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Eastern European migrant workers and the Scottish tourism industry: The economic impact

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Introduction

In recent years Scotland and the UK as a whole has seen an influx of migrant workers from Eastern Europe. Foreign nationals in general made up 3.5 per cent of the UK workforce in 1996 and in 2006 they made up 6 per cent. In 2005/06, 662,000 new national insurance numbers were issued to foreign nationals, almost twice as many as in 2002/03.¹ This increase in migrants is due mainly to EU enlargement in 2004 when Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the 'AC10') were all accepted as members of the European Union. As a result of this influx many questions have been asked by government, the media and independent observers about this migration including:

- ❑ The performance of migrant workers in the labour market;
- ❑ The impact that migrant workers have on UK born workers and the wage level;
- ❑ The impact that immigration has on particular industries such as tourism;
- ❑ The impact that immigration has on certain regions of the UK with specific reference to Scotland; and
- ❑ The impact that immigration has on public services and other economic, social and cultural factor.

It is important for the government and other organisations to know the answers to these questions so that appropriate policy decisions can be made. This can be difficult however as migration flows are complex especially in light of the fact that there are few barriers restricting the entry and exit of migrants in and out of EU countries. Migration can have advantages and disadvantages for the host country as well as for a migrant's country of origin. Measuring and quantifying these advantages and disadvantages accurately is challenging as there are many economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of the impacts of migration that go beyond the effect on GDP of a country.²

With this in mind, and using previous empirical data and my own personal research, this Local Work will investigate the social and cultural impacts of migration, focusing particularly on the extent to which Eastern European migrant workers have a positive impact on the Scottish tourism industry. This research was undertaken in Autumn 2007 as part of a BSc in Economics and French at the University of Aberdeen.

¹ Audit Commission, (Jan 2007), *Crossing borders - Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers*. <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/05CA5CAD-C551-4b66-825E-ABFA8C8E4717/CrossingBorders.pdf>

² Poot, J., Cochrane, B., (February 2005), *Measuring the Economic Impact of Immigration: A Scoping Paper*, Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato.

Defining the term 'migrant worker'

In this paper, the concept of a migrant worker will be defined as a *"person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national."*³ This definition includes long and short-term migrants who are work permit holders, those on a specialised work schemes, business people and investors, students, those who do not require a visa to work (such as Eastern Europeans) and holiday visa holders. However, the main focus of the research was on Eastern European migrants registered as migrant workers on the Workers Regeneration Scheme (WRS). Other groups of migrants such as refugees, asylum seekers, self supporting retirees and returning citizens are not included in this definition. There are also many migrant workers who come into a country and are not registered to work and so are not included in statistics. Again, these migrants will not be dealt with, within this paper.

The Scottish tourism industry

Scottish tourism employs almost 200,000 people, about nine per cent of the total Scottish workforce. In fact, Scottish tourism pays the wages of more people than the oil, gas and whisky industries combined.⁴ Tourism is therefore a vital industry for Scotland worth £4.2 billion in 2005.⁵ Scottish tourism is growing especially in relation to the overseas market, which was up 20% in 2004. However, tourists from the UK are important as well, with figures from a report by the Scottish executive suggesting that 44% of trips made in Scotland are made by Scots themselves while 47% of visitors are from England and Wales. This is approximately 60% of total tourism revenues generated in Scotland. The other key market is business tourism, which accounts for 22% of the market.⁶ Scotland's key tourist attractions include its natural beauty, wildlife, culture and history and the wide range of activities that it offers visitors such as skiing, climbing, walking, fishing and golf. Scotland also plays host to many important sporting and cultural events such as the Highland games, the Edinburgh International Festival, the Edinburgh International Jazz and Blues Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Hebridean Celtic festival, the Golf Senior Open Championship and the Curtis Cup. In 2014 Scotland will also host the Ryder Cup and the Commonwealth games. Therefore, tourism provides a number of key advantages for Scotland's economy and society as a whole. Economic theory dictates that tourism may have the following positive effects:

- it is an important source of economic development;
- it creates employment opportunities at a number of levels;
- it offers additional incomes to people who want second jobs or part time/seasonal jobs;
- it encourages expenditure in local markets from external sources;
- it creates and maintains local amenities;
- it acts as a catalyst for regeneration;
- it supports local sporting and cultural events;
- it strengthens local identity and heritage, and promotes and promoting cultural diversity; and
- it encourages external investment.

