

OMEGA INTERNATIONAL RESOURCING

ASSISTING INTEGRATION AMONG MIGRANT WORKERS

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The national debate surrounding the issue of Britain's swelling migrant workforce has put many of the UK's recruitment businesses under the spotlight.

A recently published report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation underlines the difficulties that migrant workers are faced with when they come into the UK. Additionally, it has also thrown up a number of fundamental questions that demand answers from Britain's recruiters.

Since EU expansion back in 2004, workers from Eastern Europe have been turning up in droves, keen to benefit from what British employers have to offer. The latest official figures show that there are in the region of 510,000 registered migrant workers in the UK to date. This figure is of course a vast under estimation when self employed and illegal workers are taken into consideration.

We are all painfully aware of the views many British nationals hold with regards to migrant workers who tend to be regarded as usurpers of British jobs. Conversely, the increase has been of huge benefit to employers and the eastern European drive towards the UK has significantly boosted our economy.

With this debate so prominent in the national press, it is easy to forget the workers themselves. Many arrive in the UK with little or no knowledge of what they will be faced with, only to discover that they are largely disregarded by their UK employers. Recruiters have been accused of washing their hands of their migrant workforce once they arrive in the country. Indeed, it is only recently that horror stories have begun appearing in the press about the appalling conditions many migrant workers are enduring.

What the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report clearly exemplifies is that migrant welfare is consistently being overlooked. The reasons for this are wide ranging. Whilst exploitation is indeed prevalent, the fact remains that the gap between British nationals and migrant workers is so wide because of a failure in integration.

The government has always maintained that integration is high on its agenda. Yet, the solution to the problem has all too often been placed at the door of the migrant worker. While Ruth Kelly MP may well have some justification in calling for all migrants to learn English, she is arguably doing little to specifically help them to integrate.

The foundation's director, Julia Unwin, has expressed her criticism of the government by saying that their research showed that the government should value migrants as "more than simply an economic resource". Indeed, the report showed that while the percentage of migrant workers wanting to stay on in the UK had increased over the last two years, many remained feeling isolated.

The report highlighted three main areas where the system was failing migrant workers. Primarily, only 17 % of workers said they knew where to go to get general advice. From this figure, almost none had been given the information from their employer. Secondly, only 33 % knew how to register with their local GP. Again, from those that did, the majority had gained this information from friends and family rather than their employer. Lastly, 44 % of the workers were living in cramped conditions with at least one other person other than their partner. It was also gleaned within the report that 15 % of all those using homelessness agencies were from the A8 states.

One recruitment business doing more than most to counter these statistics is Omega Resource Group Ltd.

Established in 1998, Omega is one of the industry's fastest growing recruitment businesses and has an exceptional track record in providing UK employers with migrant workers since November 2004.

Omega prides itself on providing migrant workers with a support system that is second to none. Having two offices based in Poland, one a recruitment centre in the heart of Warsaw, the other a training centre in Southern Poland, Omega are perfectly positioned to deliver the best match for both clients and candidates alike. Additionally, they provide skills and language training to candidates if this is required.

Being one of the first recruitment businesses in the UK to have been awarded the Gangmaster License, Omega entered the market with a strong ethical code that has ensured migrant workers are not short changed on their arrival.

Candidates are put through a rigorous selection process at the assessment centre in Poland prior to their placement with UK employers. Clients are involved throughout this process, participating in assessment centres, and giving both powerpoint and video presentations on their business to ensure each candidate is 100 percent aware of the job role and workplace prior to their arrival in the UK.

Most importantly, Omega provides the support of a strong welfare team that looks after the interests of migrant workers once they arrive in the UK.

Omega pre-arrange all accommodation (compliant with HMO regulations) with workers' consent and properties are usually rented for an initial six month period. Moreover, Omega go that little bit extra to ensure workers are as comfortable as possible when they arrive in the UK. All are provided with white goods and essential furniture and Omega also aim to position workers' accommodation as close to their workplace as possible. They also manage transport arrangements for an initial period whilst workers become acclimatised and self sufficient.

A Polish welfare officer is also provided by Omega to ensure all contractors are inducted into the workplace and to be on hand to answer any questions that invariably arise. By inducting workers thoroughly, the Omega officer ensures all have met with their management and colleagues, are given a tour of the company and are provided with, and understand, all health and safety practices.

Additionally, Omega ensure all contractors are registered on the Workers Registration Scheme, have UK bank accounts and have correctly completed all relevant paperwork. They also make sure that migrant workers have relevant health service details and will register them with GPs if necessary, introduce them to community services and help them familiarize themselves with the locality.

The care does not end once workers initially settle. The Omega welfare officer remains in regular contact with workers following their induction and all are provided with an emergency number that can be called at any time.

While these measures are ignored by many recruitment businesses, Omega's managing director, James Strickland, believes they should be a legal requirement for all: "The welfare of migrant workers is paramount to Omega. We take every measure to ensure that the transition for migrants moving to the UK, especially for the first time, is as smooth as possible. Too few businesses take this as seriously as we do and we believe it is a necessity that coincides with our code of ethics".

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