day on/off shift pattern. Each shift is for 12 hours from 7 in the morning to 7 at night. He was initially paid a wage of £6.52 per hour and then after a year this went up to £7.28. Prior to this he worked at a food factory through an agency where he was only able to work 8 hours per week. For a time even when working at the processing warehouse he would go through another agency to get additional work here on his days off. He suggests other options were limited; aside from this kind of work there was 'not a lot of jobs available in other areas'. To access work, he also has to travel a considerable distance, which means it is sometimes difficult to make early shifts. He has also experienced occasional problems in getting paid for work completed through one agency, this remains unresolved. He has experienced problems in relation to overpayment of Housing Benefit which he is still paying back, and also had a poor experience of the Job Centre when JSA benefits were stopped after he was told he wasn't searching for enough vacancies per week. He is very keen to get back into his business again, but perhaps dealing in a wider range of goods than his previous business, either in the UK or in West Africa, although finance and the unlikely prospect of returning home any time soon were seen as barriers to realising this ambition.

qualifications, or the paperwork to prove a qualification had been lost. This can create problems in proving the existence of these skills and experiences (e.g. case study Fabrice). In some cases this combined with a lack of recognition by migrants themselves of the potential relevance of their prior skills and experience for work in the UK, or an undervaluing of their equivalent UK qualification. Support with CV writing can play a useful role in addressing this issue, and was reported in the policy seminar as already occurring in some places for example as part of ESOL classes, but in many cases voluntary sector organisations providing this kind of support have had their resources reduced and based on our data it does not appear to be routinely available via Job Centre Plus. Participants in the policy seminar reported some effective examples of funded work placements to help new migrants gain experience of work in the UK, which can involve a range of partners and may not be specifically targeted at migrants but can carry extra value for them, for example a scheme organised by Your Homes Newcastle for its tenants.

Difficulties regarding skills, experience and qualifications are further compounded by barriers associated with language and discrimination, which are discussed in other parts of this report.

### 3.4 Availability of Jobs

It has been suggested that "The North East of England has a long history as one of the UK's worst performing labour markets offering a classic example of the painful process of deindustrialization and restructuring within a former industrial heartland."<sup>29</sup> This means that employment opportunities, especially in higher paid and higher skilled work, are influenced negatively for all,<sup>30</sup> but combines with other factors mentioned previously in a unique way for migrants and different groups of migrants. This relates to the poor availability of work generally in the accounts of some of our participants, but also to the need (at a cost) of moving beyond the region to find work, or to travel within the region (e.g. case studies Habon, Fabrice). Below a stakeholder gives their observations regarding the interaction between regional disparities in availability of work and communities based on nationality for refugees who have recently secured status:

*"And one of the major things is a lack of jobs in the North East, particularly in Sunderland. A lot of people who've got status have gone to London. Quite a few have gone to Leeds. I think because they may have communities of their nationalities set up where they can go and they can get help...They move to Newcastle. But no ...it's people mostly want to go to London because they know there's work there. I mean we had a guy who, he's got [refugee] status and he was a journalist in his own country and he has been offered a job with a... radio station in London which is reasonably*

<sup>29</sup> Stenning, A. and S. Dawley 2009. Poles To Newcastle: Grounding New Migrant Flows in Peripheral Regions. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 16(3), 273-294.

<sup>30</sup> North East Local Enterprise Partnership 2014, *More and Better Jobs: A Strategic Economic Plan for the North East*

**Ruth** was born in (what is now) the Democratic Republic of Congo. She arrived in the UK in 2008, has indefinite leave to remain from 2013 and is currently unemployed. She is now in her early 50s and has extensive experience of living, working and training in other countries including the Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, China and Italy. Her work experience prior to coming to the UK includes data inputting, stock control, secretarial work and sales and marketing including a management role. She also has experience of self-employment selling goods door-to-door.