That said, obtaining and capitalising on these advantages can be difficult in light of the challenges that the tourism industry faces. Tourism is very competitive and is constantly changing. For example, the boom in cheap flights and the popularity of last minute breaks have all placed pressure on the Scottish tourist industry. Furthermore, tourism is also very volatile as its demand changes regularly. Tourism is also highly dependent on broader economic factors such as the exchange rate and the level of disposable income that people have. It is up to local governments and other players in the industry to provide funding, facilities and good management in order to overcome these challenges.

³ UNESCO, The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants, Definition of a migrant Worker. http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=3020&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁴ Scotland the official online gateway, (2003), *You must see*. <http://www.scotland.org/about/innovation-and-creativity/features/business/tourism.html>

⁵ Scottish Enterprise, (2005) *Key facts and figures*. www.scottish-enterprise.com/sedotcom_home/sig/tourism/tourismfacts.htm

⁶ The Scottish Executive, (2006) *The Next Decade: A Tourism framework for change*. http://staging.scotexchange.net/framework_for_change.pdf

Understanding data on migrant workers

Deciphering the impact of migration on a country, not to mention an individual industry, can be very difficult. The Scottish context is no exception. This is largely due to the lack of Scottish based research. Ideally policy makers want to make good decisions based on solid facts and figures rather than assumptions and estimates. However, there are important issues with the available data sets. The Labour Force Survey provides detailed up to date information but it is based on samples, which makes it difficult to generalise for the national situation. The main source of data for Eastern European Migrants is the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) to which migrant workers from the accession countries (excluding Cyprus and Malta) are expected to register with, in the UK. However, there are many problems with the WRS including the fact that migrants are required to pay to register with the scheme and that it only measures net inflow to a country. At present, there is no single, all-inclusive system in place to measure all movements of population into and out of the UK.⁷ Moreover, the movements of unregistered/undocumented migrants are not included and extremely difficult to gauge and therefore their influence is largely unknown.

General trends relating to migration

Although the majority of the empirical research in relation to immigration has been done in the context of the United States, this research can provide a useful backdrop to a consideration of tourism in Scotland when examining general trends and patterns, especially in relation to economic impacts such as changes in wage rates.

Using cross section analysis, Chiswick (1978) examined how migrant workers integrated into a host country's (namely the USA) labour market by modifying their skills. He came to the conclusion that when a migrant initially arrived in the host country they would earn 17% less than that of US born workers. However, within 15 years of entering the host country, migrant wages would exceed that of indigenous workers and would most probably remain that way. Chiswick claims that this is as a result of migrant workers being much more motivated than indigenous workers. Migrants are motivated to move in the first place, precisely in order to work longer hours and are prepared to work hard.

Cohort effects

Economists such as Borjas⁸ criticised this view point saying that Chiswick did not consider that migrants coming into a host country today will have a completely different skill set compared to those who migrated in 1970. It is also likely that they will have different future earnings as well. Borjas uses the term *cohort effects* to describe the discrepancies, which can be observed when examining future earnings due to migrant workers having different skills according to when they arrive in a host country. It is evident that both the migrants and US born populations must be "tracked" over time to correctly measure wage convergence between immigrants and US born workers.⁹ Borjas illustrates this point by taking U.S. census data from 1970, 1980 and 1990. This cohort analysis showed relatively slow rates of earnings growth for most immigrant groups,¹⁰ perhaps suggesting a reduction in the skill levels of immigrants being admitted, and as a result, wage convergence between migrant and US born workers less likely. The manner in which migrant workers adapt and assimilate into the labour market is therefore important to consider when calculating the overall impact of immigration. The assimilation of migrant's children is also important when predicting future earnings of migrant workers. In effect, current immigration policy determines tomorrow's differences in the labour market experiences of US-born ethnic minority communities.¹¹

⁷ National Statistics, (Nov 2006), *Over 500 a day gained through migration to the UK.*
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/intmigrat1106.pdf>

⁸ Borjas, G J., *Assimilation, Changes in Cohort Quality, and the Earnings of Immigrants* Journal of Labor Economics, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), pp. 463-489.

