

# Organising

Migrant  
Workers

Executive Council  
Statement to the 2008 ADM

*Usdaw*  
*Union of Shop, Distributive  
and Allied Workers*

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# Introduction From the General Secretary

Organising migrant workers is a key challenge facing Usdaw. Usdaw has a choice – organise migrant workers or see existing pay and conditions undermined by a decline in levels of Usdaw membership.

A trade union is only as strong as the levels of union membership in the workplace. We need to have the goal of organising all workers in the workplace.

The growth of the globalised economy means that the world is seeing an increasing internationalised workforce. More and more UK workers are living and working abroad, and we are inevitably seeing more migrant workers in the UK.



Migrant workers are here to stay and we need to welcome and organise migrant workers into Usdaw. The workforces in our workplaces are becoming more diverse and to continue to be an effective trade union Usdaw needs to reflect that diversity.

Some workers fear the arrival of migrant workers but the interests of existing workers will be best protected by organising the new workers to ensure that employers are unable to erode pay and benefits. Trade unions have a responsibility to ensure that the most vulnerable sections of the workforce get a fair deal from the employers by organising all sections of the workforce.

This ADM Statement is an important policy statement committing the Union to a strategy of organising migrant workers. The Statement dispels some of the myths and misconceptions about migrant workers, identifies good practice in organising migrant workers and highlights some of the key issues for the Union.

The Union faces specific challenges over the use of agency labour. Usdaw believes agency labour should be limited to covering business fluctuations and short-term gaps. We are committed to organising agency workers as agency workers deserve a better deal and by organising agency workers we will prevent existing terms and conditions from being undercut.

The Union will continue to work with the TUC to push for the introduction of an Agency Workers Directive that will guarantee agency workers the same terms and conditions as permanent employees.

Migrant workers are now a significant part of the workforce. Usdaw is committed to organising all the workforce in our workplaces. This document is an important re-statement of the Union's commitment to organising migrant workers.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hannett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**John Hannett**  
**General Secretary**

# Section 1: The UK and the Migration of Labour – The Facts

- 1.5 million foreign migrants were working in the UK in 2005 (*Office for National Statistics*).
- Migration added 0.5% per year to the working age population between 2001 and 2006 (*BBC News, 17 October 2007*).
- The UK population grew to 60,587,000 in 2006 - an increase of 349,000.
- 5.4% of all employees in the UK are migrant workers.
- In the 2004 - 5 two year period, 74,000 people arrived in the UK from the Eastern European countries that joined the European Union in 2004.
- In Germany over 10% of the labour force is non-German, in France 6% of the workforce are migrant workers.
- 12.5% of the UK's working age population was born overseas (*BBC News, 17 October 2007*).
- In Australia 24% of the total population was born outside Australia, United States 12% are foreign born, Germany 13%, Sweden 12%, Ireland 11%, France 10% (*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures 2004*).
- Net immigration into the UK is falling. Net immigration measures the number of people immigrating into a country minus the number of people emigrating abroad.
- The latest figures released show that net immigration was 191,000 in 2006. The 2006 figure is 53,000 lower than the net immigration figure of 244,000 for 2004.
- An estimated 5.5 million British people – almost one in 10 of the UK population – live permanently abroad (*BBC News*).
- 1.3 million Britons are living in Australia, 761,000 in Spain, 678,000 in the USA, and 603,000 in Canada (*BBC report on Brits Abroad*).
- Britons have utilised Europe's free movement of labour principles – for example, 200,000 living in France (*BBC report on Brits Abroad*).
- Over a recent two year period (2004 - 5) 71,000 British citizens started new lives in Australia compared with 58,000 in Spain and 42,000 in France.

It is clear then from these facts that the UK is not being swamped by immigrants despite the scaremongering of sections of the media. It is equally clear that migration is a major part of the global economy and that the UK plays a significant role in the exporting of skills and talents as well as welcoming skills and talents from abroad.

## Section 2: The Trade Union Case for Organising Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are a permanent feature of the UK workforce. Migrant workers are here to stay. Trade unions have a choice – organise migrant workers or see employers use non-unionised workers to undermine existing pay and conditions.