The gap between arrival in the UK and the decision on her status five years later has, as she puts it, disrupted her 'rhythm', resulting in gaps in education and work experience that have affected her confidence. In the UK she has been involved with voluntary work with a drop-in centre in the region, a role that she values, particularly in a caring capacity. She has a strong desire to get work and feels frustrated that she hasn't had the opportunities to show people what she can do. She describes herself as 'depressed' at the inability to secure paid work. Despite the fact that since arriving in the UK her English language skills have improved, mainly through speaking English with friends and her children, she identifies the main barrier as language. This particularly relates to understanding job application instructions, but also the reaction of employers to someone who may not understand everything immediately. Due to these challenges she has decided to focus on improving her language skills before applying for further posts. She has completed an ESOL course, attends a conversation class and is enrolled in an access course at a local college, although she is struggling with the demands of the course and finds the support provided for students of very different abilities insufficient.

*well... I mean, not by London standards...but you know, it's £20,000, nearly £22,000 and he didn't want to go but I think he recognised that that's the only move forward for him, so he's leaving a big support network here in Sunderland where he's been very happy, but needs must." (committee member for a refugee support organisation)*

### 3.5 Caring Responsibilities

Childcare is an issue that cuts across all groups and affects the ability to secure employment. This barrier is particularly significant when families are headed by single parents who have to juggle multiple responsibilities and may lack social networks able to provide informal care (e.g. Case Study Natalia), as described by the following respondent:

*"agency, sometimes they ask me to go [to another city], I want my job in [the city where I live] or ten minutes of [that city] because I've got kids...if I get a job in [another city] for example I need to, at six o'clock in the morning it is not easy to go there, not easier, another problem." (woman from Guinea, arrived 2008, temporary leave to remain)*

For respondents from the EU who are currently not working this often related to either childcare commitments or focussing on education and improving English to gain better career opportunities in the future. In these cases they were usually supported either by parents living in the UK or their husbands or wives who were working.

### 3.6 Experiences of discrimination

Discrimination did not feature in survey responses on barriers to accessing work, but significant levels of in-work discrimination were reported, and discrimination as a perceived barrier to accessing work was reported in the in-depth interviews, such as multiple job applications with no replies. Participants in the policy seminar reported perceptions that employers' attitudes changed for the worse once they realised somebody was a migrant. In the survey, out of those who had been in paid employment in the last 12 months 137 answered a question about experiences of discrimination. Of these, 20% said they had felt discriminated against by employers on the basis of ethnicity, country of origin or immigration status within the last year, and this rose to 26% for EU10 migrants and 25% for African migrants. Overall, 19% reported feeling discriminated against by colleagues, and this rose to 44% for Africans compared to 19% of EU10 migrants. This suggests a very different pattern of workplace experiences depending on migrants' country of origin, which in this case is also a reasonably reliable indicator of ethnicity. The difference might be connected to the higher degree of visibility of difference defined by skin colour compared to accent or other markers of ethnicity, or the racial hierarchies that position white Eastern Europeans differently compared to black Africans. 26% of respondents felt discriminated against by members of the public they encountered at work, and differences by region of origin were similar to those for discrimination by colleagues – 43% of Africans and 22% of EU10 migrants feeling they had been discriminated against by members of the public at work in the last year. This tells us about respondents' subjective perception of discrimination, but such



**Elena** was born in Romania, and has dual citizenship in Romania and another European country. In Romania she gained an undergraduate level qualification in Psychology and worked at a hospital then at a care home. She had the opportunity to take a higher status position looking after several homes, but there was no increase in salary and too much responsibility.

She arrived in the UK in 2012 and has worked in the same care home ever since. She feels she can put into practice some of the skills developed in her previous role, and enjoys working with people – something she feels she is good at. She prefers the fact that she can now provide for the needs of her clients – something which frustrated her in Romania due to a lack of resources. She accessed her current job through representatives of an English based recruitment agency in Romania, following in the footsteps of a close friend to the move to the North East. The requirements in terms of experience and qualifications were not stringent, although she is currently taking qualifications in care work at a local college and is looking to improve her confidence in English. She contrasts her migration experience, where she required a visa and had no choice but to come through the agency, to other Romanians working in her sector now who can be recruited more directly. Included in her contract was a tie to shared agency accommodation for a period of one year, although after her probation period of 3 months she became employed directly by the care home. Leaving the rest of her family behind, she found the first year very difficult. However, after just over a year she has now been joined by her family. Her children are doing well at school and they are looking to build a life here. Her husband was also able to secure work in the same care home. She has considered going into other work in the future, perhaps child-minding, as she feels as she gets older her current job may become too physically demanding. She would like to see if she could get her prior qualifications formally recognised to enable her to work in school with children with special needs, but she is unsure of the process.