⁹ Borjas, G J., (Dec 1994), *The Economics of Immigration*, Journal of Economic Literature, Vol. 32, No. 4., pp. 1667-1717.

¹⁰ Borjas, G J., *Assimilation, Changes in Cohort Quality, and the Earnings of Immigrants* Journal of Labor Economics, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), pp. 463-489.

¹¹ Borjas, G J., (Jan 1993), *The Intergenerational Mobility of Immigrants*, Journal of Labor Economics, Vol. 11, No. 1, Part 1: Essays in Honor of Jacob Mincer., pp. 113-135.

Importance of language acquisition

Wage convergence between UK born and migrant workers' wages relies on the acquisition of skills. One of the most important skills is the ability to speak the language of the host country. It has been argued in many studies that there is a direct relationship between language acquisition and the wage rate of a migrant worker. Once migrant workers acquire better language skills, they can compete for more skilled employment.¹² This is an important factor in the Scottish tourism industry because many jobs in this sector require good communication skills. Many employers in the Scottish tourism industry have taken upon themselves to provide migrant employees with the help and support in order to improve their language skills, as it is in the employers' best interest to have a more productive and competent workforce. Employees are also likely to earn more. The value of language acquisition in the Grampian area of Scotland was highlighted in the following study, commissioned by *Communities Scotland* and undertaken by the University of Highlands and Islands. The number of migrant workers in Grampian has more than trebled over the last four years, from 1,850 in 2002/03 to 5,980 in 2005/06. This represents a faster rate of growth than that experienced in either the UK or Scotland as a whole.¹³ This research also revealed that Eastern European migrants are filling gaps in the hospitality industry, particularly in jobs involving long hours and poorer working conditions. In addition, many migrant workers in Grampian are working in low skilled or semi skilled jobs, despite often having higher skills and qualifications. The priority for many of these migrants is simply to make as much money as possible in a short period of time. Language plays an important role in terms of both helping migrant workers to earn more money, but also in terms of progressing to more highly paid employment. However, one of the main findings of this research was that language barriers posed a problem for employees and employers alike in the Grampian region with a marked increase in demand for language classes. English language classes were found to be difficult to access as a result of long and/or irregular shift patterns coupled with the inflexible nature of provision.¹⁴ Furthermore, information about English language classes did not seem to be readily available to migrants despite the efforts of local authorities to make this information available.

A declining population

In Scotland there is a shortage or a gap in the labour market especially in industries such as tourism. This is due to a general decline in population caused by low birth rates, an ageing population and low fertility rates. Based on existing trends and making no allowance for the impact of government policies and other factors, the total population of Scotland is set to rise to 5.13 million in 2019 before falling to 5.07 million by 2031 and will continue to fall to below five million in 2036 and 4.86 million in 2044.¹⁵ In addition, Scotland has seen significant out migration, which continues to exacerbate this situation. Declining population could potentially impact upon opportunities for continued economic growth and prosperity and means that migration is very important for Scotland and subsequently for the tourism industry. Not only must Scotland recruit migrant workers, it must also retain them in the labour market in the long term. To encourage population growth the Scottish parliament has introduced schemes such as the *Fresh Talent Initiative*, which aims to encourage foreign workers to come to work and live in Scotland. In addition visa extensions for foreign students are planned to allow graduates to remain and work in Scotland.