For over 150 years the UK economy has been built on migrant workers. Irish workers built many of the roads and railways that created the infrastructure of the modern economy, Jewish workers arrived at the start of the 20th Century fleeing persecution and bringing many skills that boosted the UK economy. The 1950s and 1960s saw workers arrive from the Caribbean and the 1970s saw immigration from Southern Asia.

Each wave of immigration has sparked worries and concerns among sections of the population but each group has successfully settled in the UK. The economy has benefited from the influx of additional labour with new skills.

The Trade Union Movement has remained relevant by organising the new workers. The latest influx of migrant workers is no different. The Trade Union Movement will maintain its influence by organising the new migrant workers.

Some UK workers fear that the arrival of additional labour will result in the undermining of terms and conditions by more workers being available for hire. The interests of existing workers will be best protected by organising the new workers to ensure that employers are unable to offer lower pay and benefits to migrant workers.

The guaranteed way to ensure that migrant and/or agency workers have a negative impact on job security, and terms and conditions of employment, is to ignore the issue and let employers have a free hand in how such workers are used. Only by organising these workers into the Union will we be able to stop them from being exploited and, in turn, lowering existing standards.

The increased use of agency labour has raised concerns that the numbers of permanent jobs will fall as work is covered by agencies. To protect permanent jobs the Union is negotiating with employers to limit the use of agency labour to covering short-term business fluctuations.

There is apprehension that existing pay and benefits could be undermined and undercut by agency labour being paid lower pay and benefits. The most effective trade union response is to organise to get agency workers' pay and benefits comparable to the core permanent workforce.

An Agency Workers' Directive will guarantee agency workers equal pay and would prevent agencies from being able to undercut the core workforce terms and conditions. Usdaw is lobbying for the introduction of the Agency Workers' Directive. The trade union case for an Agency Workers' Directive will be strengthened if we can show that we organise and speak for agency workers.

The case for organising migrant workers goes beyond protecting existing members' terms and conditions. The Trade Union Movement was formed to organise workers facing exploitation and get a fair deal by presenting the employers with a united and organised workforce.

Some employers and managers are taking advantage of migrant workers. We have a responsibility to ensure that all workers in our workplaces get a fair deal. The most vulnerable sections of the workforce need the protection of a trade union.

We have a responsibility to organise migrant workers to stop the exploitation of vulnerable workers and to get equal treatment for all workers.

In summary, the best way we can protect and improve the pay, terms and conditions of existing workers is by organising the new migrant workers. We need to organise migrant workers to prevent exploitation of vulnerable workers and to ensure they get equal treatment in the workplace and in so doing we will protect the jobs, pay and benefits of UK workers in existing jobs.



## Section 3: Migrant Workers – Debunking the Myths

In any debate about how trade unions should respond to migrant workers we need to be clear about the facts. This section of the EC Statement looks at some of the myths about immigration peddled by sections of the media:

*“They’re taking our jobs and contributing to unemployment”*

- Migrant workers are not having a negative impact on employment – unemployment remains close to its lowest level for 30 years.
- British workers are not losing their jobs as migrant workers tend to be employed in hard to fill jobs or unpopular shifts.
- Migrant workers are helping the economy to grow and expand by filling labour market gaps.
- Migrant workers are increasing the proportion of the working age population compared to the old and very young. This is helping to create jobs by improving the competitiveness of the UK economy.
- Some rogue employers are using migrant workers as a cheap labour option to fill permanent vacancies. Trade unions are working to ensure migrant workers get the proper pay, terms and conditions for the job. We need to tackle unscrupulous employers by ensuring agency workers have a legal right to equal treatment.

*“They only come here to claim benefits”*

- Migrant workers are not a drain on benefits as they come to the UK to work, not to claim benefits.
- Migrant workers are only able to claim income related benefits once they have worked legally in the UK for a year.
- The benefit system is not a big attraction when workers are considering migrating to the UK.

*“Migrant workers are a drain on public services”*

- Migrant workers contribute more in taxes than they receive in services. It is estimated that migrant workers make a net contribution of £2.5 billion.
- If there were no migrant workers in the UK taxes would have to rise or expenditure be cut (*Home Office report*).
- Official research studies have found that migrant workers are a ‘clear benefit’ to the UK by contributing to an expanding economy.