widespread perceptions lend weight to individual accounts and are further reinforced by research on the ethnic pay gap when controlling for other factors such as country of birth and educational level.<sup>31</sup> In-depth interviews showed the varied forms discrimination can take, including direct and indirect discrimination and experiences inside and outside the workplace, as illustrated by the following account:

*“It's hard for anyone who is non-British in terms of jobs, in terms of social life. It's really, really hard ... the way the community responds to you really is the main thing. I have friends who say to me, oh ... you cannot possible say you've experienced discrimination ... So, I've come across a lot of that ... it's not changing [here]. It can only... it changes for those who are vocal, for those who are not scared of challenging maybe because of your background in terms of your knowledge of the system or social class or whatever.” (woman from Zimbabwe with leave to remain, arrived in 2001)*

Examples of differential treatment of employees that was perceived as discriminatory included one worker still not being given a contract after a year's employment, while another worker was given a contract after two months, or formal holiday entitlements not being honoured in practice because employers would not sign off the necessary form despite multiple reminders. Participants in the policy seminar provided further accounts of mistreatment by employers, and suggested that discrimination could restrict job opportunities and career progression by intimidating people away from putting themselves forward for opportunities, and also deter people from taking up complaints against employers. Participants suggested that discrimination may be produced in some cases through the way the immigration system is organised, with employers, Job Centre Plus advisors and others increasingly expected to implement immigration rules without the necessary expertise, leading to uncertainty, stress and suspicion. The DWP reports that their staff are now routinely provided with guidance on immigration rules and their application to benefit entitlement.

Alongside these accounts of workplace discrimination, respondents also talked about the potential for the workplace to act as an important site of support, solidarity and integration, in some cases helping people to cope with direct discrimination they were facing in community settings.

<sup>31</sup> Heath, A. and S. Y. Cheung. 2006. *Ethnic Penalties in the Labour Market: Employers and Discrimination*. Department of Work and Pensions; Catney, G. and A. Sabater (2015) *Ethnic Minority Disadvantage in the Labour Market: Participation, skills and geographical inequalities*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

**Helena** was born in Poland and moved to the UK in 2010. Prior to moving to the UK, she worked part-time variable hours in Poland in a Hotel bar, restaurant and reception, and at the same time, studied an undergraduate degree in tourism for two years.

She first arrived in the South of England, and worked in a restaurant for two weeks. Since moving to the North East, she has worked for four years full time (working 40 hours a week, 12 hour shifts including night shifts), in a food processing factory. She was initially packing for several months, but was then asked to move into Quality Control and has trained others in this department. Both she and her partner now work at the same factory. They applied for the job after arriving in the North East and hearing about the job via friends. She feels that she would not be working in a factory, if she had stayed in Poland, as she had been gaining an education with the goal to work in tourism; either studying a postgraduate degree at University, or working as a tourist guide. She is currently improving her English language skills, as she would like to work as a care assistant, however doesn't feel confident that her English is good enough, though she does feel like her English has improved since working in the factory and talking with English friends. She has future goals of further improving her English and getting a better job, possibly in tourism and has the ambition of buying a house in the North East and settling here more permanently.

### **3.7 Other barriers**

Other barriers and constraints respondents presented included general confidence, mental health, the time taken for DBS background checks to be completed when checks with other countries are needed, gaps in experience, costs associated with starting work, and absence of social networks.

“I want to run my own business if I'm allowed to work, there's a big reason behind this...I want to help people who are destitute, who are on the roads... I want to earn so that I can help people who are destitute. I have seen how difficult it is. I was on the road in 2012. I was pregnant. Nobody helped me at that time.” (woman from Pakistan, arrived in the UK in 2010, seeking asylum and still prohibited from taking paid work as of 2015)

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#### 4. Responses and sources of support

