

# Supporting migrant workers in rural areas

A guide to Citizens Advice Bureaux initiatives





# Foreword

The exploitation of migrant workers, as reported to rural Citizens Advice Bureaux, underlines the fact that we live in a world in which people are often disadvantaged, harassed and even attacked because of their religion or ethnicity. Britain is a multicultural society and all of us, coming from very different origins must learn to live together in harmony. The consequences of failure to do this are unimaginable.

The Citizens Advice service has a major part to play in bringing about better relations between individuals and between different communities. Our whole ethos is about helping people, whoever they are, to exercise their rights and responsibilities and to obtain fair treatment under the law, thereby improving their lives.

This Good Practice Guide looks at some of the challenges members of the Rural Bureaux Network have identified when supporting migrant workers, and how rural Citizens Advice Bureaux have overcome these challenges through a variety of initiatives. These initiatives can be replicated in rural areas across England and Wales, by rural bureaux, who are looking to support the migrant workers who make such a positive contribution to our economy and society.

There are many ways in which the Citizens Advice service can act to promote social cohesion and to support the migrant worker community. It is vital that we play our part.



Jane Betts

Chair, Buckingham and Winslow CAB and Vice Chair of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority

# Background

The employment of migrant workers in rural areas of the UK is not a new practice. The use of Irish harvest migrants and the employment of the navy to construct the nation's infrastructure are but two illustrations of the historic use of migrant workers in the rural economy.

Today, the use of migrant labour in rural areas is more widespread and the migrant labour force is more ethnically and culturally diverse. This has generated a number of new issues and challenges for the providers of services in rural areas including Citizens Advice Bureaux.

This guide examines the challenges facing rural Citizens Advice Bureaux advising migrant workers and the responses from bureaux to these challenges. It identifies examples of good practice and initiatives with migrant workers that other rural Citizens Advice Bureaux may wish to try to replicate.

# The challenges posed for rural Citizens Advice Bureaux by migrant workers

Notwithstanding their growing importance in the economic life of the country, the employment of an increasing number of migrant workers has resulted in an increase in demand for the services of Citizens Advice Bureaux. In some localities, the scale of that increase has been very significant in recent years with the result that migrant workers now represent at least 25 per cent of the total clients for some bureaux.

Whilst much of that growth has been the result of self-referral, there is evidence to suggest that a proportion is due to decisions by other bodies and agencies to redirect/refer requests for help and advice to their local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). This raises important questions about the implications of this growth on Citizens Advice Bureaux resources and also about the ownership of the migrant worker agenda and the extent to which it is shared (or not) by all the bodies and agencies that need to be involved.

A survey of rural Citizens Advice Bureaux in 2005 sought to identify, amongst other things, the nature and extent of the challenges and issues that migrant workers pose for the service.

Out of a total of over 90 Citizens Advice Bureaux who identified migrant workers amongst their clients, some 22 per cent could identify no particular challenges associated with that client group. Their generally low level of use of Citizens Advice Bureaux services was seen as being capable of incorporation within the workload of the bureau. For other bureaux, the nature of the challenges posed by migrant worker communities can be classified into five broad categories:

- ▶ communications
- ▶ availability of advice
- ▶ management of bureau business
- ▶ challenges for staff/volunteers
- ▶ changing nature of problems

## Communications

Over 60 per cent of Citizens Advice Bureaux identified communication problems as the major challenge posed by the increasing number of migrant workers. Of these, about two thirds identified language barriers arising from a poor command of English amongst the migrant labour force. This poses two particular problems for bureaux staff:

- ▶ difficulties in understanding the true nature and extent of the issue(s) on which the client is seeking help and advice
- ▶ difficulties in ensuring that the client fully understands the advice being given and its implications for his/her situation.

The latter problem is often exacerbated by a general lack of understanding amongst some migrant workers of their rights and entitlements, the rules and procedures governing their access to them and their associated expectations.

Communication is one of the main challenges faced by migrant workers. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the need for, availability and cost of interpretation and translation services is identified as a significant problem for rural Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The challenges surrounding interpretation/translation are not common to all bureaux. For some, the main problem is the absence of anybody in the locality who is able and willing to provide the service that is required. For others, the issues surround the need to depend on volunteers with associated problems of their availability when required. For yet others, the issue is one of the dependability of volunteer interpreters. For the majority of respondents, however, the key concern is the affordability of available services. Although access to Language Line is recognised as an option, the (un)affordability of that service is cited by many Citizens Advice Bureaux as a real barrier to its regular use. Similar concerns are expressed about the costs of employing professional expertise.

