

## Investing in Communities: migrant workers

### EEDA helps migrant workers contribute more fully to the local economy

#### Summary

Through its Economic Participation programme, EEDA is helping migrant workers find work and develop business opportunities across the East of England. Modest funding and work with partner organisations has achieved tangible results – overcoming skills shortages and helping to integrate ethnic groups into the wider community.

<b>County:</b>	Region-wide
<b>EEDA theme:</b>	Economic Participation
<b>Date:</b>	May 2008

#### Main messages

- EEDA funding of support initiatives helps migrant workers across the region
- Leading to better-paid, more productive jobs for skilled migrant workers
- Giving businesses set up by migrants help with their marketing and administration
- Offering migrant workers a better opportunity to integrate with the local community.

#### Case study

##### Recruiting from Eastern Europe to plug the skills gap

Urszula Jukes is a director of Access Europe Ltd, a Bedford-based company that recruits workers from Poland and the Baltic states on behalf of local businesses. EEDA funding helped her offer English language courses, employment support and cultural awareness classes to Polish migrant workers. “I often find skilled people extremely keen to work in their areas of expertise,” said Urszula, “but their lack of English is a bar to getting the skilled jobs. EEDA-supported classes mean I can get them up to speed in the language, and then local firms can use their expertise.”

Urszula first became involved in recruiting migrant workers when she worked for Axis Electronics, also in Bedford. The company began to have difficulties recruiting skilled workers when major operators like Motorola moved out of the area after 2000, and the local skills base diminished. Urszula responded by hiring three Polish graduates and integrating them into the workforce. The initiative worked so well that Axis has continued to recruit migrant workers, and 20 per cent of its 100-strong workforce now originates from Eastern Europe.

### **Building on the skills of migrant workers**

In addition to Access Europe, many other initiatives on behalf of the immigrant community are already benefiting from EEDA funding. Cambridgeshire County Council's (CCC's) Trading Standards team has used a grant to set up a pilot project in Wisbech to help migrants who own businesses such as cafes, delicatessens and food shops. Tobin Stephenson, one of CCC's project managers, said: "These small businesses were often in breach of labelling regulations, because goods have to be labelled in English. The pilot project gave us the money to help them translate labels and signage." Tobin's team also developed a toolkit to help the businesses market themselves.

Farley Passos, co-owner of a shop called O Cantinho in Wisbech, was one of those who received help. He said: "I am very pleased to be working in partnership with Cambridgeshire Trading Standards on this project, and really pleased at the support we are getting to help us improve compliance. Most of our stock comes direct from Portugal, so we can serve Wisbech residents real Portuguese food and tell them how to prepare it themselves."

The project's success has helped to create greater understanding between retailers and Trading Standards, as Tobin explained: "It gave us a positive relationship with the retailer and allowed us to point out shortcomings in other areas that were quickly remedied. Other local authorities have had to resort to prosecution to get the same co-operation." As a result, local people have used the services of these local businesses much more, which in turn has helped integrate the migrant workers into the community.

Keystone Development Trust, a charitable organisation working in deprived areas of Thetford, is using EEDA funding to provide a telephone helpline to offer advice to migrant workers as part of a wider project. Already, the police and local trades unions, and another regional development agency, have expressed interest in contributing to the helpline.

Keystone's non-EEDA funded work includes a drop-in centre to give migrants information on subjects such as workers' rights, driving licences and insurance. National Insurance is particularly important, and Keystone prepares people for their interviews, and books their appointments. "I never realised how important the National Insurance interview was," said Elisa Pinto, Keystone's manager, "but these people are keen to work, and they see the National Insurance number as their passport."

### **Understanding the issues**

In 2005, EEDA's investing in Communities programme commissioned one of the most comprehensive and detailed studies to date on the contribution migrant workers make to the regional economy. The resulting report, produced by London Metropolitan University, found that several companies in the region could not survive without the skills provided by migrant workers, yet many such workers have inadequate access to basic support such as information on rights, childcare, finance and services.

Concern generated by the report led to the creation in 2006 of the East of England Migrant Workers Steering Group (MWSG), which includes EEDA and partner organisations such as the Learning and Skills Council, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Keystone Development Trust. The MWSG is a vehicle for maintaining a long-term focus on the key recommendations of the report. Mark Allison, EEDA's project manager for the migrant worker initiative, said: "The MWSG has links to the multi-agency fora across the region that tackle the issues on a local level, and to the national migration group, to ensure that good practice from the region informs policy development and other decisions made nationally."

### **Conclusion**

Through its Economic Participation programme, EEDA will continue to fund a variety of innovative projects to help migrant workers contribute to the East of England's economy. Past initiatives have required only modest amounts of funding – less than £300,000 since 2005 – yet have achieved much in terms of addressing skills shortages and enabling migrants to feel they can participate in, and belong to, the wider community.

## Extra quotes

### Mark Allison, EEDA's project manager for the migrant worker initiative

"EEDA has generated a model that can be used elsewhere. It's a good example of effective regional funding, because we can implement on a local level with minimum investment and quickly transfer to regional level once a template has been created. The process avoids duplication, so the sums involved are small, and we are promoting the model to other regional development agencies."

## Additional information

The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) estimates that migrant workers individually contribute £7,203 per annum in revenue to the UK exchequer. This is a relatively higher contribution than the UK-born population and equates to something approaching a contribution of £360 million per year in the East of England.

## Financial facts and figures

- EEDA's funding of initiatives for migrant workers will be £350,000 during 2007/08
- EEDA gave £15,000 to Access Europe to teach English to migrant workers
- Cambridgeshire County Council's (CCC's) Trading Standards "toolkit" for migrant workers cost £12,000 to market – 80 per cent of which was funded by EEDA
- EEDA helped Keystone source a further £200,000 in additional funding for its work with migrants.

## Contact details

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