In-depth interviews provided an opportunity to explore how migrants responded to employment difficulties in the past and their plans for the future. Social contacts that pre-dated migrants' move to the UK were an important source of support for many respondents to find initial employment. The presence of such contacts was the reason a number of EU migrants gave for moving to the North East. The absence of such contacts is particularly significant for refugees, who do not have a choice about which part of the UK they are dispersed to when they claim asylum, and where they consequently tend to begin their search for work if they secure status, an issue also highlighted by the Survey of New Refugees.<sup>32</sup> Education was often seen as a strategy to support career progression (e.g. case study Habon), but we encountered multiple individuals for whom education had not had the desired effect. Some respondents were aware that there was a way to convert their qualifications to an equivalence recognised by UK employers, but were unsure how to access this route. At least one college in the region reported that they are already responding to this need through a specialist from NARIC<sup>33</sup> holding sessions at the college.

54% of respondents were not aware of organisations that could provide employment or self-employment advice, and this was highest for EU10 migrants at 65%.

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<sup>32</sup> Cheung, S. Y. and J. Phillimore 2014. Refugees, Social Capital, and Labour Market Integration in the UK. *Sociology*, 48(3), 518-536.

<sup>33</sup> NARIC is the designated United Kingdom national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills. It performs this official function on behalf of the UK Government. [www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)

**Habon** was born in Somalia. She arrived in the UK in 2002, then in her early 20s, has British citizenship and is currently employed, working for a voluntary sector organisation where she has been for a number of years. Before she came to the UK she was a student preparing to go to University. In Somalia she had aspirations of becoming either a doctor or nurse and was nursing voluntarily at a local hospital.

However, her plans changed since coming to the UK. While she waited for a decision on her asylum application, she did voluntary work with a refugee support organisation, went to college to learn English, and did a computer course. Once she gained the right to work, she got some support in putting together a CV, but found that she got very few positive responses from potential employers in care work and catering. She enrolled on an access course and managed to find work at a restaurant through a local job support organisation about which she was really pleased after being unable to work for so long. She describes finding work as a difficult and exhausting process. Her role and hours worked were extremely unpredictable and she earned just enough to live on. She experienced some problems in that job with her treatment by colleagues, and despite her commitment, felt isolated. This led to her eventually leaving. Following this she worked in multiple roles as an occasional interpreter, for a voluntary support organisation and in the care industry for a period of time. She was less positive about this role due to the low pay, but also the distances involved and transport costs paid out of her own pocket. During this period she also managed to complete a degree at a local University. Her current position, which mainly involves supporting the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, began initially as voluntary work but has led to a full time paid role. She finds this work very emotionally demanding, but also gets tremendous satisfaction from helping others in similar situations to those she initially faced. Despite the difficulties encountered, she now sees her current work as giving her a base on which to build her life.

Some respondents reported intentions to move away from the North East in order to improve their employment prospects, among other reasons, but respondents also expressed non-economic reasons for staying, including social support networks, aspirations for children, aesthetic attachments to the region, lifestyle factors, or avoiding the prospect of moving again because it was viewed as a further traumatic displacement. Respondents also showed a frequent willingness to be mobile within the region, not moving permanently but travelling sometimes considerable distances from home to one or more places of work. This is quite different to the image others have painted of the North East as “a series of small, discrete, and spatially bounded labour markets, rather than forming an integrated labour market in which people are linked to employment opportunities across the region”,<sup>34</sup> and may be something distinctive to new migrants. At the same time, some respondents also reported severe restrictions on their mobility for work as a result of a lack of child care.

The most common response we encountered to perceived discrimination at work was for the person who felt discriminated against to leave that employment (e.g. case study Habon), although there were also some cases where legal action was taken (e.g. case study Gabi), or where discrimination was reported to managers who intervened in a way that our interviewees found helpful. High levels of self-employment and desire for self-employment can also be understood as one response to perceived discrimination in employment, following a long established pattern for ethnic minorities in Britain.<sup>35</sup> Some stakeholders in our policy seminar suggested that in some cases self-employment is motivated by the desire to avoid the Job Centre system which some consider to be punitive and/or discriminatory, although there is considerable disagreement about whether this is institutional or the fault of individual advisors, and whether these experiences are particular to migrants or more general.<sup>36</sup>

We encountered a recurring tendency among respondents to evaluate their experiences in Britain in comparison to their situation in their country of origin, including gratitude for even small amounts of state support and acceptance of low wages by British standards because they were an improvement on their previous experience. In some cases respondents

<sup>34</sup> Hudson, R. 2005. Rethinking change in old industrial regions: reflecting on the experiences of North East England. *Environment and Planning A*, 37(4), 581-596.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, K. and S. Drinkwater 1998. Ethnicity and self-employment in Britain. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 60(3), 383-407.