Whilst many bureaux have adopted innovative and imaginative approaches to their problems of interpretation and translation, it remains a major challenge for many, which increases with the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of the migrant labour force.

## Availability of advice

Identified as a significant challenge by over 20 per cent of bureaux, the growth in the number and diversity of migrant worker clients is imposing new demands on the level and extent of advice services provided by local Citizens Advice Bureaux. The increasing complexity of the advice needs of migrant workers and especially those relating to changing immigration rules and procedures, associated rights and entitlements means that in-house knowledge and expertise is often of insufficient depth to provide the required level of help required.

The additional costs of acquiring the necessary information and advice from external professional sources impose significant additional cost burdens on an already financially hard-pressed service. Costs tend to be magnified in the more remote rural areas where the necessary expertise is both absolutely and relatively scarce due to the fact that it is held by a comparatively small number of specialists who operate from larger urban centres that are geographically distant.

A small but significant percentage of bureaux also report difficulties in getting the specialist information that they require from the relevant departments and agencies who have overall policy responsibility for particular policy areas. Whilst some of these problems concern the accessibility of help lines and call centres, there are some concerns expressed about the levels of expertise and understanding of key policies and regulations held by employees of the relevant government departments and agencies at national, regional and local levels.

## Management of bureau business

Just over 10 per cent of Citizens Advice Bureaux report that the increasing numbers of migrant worker clients often pose challenges for the organisation and management of bureau business. Larger numbers of clients with associated language barriers result in longer consultation/advice sessions and consequent increased waiting times for other clients. This, together with a reported tendency for migrant workers to attend advice sessions in groups can also lead to overcrowding in waiting rooms which in turn can be a source of stress and subsequent tension between migrant workers and other clients.

Minor problems and issues for the organisation and management of bureau business can also arise as a result of the work patterns of migrant workers. Their need to make appointments outside of working hours and/or the pattern of shift working regimes can render the making (and keeping) of appointments difficult and challenging.

## **Challenges for staff and volunteers**

Linked partly to issues of business management, a small percentage of rural Citizens Advice Bureaux identify problems of increasing pressure on staff and resultant stress associated with the increasing number and diversity of the client base. Such problems are sometimes exacerbated by high levels of concern/frustration experienced by staff and volunteers about the adequacy of the help and support that they feel able to afford to migrant worker clients.

## **The changing nature of client problems**

The migrant worker population has not only increased numerically in recent years but the nature of the issues being brought to Citizens Advice Bureaux is also changing. In some areas, changing recruitment strategies by employment agencies, gangmasters and employers introduce new migrant labour with different languages, cultures and family structures. The impact of EU enlargement in May 2004 and evolving immigration rules and procedures are identified by some bureaux as a further challenge. Approximately 58 per cent of bureaux identified immigration as one of the key issues on which migrant workers seek advice.

In that context, it is worth noting that whilst employment issues remain a major concern for migrant workers, problems surrounding housing, benefits and immigration are identified by bureaux as being equally prevalent on the list of issues referred for advice.

## Summary and conclusions

The increasing dependence on migrant workers to meet specific skill shortages and/or to do the jobs that the indigenous labour force are unwilling to accept has posed and will continue to pose a number of significant challenges for Citizens Advice Bureaux.

As a free, impartial and independent source of information and advice across an increasingly diverse range of issues, the Citizens Advice Bureau is clearly a front-line service as far as the migrant worker agenda is concerned. To sustain that position requires bureaux to continue to develop, update and refine the knowledge and expertise of its in-house staff and volunteers to meet a growing and more demanding agenda. The changing nature and scale of those demands, however, will also require the continuing input of independent experts and other external sources of expertise. Satisfying both of these requirements has serious resource implications which are already being reported by Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The increasing demands on resources is not solely the result of the organisation's growing reputation within the migrant labour force, however justified that is. Although difficult to quantify with any precision, there is some evidence to suggest that the increasing caseload on migrant workers also derives from referrals from other bodies and agencies, some of whom arguably should be taking more ownership of the agenda themselves.

