

<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE</b>			
<b>CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONIAC)</b>			
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## **The London Outreach Worker Project**

**A paper by Simon Hester, HSE Construction Division**

For information and discussion at CONIAC on 21 July 2010

### **Purpose of the paper**

1. This paper explains the background to the London Outreach Worker Project (LOWP), what it has achieved and lessons learned.

### **Background**

2. Migrant construction workers make up 6-8% of the workforce nationally though in London this figure is 40%. Approximately 60% of the total migrant construction workforce is based in London with another 15% based in the South East.
3. Direct evidence of increased vulnerability to health and safety risks based on migration status is inconclusive. Accidents tend to happen early on in a construction project – regardless of status – and most fatalities happen on small projects. The most vulnerable workers are those moving from small job to small job, often with poor management and poor standards. Anecdotally, certainly in London, many migrants are found working on smaller sites. Where safety management is poor or non-existent the health and safety risks faced by migrant workers are magnified - due to language difficulties, ignorance of UK standards, and exploitation by employers.
4. Research shows that most migrants are ignorant of their rights at work and have no knowledge of HSE. The work carried out by the LOWP confirms these findings.
5. Inspectors have for many years been aware of the presence of large numbers of migrant workers and HSE has developed techniques for communicating with them. However, HSE has rarely received complaints or phone calls from migrant workers.

### **London Outreach Worker Project (LOWP)**

6. LOWP was set up in May 2009 as a result of industry concerns about, and HSE research into, the vulnerability of migrant construction workers to increased levels of risk particularly those working for smaller

contractors. HSE's Construction Division established a one-year project in London aimed at the three largest groups, comprising roughly one-third of the construction migrant workforce – Polish, Romanian and Indian. Originally an outreach worker from each community was employed and embedded in one of the London construction inspector teams.

7. The outreach team's brief is to:
  - raise awareness of HSE and UK H&S standards in the targeted communities;
  - assist Inspectors and other visiting staff; and
  - improve HSE's knowledge of the targeted communities.

### **Outreach methods and results**

8. The project has employed a wide range of techniques to reach and influence the targeted communities.
9. **Pocket information cards:** The outreach workers have distributed 110,000 cards to construction workers and their families. The cards contain basic health and safety information in the relevant languages, advertise dedicated helplines, email addresses and webpages.

Every Polish and Romanian church in London has been visited at least once and cards distributed. Outreach workers have spoken directly to congregations and/or the priests have encouraged their congregations to take up the cards. Pocket cards are available at the Polish and Romanian consulates where workers queue every day for passport and immigration issues, and at many Polish and Romanian shops and three key food wholesalers. Fourteen NGOs and charities dealing with East European migrants distribute pocket cards and a few have organised awareness events.

It has been more difficult to distribute cards directly at the Hindu and Sikh temples due to suspicion from temple committees, but this appears to be mellowing. The outreach team has also concentrated on distributing cards at major religious and community events attended by construction workers and their families.

10. **Newspapers:** the project has placed adverts and advertorials every week since September 2009 in two Romanian newspapers, four Polish newspapers and three Indian newspapers. The advertorials included 600-word articles covering a wide range of issues of direct relevance to construction workers – including basic legal requirements, with particular reference to employment status, and the role of HSE through to specific site safety, health and management issues. In addition the pocket cards have been inserted into Romanian and Polish newspapers.

11. **Websites and portals:** East Europeans are heavy users of the internet. The project has since October 2009 placed adverts and weblinks on 7 Romanian and Polish websites. For example:
- **Londynek.net** - a major Polish portal, report 562,000 impressions and 614 clicks through to the HSE website. 16 articles placed on their **Ukiepedia** information section have been read 6,194 times. The most popular article is entitled *Construction workers – are you really self-employed?*
  - **Buduj.co.uk** - a Polish website specifically for the construction industry, report 86,479 impressions and 1,330 clicks through to the HSE website. It has also carried all our articles.
  - **Romani-online** - a major Romanian website, report 2,705,000 impressions and 1,254 clicks through to the HSE website.
12. **Radio:** the project has been running daily adverts and fortnightly talk shows on **Panjab Radio**, a community-based radio station in Southall. Since the beginning of the year we have also run similar adverts on **Romani Radio** – the only Romanian radio station in Britain which is web-based.
13. **HSE website:** webpages have been created with translated material in Polish, Romanian, Gujarati, Punjabi and Hindi on the construction section of the HSE website.
14. **Help lines:** Prior to the outreach project the HSE London office had no records of calls from individuals who could not speak English. The experience of the dedicated help lines has been useful but mixed. The project receives telephone calls and emails which are dealt with directly by the outreach workers. However, a large proportion of the queries dealing with construction issues have not strictly been about health and safety (eg, how to obtain CSCS cards). The figures for September 2009 – April 2010 are:
- Romanian:** 140 calls – about 80 dealing with construction issues, 10 emails – 6 dealing with construction issues;
- Polish:** 67 calls – about half dealing with construction issues, 35 emails – most dealing with construction issues;
- Indian:** 51 calls - overwhelmingly about non-construction issues, 3 emails only.
15. **Safety and Health Awareness Days (SHADs):** the project has organised successful SHADs, in conjunction with Working Well Together and the National Construction College, aimed at Polish and Romanian construction companies, site managers and other construction professionals.

- **Romanian** – 2 March. 50 participants, mostly site managers, described as the largest gathering of Romanian construction professionals in Britain ever and extremely well-received.
  - **Polish** – 6 March. 80 participants, mostly managers of Polish SMEs or site supervisors/managers, described as the largest gathering of Polish construction professionals in Britain ever and again very well-received.
16. **Assisting inspectors:** the outreach workers have assisted inspectors on site visits and with accident investigations. They have provided good interpreter services but, more importantly, they have been able to explain the role of inspectors to people who are suspicious or nervous of HSE.

### **The future of the project**

17. The one-year project has been extended to a second year, financed by the Migration Impact Fund of the Department of Communities and Local Government. In addition, the methods of the project are being extended to the Bulgarian and Lithuanian communities, without employing dedicated outreach workers from these communities. The possibility of employing an outreach worker to intervene with the Chinese community is being considered.
18. The methods and lessons of the project are being replicated by HSE in other parts of the country and cover other industries.

### **The lessons of the London Outreach Worker Project**

19. The following beneficial outcomes have resulted from the project:
- HSE has learned about the lives of migrant construction workers and their communities.
  - The outreach workers have been able to open doors that HSE did not know about. Their language skills and community knowledge has enabled them to effectively engage with our target audiences.
  - The project has enabled an intensive awareness raising campaign over many months in the target communities, and has created networks of contacts and stakeholders which, hopefully, will continue after its close.
  - The project has boosted the capacity of frontline staff by helping with site inspections and accident investigations.

### **Contact**

Simon Hester, Tel: 0207 556 2168, email: [simon.hester@hse.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:simon.hester@hse.gsi.gov.uk)  
 Michael J Ryan, Tel: 0141 275 3107, e-mail: [Michael.Ryan@hse.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Michael.Ryan@hse.gsi.gov.uk)