<sup>36</sup> Dwyer, et al. 2016. First Wave Findings: Migrants and conditionality. <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/WelCond-findings-migrants-May16.pdf>.

described their acceptance of poor conditions for themselves in order to give their children the best possible chance, or in order to send money to family or friends outside Britain. 40% of respondents to our survey said they remit money, and this was highest for migrants from Africa (58%) and lowest for migrants from EU10 countries (31%), potentially reflecting the fact that it is easier for family members to join EU migrants and the greater international inequalities between European and African countries that make remittances more valued. Amongst those who said they lacked sufficient money for necessities for themselves, 31% still said they remitted money.

Collective responses to employment difficulties included informal support and advice, volunteering, and in some cases creating new organisations. 12% of survey respondents had been in a trade union prior to coming to Britain, and this fell to 3% for EU10 migrants compared to 14% for migrants from Africa and 13% for migrants from Asia. Once in the UK, 13% of those who had been in paid employment or self-employment in the UK in the last year reported belonging to a trade union, but there was little overlap between those who had been in a trade union before coming to the UK and since arriving. This compares to 33% unionisation for North East employees overall.<sup>37</sup> In-depth interviews identified cases of voluntary sector organisations playing trade union-type roles, including two voluntary sector organisations staffed by individuals who had prior experience in trade union organising. Similarly, Fitzgerald et al found Polish language websites playing a significant role in the region.<sup>38</sup> Previously some trade unions and the Northern TUC have been active in relation to migrants in the region,<sup>39</sup> but more recently there is much less visible activity. The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) is a notable exception, organising migrants in food processing in many parts of the North East despite very limited resources.

There is considerable voluntary and community sector provision for migrants in the North East, a significant amount of which is led and/or staffed by migrants. Volunteering can play an important role for migrants to develop new social contacts, improve general confidence and gain English language competency. Specialist 'move on' support, including interface with Jobcentre Plus and employability support is provided to asylum seekers who are granted leave to remain by voluntary sector organisations such as North of England Refugee Service and Open Door, and self-employment supported is provided by organisations such as the Angelou Centre in Newcastle. However, in common with the voluntary and community sector overall, this work is severely under-resourced and faces an uncertain future. Our data suggests that these services are not reaching a lot of migrants. 54% of survey respondents said they were not aware of organisations that could provide employment or self-employment advice, and this was highest for EU10 migrants at 65% - particularly significant as this was also the group that reported the highest level of perceived discrimination by employers. Policy seminar participants suggested that mainstream services, such as Five Lamps, Project North East, and All Communities Together, may not be known to new migrants, and pointed out that some relevant sources of support such as Business Link no longer exist.

<sup>37</sup> BIS 2015. *Trade Union Membership 2014: Statistical Bulletin*. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

<sup>38</sup> Fitzgerald, I., J. Hardy and M. M. Lucio 2013. The Internet, employment and Polish migrant workers: communication, activism and competition in the new organisational spaces. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 27(2), 93-105.

<sup>39</sup> Reflected by involvement in research, e.g. Fitzgerald, I. 2005. *Organising Migrant Workers in Construction: Experience from the North East of England*. Northern TUC; Fitzgerald, I. 2007. *Working in the UK: Polish migrant worker routes into employment in the North East and North West construction and food processing sectors*. Northern TUC / Northumbria University. This was also reflected by the Northern TUC's direct involvement in 2008-10 as partners with the Regional Refugee Forum North East and Churches Regional Commission in campaigning to change national policy on the right to work for asylum seekers. See details at <https://www.refugeevoices.org.uk/activities/right-to-work-campaign/100>

## 5. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The following recommendations were generated through discussion of the findings with project partners and more than 50 stakeholders who attended a policy seminar held at Northumbria University on 27 June 2016:

### 5.1 Policy

Some policy recommendations cut across different levels of government, and would benefit from involvement from policy makers at local, regional and national levels:

- Employment needs to be recognised as crucial for any kind of approach to the ‘integration’ of new migrants;
- A holistic strategy is needed that considers where we are heading, the challenges we are facing, what needs to be done to address these and the people who need to be involved;
- Needs and challenges that new migrants share with other sections of the population, such as the need for affordable childcare, should be highlighted alongside the specific issues new migrants face;
- There is a need to identify case studies of where new migrants have been more successful, particularly where they have managed to get back into former professions, and to share such stories and examine their route maps. This may be especially relevant for those with limited social networks and lack of awareness of any pioneers;
- A wider range of forms of livelihood should also be explored, such as cooperatives and social enterprises;

Other recommendations have particular relevance for local, regional and national policy makers:

#### Local and regional

- A vision is needed of how new migrants can participate in and contribute to the region’s Economic Development Strategies as part of their ‘inclusive growth’ objectives;
- Steps should be taken to ensure early and consistent access to ESOL across all parts of the region, taking into account that new migrant populations are widely dispersed;
- Vocational training and apprenticeships open to all ages and linked to areas of regional labour market demand could help to open up a wider range of opportunities for new migrants and increase their capacity to meet the needs of employers;
- The Local Enterprise Partnerships in the region have an important leadership role to play in creating support infrastructure for migrant entrepreneurs as part of inclusive growth;

#### National

- Improved speed of decisions for those seeking asylum could help to address issues relating to confidence and gaps in education and experience, but this needs to be combined with targeted support during the asylum process and after securing leave to remain to help people prepare for employment in the UK. Some stakeholders suggested a ‘grace period’ following the granting of leave to remain would be highly beneficial, to give time to transition out of the asylum system before being faced with the demands of jobseeking;
  - New migrants will not ‘naturally’ fall into employment by default without a policy driven approach. There are previous delivery models that can be drawn on, such as the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), which had a high success rate in supporting refugees into employment. The current provisions under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme should also be evaluated with a view to potential application to other refugees in the UK;
  - There is currently no national policy framework on integration of new migrants after they
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arrive in the UK. As a result, responsibility for migrants is dispersed across Whitehall. No single department takes a lead role. Government funding to support the integration of new status Refugees ended in 2011 with the ending of the national RIES contract. The UK would benefit from a unified integration strategy, relating to all migrants and including economic and non-economic dimensions;

## **5.2 Public Service Delivery**

- Training should be provided to employers and service providers about immigration rules to promote accurate knowledge and confidence around entitlements to work; one model for this is the work done by ACANE (African Community Advice North East) with GPs;
  - Migrants should have access to the NARIC system to establish equivalence in qualifications from country of origin. One model for providing this is the sessions with a specialist from NARIC that are already offered by Darlington College. For those working or living in Scotland, SQA can assist with the conversion of qualifications;
  - Migrants need help to map their route to re-establishing or progressing careers. They need access to Careers and Course Information, advice and guidance that is independent of any education provider to prevent conflict of interest with organisational business objectives. Advice needs to be available about the courses and qualifications that are most appropriate to career objectives;
  - Advice through the Job Centre needs to support the development of careers beyond a narrow focus on finding the next job. Such an approach may require additional training for advisors and/or changes to directives, to allow a focus on the individual and their particular needs; lessons might be learned in this respect from a new approach being piloted in the Durham and Tees Valley areas;
  - Greater flexibility for meetings with Job Centre advisors would be welcomed, to allow for longer meetings in cases where more in depth support is needed; the DWP states that its work coaches already have flexibility to adjust interview frequency and time slots to the needs of the individual, meaning that where somebody needs more support there should be no barrier to the work coach accommodating this request;
  - There is significant demand for support and advice for those looking to take a self-employment route, and increased awareness of sources of support such as the New Enterprise Allowance and other sources of support that Job Centre Plus staff can signpost customers to using the District Provision Tool;
  - There is a need for formal employment orientation as part of 'Move On' support for those granted asylum. This may include briefings on the local economy, growth sectors, vocational training, UK recruitment processes, where to look, how to write a strong application, employment rights and sources of support;
  - More access is needed to suitably informed rights and advocacy work to address specific issues faced by new migrants;
  - Increased access to affordable childcare could address a significant barrier to employment for some migrants, which also affects other sections of the population;
  - Steps should be taken to increase awareness of rights and sources of support for new migrants; this should include greater sharing of information between organisations, for example housing providers delivering public contracts should pass on information about sources of support to their tenants;
  - Local authorities should address employment conditions and health and safety as part of their increased health remit.
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### ***5.3 Community and Voluntary Activity***