The contribution and achievement of Citizens Advice Bureaux in assisting migrant workers' issues are not universally acclaimed by all the participants in the migrant worker debate. Efforts by bureaux to enlighten migrant workers about their rights, entitlements and the obligations of employers and agents are often derided by unscrupulous agencies and gangmasters. In some cases, employers and agencies have prohibited migrant employees from contacting a CAB, with dismissal being the price of disregarding that sanction. In such circumstances, the challenge to a CAB posed by its migrant workers caseload becomes as much an issue of how they handle that caseload as much as what it contains.

# Initiatives by rural Citizens Advice Bureaux to provide services to migrant workers

The challenges posed by migrant workers have generated a range of initiatives from Citizens Advice Bureaux. These reflect the scale and intensity of the issues, the resources available to respond, the support from the wider voluntary and statutory community and, inevitably, the energy and commitment of staff and volunteers working within the Citizens Advice service.

These challenges are likely not only to increase in numbers for the foreseeable future but also to become more complex and demanding as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the migrant labour force increases and the policy agenda on immigration and related matters continues to evolve.

Citizens Advice Bureaux have to face these challenges at a time when current resources are limited and competition for future resources is likely to intensify.

Migrant worker clients were identified by some 90 bureaux, responding to the survey, as being part of their caseload, but the number and diversity of these cases and their relative importance in terms of the overall caseload varies considerably. Just under 75 per cent of bureaux reported a change in the level of migrant worker cases in recent years. The changing level of use was identified by 20 per cent of bureaux as being significant whilst some 40 per cent reported small/insignificant changes in the number of migrant worker clients.

Of the Citizens Advice Bureaux responding to the survey, 69 per cent reported that particular initiatives or measures to deal with migrant worker issues were not justified. However, a similar percentage of bureaux cited resource constraints as another primary reason why no such initiatives had been introduced. The extent to which the “not justified” explanation is due to the low level of demand or is also based on resource/budgetary considerations is a matter of conjecture. Whatever the connection, there

are clear resource obstacles to the setting up of targeted migrant worker initiatives which arguably are greater for smaller rural bureaux.

Over 30 per cent of bureaux identified a number of initiatives which they had taken to help address the challenges posed by migrant workers. Many of these initiatives could be expanded, or reproduced in other geographical areas.

## Translation/interpretation initiatives

### Interpretation

The majority of the initiatives reported concern actions to address language or communication issues. Many bureaux have recruited and trained specialist staff and volunteers with particular language skills, some of whom were drawn from within the migrant worker population. These specialists advise on both general information/translation functions and specialist advice such as debt counselling.

With a heavy caseload of Portuguese migrant workers, **Lowestoft CAB** has recruited and trained an adviser who is Portuguese but who also has an excellent command of English. In addition to his invaluable work within the bureau, the adviser plays a key role in representing Citizens Advice Bureaux at seminars and conferences on migrant worker issues as well as in collaborative meetings organised by the GMB Union to advise Portuguese workers about their rights.

With large numbers of Portuguese migrant workers in the local area, **Carmarthen CAB** has recruited a Portuguese worker to act as a translator. The bureau is now taking this further, training a Portuguese worker to be an adviser. The worker is giving staff the opportunity to learn basic Spanish and Portuguese which will mean that the bureaux staff will be able to greet many of the local migrant workers in their own language, informing them when the Portuguese speaking adviser is available, and making an appointment with them.

In circumstances where the level of demand justifies it, the recruitment and training of an appropriate language specialist as an adviser increases the bureaux capacity to engage with the migrant workers agenda. That

benefits not only the migrant labour force but also the reputation and status of the bureaux as a respected stakeholder on the broader migrant worker agenda. However, some Citizens Advice Bureaux have expressed concerns about the expertise of migrant worker translators in relation to their ability to fully comprehend and accurately translate some of the technical/professional aspects of the advice being given. The degree of their commitment and dependability has also been an issue reported by some bureaux.

