

Leeds University Business School - Research and Innovation Podcast

Episode 53: Barriers facing migrants entering the UK workforce.

Speakers: Dr Marketa Dolezalova, Ewa Jamroz and Ewa Lelontko.

Marketa Dolezalova: [00:00:00] Hi, and welcome to the Research and Innovation podcast. My name is Marketa Dolezalova and I'm a research fellow in labour migration at Leeds University Business School.

Today I'm really pleased to be joined by Ewa Jamroz, who is Policy Data and Development Officer at Migration Yorkshire, for her second time on our LIMITS podcast series. Hi Ewa.

Ewa Jamroz: Thanks for having me back.

Marketa Dolezalova: And today we also joined by another Ewa - Ewa Lelontko, who is the Employer Engagement Manager at Migration Yorkshire. Welcome Eva.

Ewa Lelontko: Hi, it's really lovely to be here with you today.

Marketa Dolezalova: Thank you for joining us. So for those listeners who have not listened to our previous episodes, I'm going to introduce our project.

The project is called "Labour mobility and transition, a multi-actor study of the reregulation of migrant work in low skilled sectors". It is a three-year study of the impact of Brexit related changes to immigration policy and of the impact of COVID 19 on employment in four key sectors in the UK, namely hospitality, adult social care, food production, and warehousing.

The aim of the project is to produce in-depth knowledge on changing recruitment practices, retraining and labour substitution strategies, including automation, and the project includes both views from employers and workers.

So thank you, Ewa and Ewa for talking to me for this second episode on the topic of migration in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Just to recap briefly, in the previous episode, which is already available on our website, Ewa talked to me about the different groups of migrants that live in the region, how they fit into the region's economy, and we focused on how migrants enter to workforce. For today's episode, we are going to focus on the barriers to work migrants experience and what factors might make it difficult for migrants to remain in work.

We'll also look at some examples of good practice. So Ewa J, as you told us, in the previous [00:02:00] episode, you have been involved in many projects with Migration Yorkshire, and you have good understanding of what people's actual experiences with looking for work are, or of not being able to find work and the reasons to this.

Could you give us like couple of examples of the main barriers that people experience when looking for work?

Ewa Jamroz: Thanks Marketa. I would say that one of the biggest barriers is knowledge of English or command of English. Many migrants speak no English, or they may have, they may be able to speak and understand English, but not write or read or the other way around.

So certainly knowledge of English is the big one and not only the kind of general communication, but also the certain professional words or professional things that the sector words that people may not be familiar with when looking for jobs and applying for jobs. So I think that's the, that's the kind of biggest for some group, but even when you do speak English and you, you are able to communicate, I think the lack of knowledge of the UK job market, [00:03:00] understanding how to apply for jobs, where to look for them, understanding what to put on your CV. I would say that's, that's the second thing that we're finding is quite problematic for all migrant groups. And I've been recently working... The most recent project I've been working on is with new arrivals from Hong Kong.

And a lot of them are coming with fantastic English and yet they are struggling to enter the job market at the level that they used to work at in Hong Kong. And a lot of it is related to just not understanding how to enter that that certain profession here in the UK and not having those connections, not having networks that they could tap into when, when looking for work in the UK.

Marketa Dolezalova: That is very interesting Ewa. And I think it's something that not a lot of people might be aware of, like in terms of employers being aware of the different barriers that migrants might experience, especially if migrants seem to speak good English. I guess a lot of people are not aware that there are technical English skills that [00:04:00] migrants might not have.

So Ewa L, are there any examples of good practice or of any examples of any projects that employers have had, or organizations would have that would help migrants overcome these barriers?

Ewa Lelontko: So, yeah, I think just echoing Ewa J's opinion - so I think we definitely need to add also the lack of work experience aside from the lack of English language and also kind of understanding how to operate, how to play the recruitment game, really, As I would say.

And I think a good example could be one of our partners, the Landmark Trust. They are a charity that specializes in conserving historical buildings and they won recently a contract to

renovate Old Calverley Hall, which is an old manor house based between Leeds and Bradford. And I really love their approach because what they recognize is that a lot of refugees and migrants who come to, to this country possess those [00:05:00] skills quite unique in arts and crafts connected to buildings and construction, and they really wanted to engage with them. So they approached us and we were able to refer some of the clients to the taster sessions.