- There is a need for increased access to suitable English language classes, and a recognition that both colleges and voluntary sector organisations have an important role to play here and need to be properly resourced;
- In the context of funding cuts, some organisations are developing new approaches, for example Berwick Migrant Support Group are training mentor support workers, some of whom are themselves migrants, to work on a voluntary basis to provide tailored support to migrants;
- Community and voluntary sector organisations need to think creatively about new partners in the voluntary, statutory and private sectors;

### ***5.4 Employers and Trade Unions***

- Employers should be encouraged to financially support ESOL provision as part of recruitment and workforce development;
- Establish a communication channel for raising awareness amongst employers about the range of skills and experiences that migrants bring to the North East;
- Training should be provided within the workplace for employers, employees and HR staff regarding migrants' rights; an established model that can be drawn on is the diversity training provided by the BFAWU;
- More involvement is needed from major trade unions in the North East, drawing on examples of good practice in other parts of the UK such as Unison's migrant workers network; the Northern TUC could play an important coordinating role here. Given the lack of knowledge about trade unions amongst migrants, it is important that trade unions are proactive and visible in making themselves known to migrants – social media could play a role here but is unlikely to be sufficient by itself;

### ***5.5 Resources and Funding***

- In the absence of any centrally funded integration policy or services, responses to the distinctive needs of new migrants seeking to enter employment are primarily being met by the VCSE and FE sectors, and funding for these sectors is therefore critical;
  - Funding priorities should take into account the value of specialist organisations that may be small but have strong relationships of trust with new migrant communities, enabling them to reach people who are missed by more generic services or those lacking strong links with relevant groups;
  - There should also be funding opportunities to enable small groups to build up a track record of work;
  - Initiatives are needed to support new migrants in developing social networks and building confidence, for example through family activities, volunteering and mentoring, and these need to be properly resourced;
  - There is a need for funding to support business start-ups, such as that offered previously by One North East, and to also explore alternative funding models such as crowd funding and community trusts, and connect what is available;
  - FE colleges can benefit from funding to enable them to deliver work in community venues, extending access to ESOL and other areas of learning to migrants who would otherwise be missed;
  - FE colleges and learners benefit from arrangements such as dual funding and Personal Career Development Loans, and these are particularly important as an initial entry point into formal
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learning;

- ESOL funding should be opened up to all migrants to support integration, without restrictions on eligibility;
  - More ESOL courses with a vocational dimension should be valuable, such as those provided by JET (Jobs, Education and Training) in Newcastle;
  - As well as formal language provision, opportunities for migrants to practice their English, such as conversation classes and befriending schemes, are important and need to be resourced;
  - Co-funding for ESOL between government and community, voluntary and private sector partners has been used in the past and would be welcomed;
  - EU funding such as the European Social Fund has played an important role, and following the referendum there is a need for renewed thinking about alternative sources of funding;
  - Funding targets should include career development and effective use of prior skills, beyond simply getting new migrants into entry-level jobs although this is also important;
  - The option of funded work placements (but not mandatory) can help to address the lack of experience of work in the UK experienced by many migrants as a barrier.
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## Appendix: Methodology

### *Research questions*

The research was guided by the following questions:

- In what ways do migrants, or groups of migrants, occupy a distinct position in the North East workforce?
- What are their experiences of access to employment and experiences within the workplace?
- What are the main causal factors influencing migrants' position, including the significance of transnational links/migrations?
- How do new migrants respond to employment difficulties?

### *Survey of migrants*

The survey was designed in consultation with voluntary sector partners and other members of an advisory board that oversaw the project. The intention was keep the questions brief enough to give a good return and straight forward enough to enable self-completion. Some questions were matched to other surveys to aid in comparison, including the Labour Force Survey and the Changing Status Changing Lives survey. A pilot version of the questionnaire was trialled with 25 respondents in early 2014, comments were gathered and substantial revisions were made, including the separation of the questionnaire into two, one version for those who had had paid employment or self-employment in the UK in the previous 12 months and one version for those who had not.