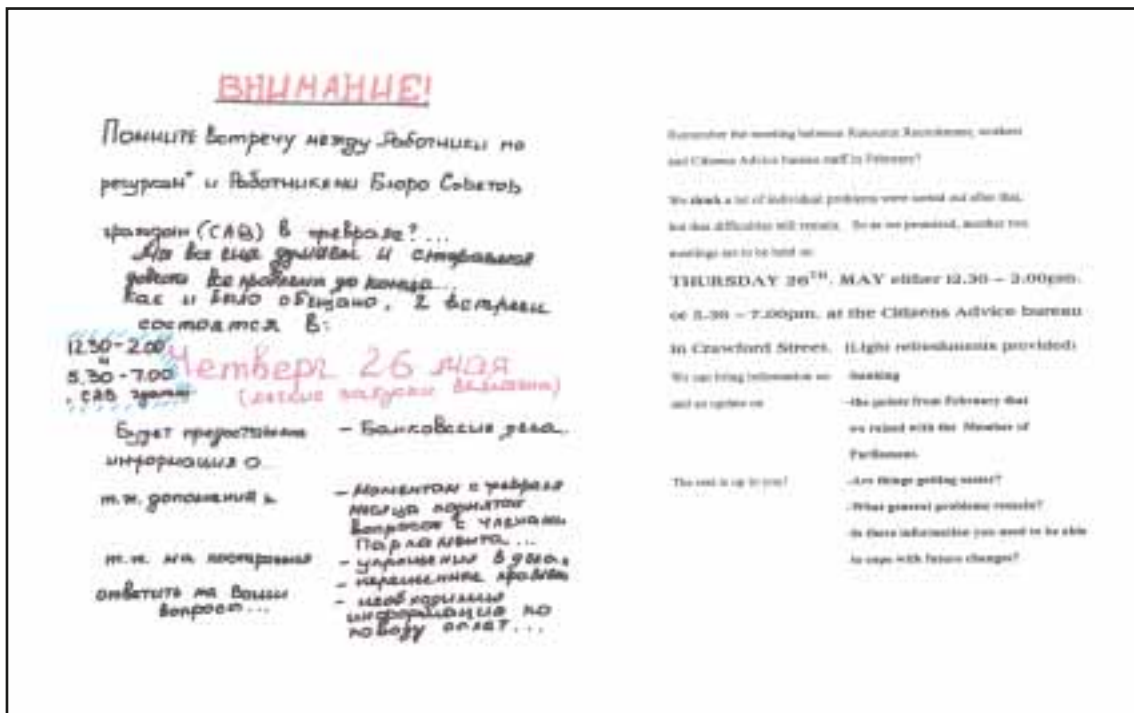
### Leaflets

The use of translated leaflets on rights and entitlements is another option reported by over 20 per cent of Citizens Advice Bureaux. From responses received and subsequent follow up, it would appear that the cost of this option can be considerable, especially for a small bureau with limited resources facing requests for help and advice from a significant number of migrant worker clients. Some Citizens Advice Bureaux are trying to overcome this obstacle by seeking the help of partners, such as the Community Legal Service, to provide translated versions of their information leaflets. Potentially, it is an option worthy of consideration by those bureaux where the practice of providing translated leaflets is yet to be initiated. There is potential for a number of Citizens Advice Bureaux, e.g. within the same region, to adopt a more collaborative and hence more cost-effective approach to this issue.

Although not rural, as part of its efforts to help a group of some 40 migrant workers from Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, **Citizens Advice Bureaux in Wigan** produced translated notes on:

- ▶ how to read a payslip
- ▶ lower earnings limit and effect on National Insurance and tax payments
- ▶ Home Office information on rights and entitlements to housing benefit/council tax benefit and on working tax credit and child tax credit.

These, combined with the provision of both a daytime and an early evening advice session, allowed the bureaux to address the key concerns of this client group.



Poster advertising advice session from Wigan CAB, (Copyright Wigan CAB).

## Language Line

A small percentage of Citizens Advice Bureaux report the use of Language Line to aid translation. The low percentage of rural bureaux using Language Line is in part linked to costs of using the service and problems surrounding the lack of confidence which some volunteers experience when working through interpreters and Language Line.

## Translation websites

**Wymondham, Attleborough & District CAB** advises migrant workers from several countries such as Portugal and Poland. The bureau has received funding for Portuguese translation, but not for translation into other languages. As the locally available translation services are too expensive the bureau use web sites with a free 'Babelfish' translator facility to ensure that clients and advisers can understand the information they are being given.

Websites with a free translation facility do offer a cheap way of double checking that advisers understand the query that a migrant worker is presenting with. They can also be used to translate information into a preferred language, which can be of benefit to the client. Whilst some bureaux report concerns about the accuracy of the translation, these concerns are also raised by bureaux using translators or Language Line.