Migration and worklessness

Worklessness is defined as detachment from the formal labour market in particular areas, and among particular groups. Workless individuals include individuals who are employed, those who cannot work for health reasons or who are economically inactive and eligible for inactive benefits (who may or may not be claiming them), and individuals who are working exclusively in the informal economy (who may or may not be also claiming benefits).¹⁶ Workless individuals tend to have few or no skills and many find themselves in a poverty trap i.e. they are better off on benefits than they are working. Often, they will have been out of work for many years and have significant barriers to employment such as poor physical or mental health. Traditionally, these individuals may have taken up the types of low skilled employment that Eastern European migrant workers are now filling, particularly in the tourism industry. So in effect the presence of

¹² Audit Commission, (Jan 2007), *Crossing borders - Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers*. <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/05CA5CAD-C551-4b66-825E-ABFA8C8E4717/CrossingBorders.pdf>

^{19, 13+21} A study of migrant workers in Grampian, (July 2007), Communities Scotland.

http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/pubcs_019731.pdf

¹⁵ The General Register Office for Scotland, Scotland's Population 2006: The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends: 152nd Edition. <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/annual-report2006/j873204.htm>

¹⁶ Richie, H., Casebourne, J., Rick, J., Understanding workless people and communities: A literature review, Research Report No. 255, Department for Work and Pensions, Institute for employment studies, Corporate Document Services, 2005.

Eastern European migrants is to create greater competition in the labour market which may have the effect of further excluding those with significant barriers to employment as they are unable to compete with younger, more keen and better skilled migrant workers.

Migrant workers and your business: Local evidence on migrant workers in Scotland

To further explore some of these trends in relation to the tourism industry in Scotland, research was carried out with employers in Grampian and Lothian regions. The survey attempted to further understand:

- the role that businesses play in the Scottish tourism industry;
- the impact that migrant workers have within these businesses; and
- the overall effect of migrant workers on the Scottish tourism industry.

The survey was then emailed to 338 businesses listed on the *Visit Scotland* website, including visitor attractions, hotels and bed and breakfasts. 40 surveys were completed and nine email responses received. This gave a response rate of approximately 15%.

This data raised a number of interesting issues and questions, and generally lent support to the empirical research discussed earlier in this Local Work. In particular it supports the national data, indicating that the number of Eastern European migrants within the Scottish tourism industry has increased significantly in recent years. The survey found that just under half (45%) of survey respondents employed migrant workers of some kind. Of this number, 89% employed migrant workers from Eastern Europe alone. In this survey, migrant workers made up approximately 10% of the total work force, 4% more than the national average. Two thirds (64.7%) of participants also reported that the number of migrant workers they employed has generally increased over the last 4 years. Most of the businesses surveyed were small or medium sized business, with 89% of businesses employing 100 people or less. Of the 55% who do not employ migrant workers, when asked if they would consider employing migrant workers in the future, 82% responded positively. This suggests that in the future, and depending on future inflow of migrants to Scotland, the influence of migrant workers on the Scottish tourism industry will continue to grow.

The majority of migrants employed by the businesses surveyed had some level of skills, however they were not over qualified for the employment they were involved with and indeed, some migrants needed training before embarking on the jobs. Both Scottish and migrant workers employed by the businesses surveyed were described as being semi-skilled, suggesting that these businesses offer mainly service level jobs where wage rates are generally low. The biggest concern for employers was the language skills of migrant workers, reflecting the findings described above from *Communities Scotland* research in Grampian. The survey also found that half of businesses surveyed actually provided language support for migrants. The results also suggested that Scottish or UK born and migrant workers may be competing against each other for vacancies in the tourism market, which could potentially lead to a decrease in the wage rate in the short term. Many businesses also felt that migrant workers are filling a gap in the labour market which exists because of a lack of suitable UK workers to fill current tourism vacancies.

As regards timescales, migrant workers appear to be staying in Scotland and working within the tourism industry for short periods of time (six months up to three years). The survey revealed seasonal patterns of employment amongst migrant workers in the Scottish tourism industry, with twice as many participants answering *yes* as *no*, when asked whether or not the number of migrant workers their businesses employed changed throughout the year. Some respondents suggested that the very nature of the tourism industry (its unpredictability and seasonality) often suits migrant workers' demand for short-term, low commitment type contracts.