Survey responses were mostly collected face-to-face via support agencies, drop-ins, migrant community organisations and workplaces in towns and cities across most of the region, but excluding the northern-most part. This gap was partially compensated for through the in-depth interviews with migrants and stakeholders, which did include respondents from this part of the region. Respondents were asked if they would take copies to give to friends or families who were also migrants, thus extending the sample beyond those directly accessing services. The research project did not have funding for translated versions of the questionnaires, so was reliant on staff in projects where responses were collected to assist respondents who were less confident in English. A particularly significant source of responses was ESOL classes, where the survey was included as part of the class at several colleges and voluntary sector projects. The survey was also placed online although this generated a very small number of responses.

Although our target group was limited to migrants who had arrived since 1999, 3% (12 people) who completed the survey said they arrived prior to this, and a further 4% (16 people) did not give their year of arrival. Of those who did give their year of arrival, 10% arrived between 1999-2003, 14% arrived between 2004-2007, 20% arrived between 2008-2011, and 51% arrived between 2012-2015. This may reflect both different rates of migration and a tendency for migrants to access the kind of services we used to collect our sample more in the period soon after their arrival.

Survey data was analysed using SPSS software to produce basic descriptive statistics and identify patterns of association between variables and differences between groups of respondents.

### *In-depth interviews with migrants and stakeholders*

All respondents to the survey were asked to fill in a separate sheet with their contact details, indicating if they were willing to volunteer to take part in a further in-depth interview. 105 people volunteered in this way and were followed up by the lead researcher, of which 27 were interviewed. An additional seven people were also interviewed who had not completed the survey but were recruited on the basis that they helped to fill gaps in the data – three had experience working in the northern part of the region where it had not been possible to gather survey responses, three were recruited to increase the sample of migrants with lower levels of confidence

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in spoken English, and one was introduced by another respondent and had a working life that was particularly useful in illustrating some of the complexities in the trajectories of migrants' working lives. Six pilot interviews with migrants in 2013 were also included for analysis. Interviews were conducted by four academic members of the research team. The majority were digitally recorded and transcribed, and five were partially or entirely recorded in notes by the interviewer, where either the respondent preferred not to be recorded digitally or there were technical problems. In total six of the 40 interviews used an interpreter, and these interviews were checked by a different translator who added detail, and the transcripts were then edited into a first person interview format to aid comparison with the other interviews. 10 stakeholders were interviewed about the work of their organisation and were presented with preliminary results from the first 352 survey responses and asked for comments. A further two stakeholders who were partners in the research were interviewed in the final stages, including discussion of a draft version of this report. All interview transcripts/notes were coded thematically and used to produce the case studies and summaries used in this report.

Interview data was subjected to a thematic analysis using Nvivo software. A coding framework was developed based on the research questions and issues arising from the survey data, and this framework was developed through several iterations as further issues emerged from the interview data.

### ***Policy Seminar***

On 27 June 2016 a policy seminar was used to disseminate findings of the study and also to test the findings against the working knowledge of a diverse group of more than 50 stakeholders from across the North East, some of whom had also participated in earlier stages of the research, and to develop recommendations for policy and practice. The event was facilitated by Chris Ford. Key findings were presented by Tom Vickers and John Clayton, followed by reflections on the report by Mark Pierce from the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, Clive Davies from the Department for Work and Pensions, Michal Chantkowski from the International Community Organisation of Sunderland, Ramatoulie Saïdykhan and Gaby Kitoko from the Regional Refugee Forum North East, and Professor Gary Craig from Durham University. A series of small group discussions then addressed key barriers and constraints identified through the research and areas of activity where responses might be developed. The outcome of these discussions were recorded and incorporated into this final version of the report.

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For more information about this research, including more case studies and translated copies of a summary of findings (available in French, Arabic, Farsi, Romanian, Polish and Tigrinya) visit [www.migrantworkinglives.org](http://www.migrantworkinglives.org) (live from early 2017), email [tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk) or write to:

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