## **Special advice sessions for migrant workers**

### **Special advice sessions**

Faced with the challenge of trying to accommodate large numbers of migrant workers seeking advice with the associated problems of prolonged advice sessions and overcrowded waiting rooms, a small number of bureaux initiated special advice sessions for migrant workers.

Accommodating such numbers within the day-to-day organisation of bureau business has proved a challenge to the point that some bureaux, like Ely and District CAB and King's Lynn CAB, have arranged special one-off consultation sessions or a programme of sessions.

This approach has clear advantages when dealing with discrete examples of a shared problem such as redundancies or the identification of a shared menu of concerns by an identified group of migrant workers. The one-off session allows the service to bring a focused and concentrated approach to bear on a common set of problems.

To provide such a special service as an on-going resource to migrant workers for an indefinite period raises different questions. Clearly, as King's Lynn CAB's initiative demonstrates, the special sessions succeed in focusing a range of expertise on a large number of client issues including issues that may not have been brought to the attention of the bureau during the conduct of its normal day-to-day business. These sessions also help to develop the expertise and understanding of both permanent and volunteer staff who participate in the programme and help to underline the bureau's position as a front-line service for migrant workers.

### **Links with cultural associations**

A common practice for some Citizens Advice Bureaux is to forge links with the cultural associations of migrant workers and, through these links, help to disseminate information about sources of advice and help that are available to them. A common belief in many areas is that all the migrant



**Gratuito**  
**Confidencial**

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**Independente**  
**Aconselhamento**

Por pessoal treinado em:

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Thoresby College Queen S\_ect

King's Lynn

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Quarta-feiras das 05:30 PM - 07:30 PM Faya marcayao ou apareya no:

North Lynn Community Centre

S1. Lawrence Road (off Losinga Road) King's Lynn

Poster advertising King's Lynn advice session in Portuguese,  
(Copyright King's Lynn CAB).

workers from the same country represent one homogeneous cultural group that is capable of being dealt with by a one-fits-all approach. Citizens Advice Bureaux who have had to deal with clients from North Portugal and South Portugal quickly came to realise the limitations of such an approach.

In collaboration with Cambridge Ethnic Minority Forum, Fenland CAB organised a Portuguese family day and barbecue in July 2005. The event was organised to help identify the needs of the Portuguese Community, the problems they face and to offer advice, signposting and continuing support. It was advertised in Portuguese, at workplaces and at central locations in the town. The event was attended by members of the Portuguese community, CAB staff and volunteers, and representatives of other voluntary and statutory agencies.

Many of the Portuguese who attended the event were not aware of the range of information and services available from the CAB, or that they were free, independent and impartial. This initiative is the first stage of a wider programme of initiatives being pursued by Fenland CAB to help their Portuguese community.

The next stage is to secure funding to run regular sessions for Portuguese clients with a qualified interpreter and, in the longer term, to recruit and train a Portuguese adviser. Efforts are also being made to persuade relevant organisations such as the Community Legal Service to provide translated versions of key leaflets.

Given the fact that many of these types of initiatives may only be short term, when projects and initiatives are being planned, consideration must be given to any exit strategy that will help to address/accommodate the increased level of expectation that initiatives may create amongst the client group.

## Media work

Highlighting the issues and concerns of migrant workers through published articles and related media has also helped Citizens Advice Bureaux to draw the attention of a wider audience to these matters. Likewise the use of agencies such as the Refugee Council to provide staff training on immigration and related issues has helped bureaux staff to gain a wider appreciation of the migrant worker agenda.

## Referrals for advice

A matter of concern to many rural Citizens Advice Bureaux is the increasingly specialist and complex nature of the advice needs of migrant workers, especially but not exclusively those relating to immigration policies and/or associated matters such as access to/eligibility for benefits and entitlements. Whilst referral to specialist sources of advice is one solution, that option can be expensive and is often difficult, especially in many remote rural areas where the nearest source of advice is geographically distant. In view of the developing profile of the migrant worker population and the issues that it generates, the matter of delivery of specialist advice and support is something that requires careful consideration at a strategic level.

## Participation by Citizens Advice Bureaux in wider initiatives

Although Citizens Advice Bureaux are regarded and treated by many public sector and voluntary agencies as the key organisation for addressing the problems and concerns of migrant workers, there is a recognition that in the face of a growing migrant worker population, the migrant worker agenda is a shared agenda, which merits the attention and action of a wider range of stakeholders. In Norfolk, this has already given rise to the creation of INTRAN - a local partnership of Language Line, CINTRA (Cambridgeshire Interpreting/Translation Services) and Deaf Connexions to take forward communication/interpretation services.