So instead of just trying straight away to employ candidates, they really wanted to give them an opportunity to understand what the role would involve. Who would they be working with, if the role is actually for them? What they did is they understood English language, you know, the basic language to understand the health and safety procedures is required, but to actually fulfil this role, you don't really need to have a really good level of English.

So even for the taster sessions, they arranged for a translator to be present. So the participants could really fully take part, have a look around. And I think what was really beautiful, aside from those taster sessions, they went above this and they organized a family, a community day during the weekend when the candidates were able to bring their [00:06:00] family members or friends.

And I think that just really beautifully shows that as an employer, it's not just about giving the employment opportunity, you can also play a bigger role which is helping to integrate into the community that you will be becoming part of.

So as a result of that program a few of the candidates went on this training program organized in partnership with DWP. And during that program, aside from learning some of the skills, they were practicing their English, they were learning those specific industry-related terms that Ewa J was talking about.

And only a few candidates at the end were able to take up the role, but what happened during the process is the Landmark Trust, introduced them to other employers in the sector. So they really widened their network. They helped to build their confidence. They practiced interview skills with them. So even if not everyone was able to take up the role at the end, they gained those really important skills that would allow them to enter the sector anyway.

Marketa Dolezalova: That sounds like an amazing project. And I guess it, it really [00:07:00] shows how important work is, but kind of not just work it's, you know, work is an important part of our life, but going to work and socializing and networking with other people that you meet through work plays a big role in adjusting to a new place and getting integrated into your community.

So Ewa, are there any other key barriers that people experience when they're looking for work in the UK?

Ewa Jamroz: I would say probably the other barrier would be around for those migrants who come to the UK qualified, would be the transfer of that qualification to the UK equivalent or recognition of those qualifications.

And understanding how you then register with professional bodies to be able to practice within the sector then so things like, you know, social workers, they need to register with Social Work England to, to be able to practice. And that registration often requires confirmation that the person speaks English at certain level.

So they need to show IELTS exam much higher than ESOL classes that are [00:08:00] available through job centre course or through colleges. It's much harder to go onto those courses, find them for free and to be able to then register. And also it's much higher level of English than is generally required for other sorts of other jobs.

So, so then more work needs to be done, through colleges and also through employers to be able to put those courses on to enable people to enter that registration process and then find the jobs within that. And one of the examples that we had that was quite useful was with again, I'm gonna give the example of Hong Kong - the group that I'm working with currently, that the NHS got together with our equivalent, so strategic migration partnerships and some community groups represented by Hong Kongers to put together a guide for Hong Kong nurses to enter NHS. So explaining what the process is, what the registration process is, what sorts of different elements of that process are. And [00:09:00] put what employers, in this situation the NHS Trust, could do to help nurses within that process.

So, you know, there are some good examples out there to help with those barriers. And, but that's, we're talking about, you know, the skilled migrants, but a lot of migrants come with perhaps no qualification because of the disruption they may have in their education.

Because we're talking about refugees and asylum seekers, for example, where, because of the situation back home, they may have had breaks in education. So it's very difficult for them to enter any sort of education here in the UK, because they may not have any proof of past education achievements from back home.

And we've had that again, specifically with you know, even to enter apprenticeship programs, you need to have GCSC for example, which people often don't have, and to be able to get GCSEs from colleges, you need to pass ESOL level one, ESOL level two, [00:10:00] all those kind of years of ESOL language to be able to get to this stage where you can just apply for apprenticeships.

So I think there are a lot of barriers within the system which, if you don't know where to go for help, if you don't know any way of cutting that process down makes it very difficult for migrants to enter a certain type of industry.

Marketa Dolezalova: Yeah, that's so interesting and it really shows how, looking for a job, it's not just simple, like getting from point A to point B. There is a lot of lot that goes on

when people look for work and they try to enter the workforce, especially like you mentioned, when they may have had some disruption to education, they might have been a lot of upheaval in their lives.

So the barriers can be multiple social barriers to getting into work. So are there any examples of good practice that like employers or organizations would have programs to help people navigate the system?

Ewa Lelontko: So I think you made a really good point Marketa- it's getting to, to work, it's not really a linear process. And I think it's [00:11:00] really difficult sometimes to create just one program that would cater for everybody; everyone's journey is slightly different. And so it's amazing that there are different ways and opportunities to support that journey.