The survey also asked respondents about the way in which they recruited migrant workers, in order to understand how government may be able to influence this process in future. The most popular methods, of recruitment were word of mouth and websites. However, one interesting issue that was raised in relation to recruitment was that many respondents perceived that tourists may prefer to be served by a "Scottish citizen" rather than a migrant worker who may know little of the country and its culture and heritage. The primary issue for businesses is the language skills of migrant workers, as this poses problems for the employer in terms of customer service, and for the employee as regards, wages.

Conclusions

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Scotland, however, there is evidence to suggest that following the increase in migration from Eastern Europe, migration may be becoming much more important in terms of sustaining the current levels of economic growth and prosperity particularly within the tourism industry. This short piece of research has cast some light on some of the key issues around migration for the tourism industry in Scotland.

- It appears that Eastern European migrant workers are important for the tourism industry in Scotland and perform well within the labour market. Employers value migrant workers as a valuable source of labour as it can often be difficult to attract UK born workers to undertake low paid, low skilled type jobs. Gaps in the labour market exist because of issues such as declining population in Scotland and increasing levels of worklessness. The Scottish Parliament has recognised the important benefits to be derived from migration in Scotland particularly the knock on impacts for economic growth and prosperity in the future. To this end, the Parliament has introduced new schemes to encourage new and existing migrants to live and work in Scotland in the long term. Evidence from this research supports the introduction of these types of schemes into Scotland. A further consideration might be to continue to work with small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to better understand labour market shortages within different sectors of the economy like tourism and to target migrant schemes accordingly.
- As the research has shown, migrant workers are important for the Scottish tourism industry providing a valued source of labour in a seasonal, low skilled, low waged and often unpredictable sector of the economy. There are opportunities for government agencies such as "Visit Scotland" to work closely with tourism businesses to offer support, help and guidance to employers about the rights and responsibilities of employers with regard to migrant workers and to ensure that migrant workers within the sector are provided with equitable pay and conditions and to reduce the opportunities for exploitation of migrant workers through the Scottish tourism industry.
- Scotland has benefited from the fact that Eastern European migrants have not only gravitated toward urban centres but also appear to have been attracted to more rural areas, as has been the case in other parts of the UK. This has had important benefits for rural areas, such as the Highlands and Islands, in terms of economic and community sustainability, for example, increased school rolls, local labour markets and local retail. Although, as this research suggests, there are benefits to local economies from new migration, there are potentially other impacts of this work in terms of social cohesion and further research will be required to explore these types of issues in these communities further.
- One of the biggest concerns among tourism employers is the language skills of migrant workers. Language affects migrant workers and their employers, in terms of the level of wages, access to services such as education and healthcare and the quality of service that employees can provide within the tourism industry. The provision of funding for interpretation and translation services would aid language acquisition resulting in a much more competent workforce and settled population. SMEs will play an important role in supporting and facilitating language skills among their workforces and should be encouraged, perhaps financially, to release employees from employment to attend such courses. Options should also be made available to employers to hold language training at their own premises as part of an ongoing staff training and development strategy.
- EU enlargement has had an overall positive impact on Scotland in terms of an increased supply of labour to the tourist industry. However, as the research has shown, we still have much to learn about the types of impact that result from such a large and relatively unchecked migration into Scottish society. Current sources of data are unreliable and only provide part of the picture. Further research will be needed in future to fully examine the impact of migration on the economy of Scotland generally and on different sectors within the economy.

Managing immigration can be difficult because managing flows of people involves many factors. Tourism is ever changing and is influenced by economic, political, social, environmental and technological changes. While future numbers are inherently hard to predict, economic and demographic trends make it likely that

a high level of migration for work and for study will continue for the foreseeable future.¹⁷ It is important, therefore, that governments and local authorities not only encourage migrant workers with high levels of skills but they must also provide the appropriate support, information and access to services for those with lower skills. In the future the benefits arising from increased numbers of migrant workers will depend largely on whether or not the skills required by employers match those of migrants looking for work.

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¹⁷ Audit Commission, (Jan 2007), *Crossing borders - Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers*. <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/05CA5CAD-C551-4b66-825E-ABFA8C8E4717/CrossingBorders.pdf>

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Visit Scotland - www.visitscotland.com

The World Tourism Organisation - www.unwto.org

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