A number of Citizens Advice Bureaux (approximately 30 per cent of respondents) play an active role in many of these wider initiatives.

## Work with other voluntary organisations

In Anglesey, **Ynys Mon CAB** works within *Communities First* areas, running advice surgeries in many of the wards covered by this Welsh Assembly Programme. Many of the voluntary agencies, in these areas, work together to actively engage with minority groups, including migrant workers. This has resulted in the organisation of local training for the voluntary and statutory agencies, as well as joint working to identify ways of improving services to minority groups in the areas.

## Credit unions

In its efforts to address the difficulties which East European workers face in opening bank accounts, **Wigan CAB** is collaborating with Unify Credit Union as a result of which these clients are now able to access the Credit Union through the bureau. Subject to resources becoming available, the two organisations have a joint plan to open an additional credit union access point in the town centre, possibly combined with a drop-in centre.

## Migrant workers interest groups

In Somerset, **Sedgemoor CAB** currently input to the work of a Migrant Workers Group established by the local Labour Party and has aspirations to play a more active role in the work of that group.

## Work with the Pension Service and JobCentre Plus.

With large numbers of Portuguese migrant workers in the local area, **Carmarthen CAB** was finding that many migrant workers were struggling to get the information they required in a way they could understand. The bureau had discussions with the local JobCentre Plus, who gave them access to Language Line, and the Pension Service. A protocol was subsequently introduced to ensure that between the three agencies, a translator was always available in working hours. As a result any migrant worker can get information in their own language from the three agencies who work closely together on issues affecting migrant workers in their area.

## Local Authority Diversity Forum

**Fenland CAB** is a member of the Local Authority Diversity Forum and is seeking to initiate joint projects with the Primary Care Trust and the local Jobcentre (amongst others) with the aim of securing the better integration of Portuguese and East European workers and their families into the local community.

## Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)

Having represented the voluntary sector on the Board of the local Single Regeneration Budget programme, the Deputy Manager of **Boston CAB** was invited to remain on the executive board of the Local Strategic Partnership. This helped to inform Boston CAB about the Borough's aims and objectives at an early stage and enabled the bureau to demonstrate how they could contribute to achieving them and play a key role in the delivery of the community strategy.

The LSP has subsequently identified a shared need for translation and interpretation services, some of which may be resolved by a new initiative in that county which is likely to provide reduced rate translation and interpretation services to voluntary bodies and charities such as Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Membership of the LSP's Equality and Diversity Theme Group enables Boston CAB to provide statistics and case study material, particularly with regard to migrant workers. This ensures that the strategy is well-informed about these issues. Membership of the group also helps to inform the bureau about the services offered by other groups in the locality. This helps to avoid duplication and enables better focusing of programmes on real needs. A shared need for comprehensive and co-ordinated translation services has been identified as a priority by the Group and an investigation of options is already in progress.

Participation in the LSP's Health Theme Group provides Boston CAB with an important link with the Primary Care Trust, a potential source of additional funding, to enable the expansion of an existing LSC funded pilot project that enables the provision of welfare benefits advice in primary care settings. The wider benefits of this partnership go well beyond the specific programmes and initiatives in which they have become involved. The relationship between Boston CAB, the Borough Council and its officers has changed significantly. From being a largely functional relationship that evolved around grant applications for extra funding, which were often unsuccessful, Boston CAB is now regarded as a key partner in the delivery of a wider range of programmes and initiatives and a respected source of information and advice. The benefits of involvement with the LSP are succinctly summarised by the bureau manager as being:

- ▶ a consistently high profile in the community
- ▶ recognition that we provide a professional service
- ▶ the ability to help influence local planning
- ▶ recognition that we are able to manage many different projects and services
- ▶ recognition of success in achieving match funding well in excess of the level of grants provided
- ▶ recognition that we are an essential part of the local infrastructure
- ▶ and above all, we are perceived as a key partner of the borough providing solutions rather than creating problems.