One of the examples I wanted to share is with DLA Piper. They're a global law firm and they were especially interested in supporting refugee women. They do recognize that actually within refugee communities, refugee women will have even lower rates of employment, because of various barriers, around childcare you know, level of English, level of confidence, all those things really impacting women.

So they really just wanted to support them, but they were unable to offer jobs as such, but what they thought about is about providing a mentoring program. So for roughly three months they matched a refugee woman with somebody from their organization and they could have been a lawyer, they could have been from an HR department, from the marketing department. So actually depending on your interest and there may be [00:12:00] areas that you kind of had experience in before.

So, so they matched women. And it proved to be a really successful program. What it's done, is help build confidence, help to wider the network of women which is one of the big barriers as we spoke about before, the lack of that network that you could just tap into, they didn't have that when they arrived to this country.

So it was really beneficial for them to be exposed to someone in this industry, help them explain how the UK job market works, what to reach out for. Very specific advice that sometimes key workers, case workers are not able to provide because you know, they're not really expert in HR or in marketing or in law.

So having somebody who can look at your CV and really tell you what are the keywords you should be using, how to best answer the interview question. And I think aside from that, there was a lot of friendships that were built during the process, which I think is really important as well. So it's not only benefited refugee women, but also the [00:13:00] employees, they really felt like they're doing something good and they learned a lot in the process. So I think it was a very successful program, as I said, and hopefully we can roll it out with other companies as well.

Marketa Dolezalova: Thank you Ewa. That sounds really great. And it's, like you mentioned, I think it's very good to be aware of this being a two-way process, that it's not just refugees or migrants that are benefiting, this kind of learning can go both ways and, you know, can enrich the company as well, because it provides new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things, make it more attractive.

You also mentioned before about networking, people having lack of networks and childcare being an issue. So Ewa J, is there anything that you have experienced in your work about migrant women having issues, having experienced lack of childcare, as a barrier to work?

Ewa Jamroz: I think what we've seen is that kind of changes in expectation for people when they're arriving. So, or adjustment to their life here in the UK. Because a lot of women back home would have wider [00:14:00] networks. Family and friends who would look after the children. You know, a lot of cultures you know, grandparents and auntie, uncles, all involved in raising children.

So obviously here in the UK, they need to be much more creative in terms of how to account for that and how to fill up those gaps, where the family is not able to step in. And we've seen with certain communities, we've seen women kind of pairing together. For example, one of them would have, you know, take children to school for another women. And then other women would collect the children in the evening. So they would kind of change the shifts that way. A lot of the time if both parents are working, there may be kind of nights and day shifts. The women may be doing night shifts and men maybe doing day shifts, or vice versa, to make sure that there is that cover, childcare cover there.

But I think we need to recognize that it's, you know, the childcare issue is an issue for everybody. But I think it's that just additional, I suppose, additional barrier when it comes to migrants because of that [00:15:00] less of networks, I suppose, that you don't have those family members who could look after the kids for you.

Ewa Lelontko: Just to add actually, I've had quite a few interesting conversations with employers lately who are really starting to recognize that childcare is a huge barrier. And what really was pleasing to see is that even looking at shift patterns just kind of, you know, when approaching and offering jobs, they are already offering it much more flexible way of working. And I think that's what's needed even more. And I think just if we can raise more awareness and just put a bit more pressure even on, on an industry that would be better.

And I think it's really interesting times because it's first time in 50 years, when we see that the number of job vacancies, it's much, much higher than the number of unemployed people, so it's a good time to negotiate, and have that negotiation power with businesses, to bring changes to recruitment and retention processes. And hopefully we are seeing [00:16:00] already a small shift in that.

Marketa Dolezalova: Thank you, Ewa.

And we could talk about barriers to employment that migrants experience for a long time, but I think on this note, we will have to stop because we have run out of time. So thank you Ewa Jamroz and Ewa Lelontko for joining me today.

Ewa Lelontko: Thank you so much for having me.

Ewa Jamroz: Thank you for having us.

Marketa Dolezalova: And thank you to those listening today. If you'd like to find out more about the project and follow us on social media, the details are in the episode show notes. Goodbye.