

Continental Drift

Citizens Advice Scotland's (CAS) latest report **Continental Drift: Understanding advice and information needs for A8¹ migrant workers in Scotland** is based on a survey of clients and advisers from representative Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) across the country. The report provides a demographic and social profile of this client group as well as a snapshot of their advice needs.

Exploited by landlords and employers, language difficulties and complex advice needs pose barriers to assistance for A8 migrant workers

Client Profile

Research shows that:

- The majority (73%) of A8 migrant worker clients were young Polish men and women working full time
- Eight in every ten were in work, with the majority working full time. One quarter worked in the hospitality and catering sector; one fifth in administration, business and managerial services; one fifth in the agricultural sector and the remainder (12.4%) predominantly in the food processing sector
- Just over half (51%) lived in private rented accommodation
- One quarter (25%) had children living with them in Scotland.

Advising migrant workers

Four in every five CAB advisers found that language barriers and the complex mix of advice needs made advising this client group more challenging than other CAB clients. Problems included:

- Difficulties in understanding both their enquiries and needs
- Uncertainty as to whether the advice and its implications had been fully understood.

Additionally, different demands were made on urban and rural advisers. Urban bureaux dealt mainly with employment issues, whereas rural bureaux saw more women with caring responsibilities leading to a higher number of benefit enquiries.

¹ A8 nationals refer to individuals from Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

|| *An East of Scotland CAB was consulted by five Polish workers who had been employed by a cleaning company for less than a year. They had contracted for a 40 hour a week at £6.20 per hour, but had not received even basic pay for the hours they had worked. They had been working unsociable hours and had been taken to various locations in Scotland.*



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The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux - Citizens Advice Scotland
(Scottish charity number SC016637)

Types and Extent of Advice Needs

All A8 nationals need to be registered with the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). Twelve months continuous employment is required before eligibility to welfare benefits is granted. If a migrant worker loses their job, they must find alternative employment within 30 days in order for it to be considered continuous. In the interim, they have no access to public funds. This leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation by employers and landlords, during the twelve month period.

Migrant worker clients have complex advice needs, with nearly half discussing two or more problems per visit. One fifth returned for further advice within the three month research period. The research found:

- More than a third (36%) of queries related to in work benefits such as working tax credits. Problems with administration, delays and language difficulties were compounded by the interplay with other complex systems such as "right to reside" status
- Migrant workers have significantly more employment problems than the general CAB population (23% versus 11%). Problems include unfair dismissal, unfair terms and conditions of employment, and confusion and a lack of understanding over employment rights
- Tax problems are a far greater issue for migrant workers than the general CAB population (8% versus 3%). Emergency tax coding - more common when changing employment frequently or having more than one job - can dent already low incomes
- Housing problems accounted for 7% of enquiries. Problems tended to concern housing conditions, as well as actual and threatened homelessness, due to employment links. Housing is often linked to a job, and if the employment ends unexpectedly, the client becomes homeless with little warning and limited resources to find an alternative.

CAS calls on the UK government to:

- Amend the worker registration scheme to reduce the vulnerability of A8 workers to exploitation by employers and landlords.

CAS calls on the UK, Scottish and local governments to:

- Fund an awareness campaign on the availability of advice to A8 migrant workers
- Provide specific funding to bureaux to meet the advice needs of this client group
- Fund comprehensive facilities to meet the language needs of both bureau advisers and migrant worker clients
- Commission research to extend understanding of the dynamic and changing character of A8 migration in Scotland.

Case evidence

|| *An East of Scotland CAB reports of an English speaking Polish worker employed by an agency for the last eight years. After three weeks in his current work as a picker he has been sacked alongside ten other fellow Poles none of whom can speak English. They will lose their accommodation immediately and are to be transported to the bus station and dumped. The client has £5 to live on as he will not get paid until the end of the week. The Polish workers have been living in Portakabins, eight people to a unit with no running water and toilet, and are charged £30 per week each. The toilet and showers are communal shared with 565 other workers on site.*

|| *A North of Scotland CAB reports of a lone parent female client from Latvia who speaks very little English. She recently signed a working time agreement to extend her working week beyond 48 hours. Since signing, she wants to reduce her hours to look after her nine year old daughter. The CAB managed to assist her with this problem and with an application for child benefit with the use of an interpreter.*