## Public Services Provision Review Groups

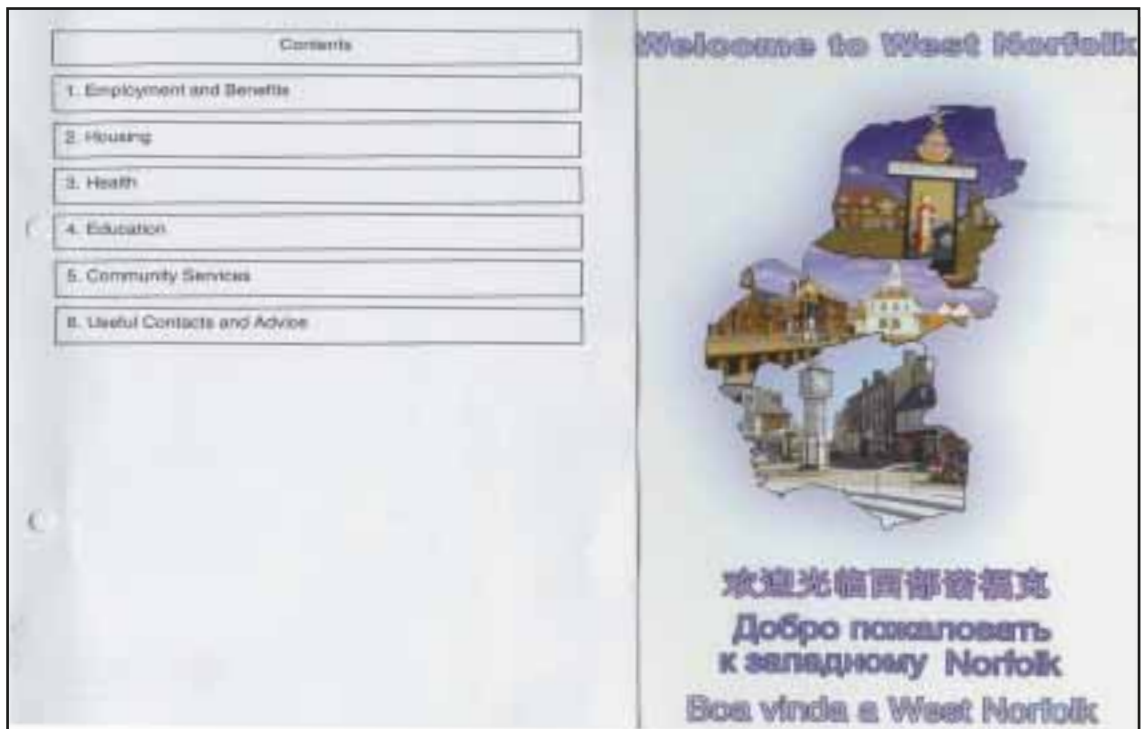
Policy influence can also be achieved through participation on steering groups/advisory groups of projects and initiatives being undertaken by the local authority and/or other bodies to address migrant worker issues.

**South Holland CAB** is represented on the steering group of a project currently being undertaken by South Holland District Council with funding from the East Midlands Development Agency. The project aims to address the need for a fundamental re-appraisal of the public service needs of South Lincolnshire in light of the increased dependence on migrant casual labour. It also seeks to strengthen business development in South Lincolnshire through the integration of migrant workers into local society. South Holland CAB sits alongside a number of key stakeholders and existing and potential partner organisations in shaping the design and delivery of this important project.

South Holland CAB participation in this project offers opportunities not just to influence its local outcomes but to play a role in influencing the policies and strategies of the Regional Development Agency which has lead responsibility for economic development and regeneration. It offers an opportunity to remind the Regional Development Agency' that the sustainable economic development of the region, strategies and plans for achieving that need to be grounded in more than just indicators of labour costs and productivity.

## Dissemination of information about migrant workers

The information functions of Citizens Advice Bureaux are not confined solely to the provision of information for migrant workers. Dissemination of information about the migrant labour force, especially to assist their better integration into local communities is an equally important function. In that context, the collaborative work undertaken by **Boston CAB** and **South Holland CAB** with their respective local authorities, the police and JobCentre Plus in the preparation of myth-busting leaflets on migrant workers is worthy of wider replication.



Front cover and contents of 'Welcome to West Norfolk' (Copyright West Norfolk Diverse Communities Partnership).



Extracts from South Holland CAB's 'myth-busting leaflet', (Copyright South Holland CAB).

In July 2005, with the help of funding from the Countryside Agency and under the auspices of the District and County Councils, Lincolnshire Police (Immigration), Jobcentre Plus and South Holland CAB, a myth-busting leaflet on migrant workers was prepared. With the overall aim of securing the better integration of foreign nationals, the leaflet provides answers to a number of frequently asked questions about migrant workers. These include why they have come to work in the local area, their impact on the employment prospects of local workers, their rights to benefits, housing and health care and their obligations in respect of matters such as council tax, driving licences and motor insurance. The leaflet is modelled on a similar document provided in 2004 by Boston CAB. 10,000 copies are being printed for local distribution.

Not only do the documents make an important contribution to countering any misinformation about migrant workers that often circulates within a local community but the nature of the partnership involved in their production lends status and authority to documents, which they might not otherwise enjoy were they to be seen to be the product of one agency. In that context, the publication and dissemination of the leaflets must also provide a degree of reassurance to the migrant labour force. The myth-busting leaflet initiative has a format and content that is readily adaptable for replication by other bureaux with a significant migrant worker clientele.

### **Welcome packs**

A number of bureaux identify a general lack of understanding about basic services and facilities as a matter of concern amongst migrant workers. As a consequence migrant workers may often have inaccurate/unreasonable expectations of what is available in a locality. It also means that Citizens Advice Bureaux are often looked to as the source of general background information which diverts resources of time and energy away from their more appropriate function of providing targeted help and advice.

As a means of addressing this problem, the concept of the welcome pack such as that published for West Norfolk in 2005 by the West Norfolk Diverse Communities Partnership has much to commend it.

*Welcome to West Norfolk* is a booklet compiled by the West Norfolk Diverse Communities Partnership containing key information on five key themes of employment and benefits, housing, health, education and community services. A concluding section entitled *Useful Contacts and Advice* provides details on a range of organisations, faith groups, cultural and community groupings in the area as well as some basic information on the rules and procedures surrounding ownership and the use of vehicles and on the electoral register and voting.

Not only does the welcome pack fulfil the function of providing basic information but it also provides the migrant worker with an introduction to and contact details for a range of statutory and voluntary bodies and agencies and other groups with responsibility for the services and facilities that he/she may require. A loose-leaf format enables the pack to be expanded/updated as required.

### **Gangmasters Licensing Authority**

As the migrant labour issue develops as part of the national policy agenda, Citizens Advice Bureaux both individually and collectively have the opportunity to shape the evolution and development of policy and initiatives. The initiation of the new Gangmaster Licensing Regime, the establishment of the Commission for Rural Communities with its particular focus on rural disadvantage and the continuing evolution of the nation's immigration policies are but three examples of policy influencing opportunities. The fact that at least one CAB has already engaged with the Chief Executive of the Gangmaster Licensing Authority is evidence of the recognition of the influencing potential in that policy area. Such early engagement is a model that could usefully be followed by other bureaux with a significant migrant worker caseload.

### **Forthcoming projects with migrant workers**

This good practice guide was put together in response to requests from rural Citizens Advice Bureaux asking about initiatives that other rural bureaux were implementing when working with migrant workers. It is therefore likely that an increasing number of rural bureaux will work with migrant workers over the forthcoming year. The case studies in this guide will be published in the online discussion forums on CABlink ([www.cablink.org.uk](http://www.cablink.org.uk)) and Citizens Advice Bureaux undertaking new projects are welcome to add their initiatives to the forum.

# Conclusions

Migrant workers make a significant contribution to the rural economy but despite this they report that they are often victims of exploitation and discrimination by their employers and the wider community. Much of this can be linked to misleading information in local communities about migrant workers, their right to work and the contribution they make to rural economies.

Service providers in rural areas, including Citizens Advice Bureaux, face specific challenges to ensure they can provide a service to migrant workers, and too many organisations prefer to refer migrant workers on rather than meet the challenge themselves. Many of the issues service providers face can be overcome, although they will have resource implications.

Many rural Citizens Advice Bureaux have a history of meeting the needs of migrant workers in their area through a range of initiatives and projects, occasionally in partnership with other agencies in the area. Many of these projects have the potential to be expanded locally or replicated in other areas by Citizens Advice Bureaux and other service providers who are looking to be more active in the support for the migrant worker community.

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice, and by influencing policymakers. Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with 5.6 million enquiries in 2003-04 from a network of 3,200 locations.

## Key contacts

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