*“They only come here for the free healthcare”*

- Migrants require less healthcare than the average UK resident. Migrants tend to be of working age and concentrated in the ages of 25 - 49. Many are young workers with no dependants.
- The health service would be in crisis without migrant workers. One in three doctors, one in six dentists and one in 10 nurses were trained overseas.

*“Some immigration is fine but the UK can't cope with current levels of immigration”*

- There are not as many migrant workers in the economy as many people believe.
- The numbers of migrant workers arriving and staying long-term in the UK is falling.
- About one in 10 of the UK's working population are born abroad. This is a smaller proportion than in many other economically developed countries.
- The international migration of labour is becoming a common feature of the globalised economy. More and more UK workers are now working abroad and Britain can manage current levels of immigration.

*“Migrant workers lower terms and conditions of employment as they will work for less than the going rate”*

- Many migrant workers are employed in permanent jobs on the same terms and conditions as other workers.
- Agencies often undercut the permanent workforce by compelling temporary agency workers to work for lower pay, terms and conditions.
- An Agency Workers' Directive would prevent agencies from paying agency workers less than the permanent workforce. An Agency Workers' Directive will deliver improved pay for agency workers and prevent core terms and conditions being undercut.





# Section 4: Agency and Migrant Workers – What do we Know?

Some sections of the media have had a lot to say about migrant workers but we need to be careful about what we take from this coverage.

Usdaw has carried out research to get a better picture of the workplaces our members work in as the Union needs to take action based on the real situation in Usdaw workplaces.

## Agency Workers

The Executive Council reported in detail to the 2006 ADM the findings of a survey carried out to investigate the extent of the use of agency workers across Usdaw workplaces. Our research shows this still stands and that:

- Agency workers are employed in a majority of food manufacturing, transport and distribution sites.
- Agency staff generally receive less pay than permanent staff.
- Agency terms and conditions are on average worse than permanent staff.
- Large numbers of agency staff are from overseas and therefore classed as migrant workers.
- Agency workers have few legal rights and can be exploited by unscrupulous employers.

Despite agency staff receiving less pay and having less favourable terms and conditions of employment, employers tell us that they do not use agency staff to directly save money on wages. They say that the costs are broadly the same once you have factored in the fee that the agency charges.

Instead, employers state that agency staff are used for reasons of flexibility to cover peaks in demand. These peaks in demand can be seasonal (eg slaughtering and processing turkeys at Christmas), due to fluctuations in customer orders or other reasons meaning that the need for staff varies over time.

## Agency Workers Have Fewer Rights at Work

Agency staff are covered by some aspects of employment law but in many ways they have much less protection at work. For example, agency workers:

- Can be paid less than permanent employees for the same work.
- Can be sent home or refused work with little or no notice.

- Are not entitled to sick pay or redundancy pay and may have difficulty qualifying for maternity or paternity leave/pay.
- Have no access to a company pension scheme.

Agency workers, therefore, are amongst the most vulnerable workers in the UK. Not only do they have few employment rights but they are constantly at the risk of being offered no work with no explanation necessary. At its worst, this can mean a return to Victorian times when employers hire and fire at will.

## Migrant Workers

Initially, migrant workers were predominately located in certain industries such as food manufacturing and distribution and were mainly working for agencies. This situation has now changed with migrant workers now working across all of the sectors in which Usdaw organises.

Migrant workers have found jobs in UK workplaces in a variety of different ways:

- Direct recruitment by their employer, after travelling to the UK under their own steam.
- Taken on by an agency in their country of origin and placed in a UK workplace.
- Travelled to the UK with an agency and then found alternative work with a different employer.
- Direct recruitment in their country of origin by their current employer.
- Travelled to the UK under their own steam and found work with an agency.

Workers from Poland form the largest group of migrant workers and account for almost 70% of those who come to the UK. Migrant workers are also now drawn from a wider range of countries including Slovakia, Portugal, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Not surprisingly, one of the biggest issues affecting migrant workers is the language barrier.

*“Migrant workers face a lot of difficulties. They may not speak very good English and can struggle to stand up for themselves, that’s why they need the Union.” (Polish Rep)*

**Language difficulties** can lead to all sorts of issues from misunderstandings at work to potential health and safety problems. And of course, for the Union, we face a difficulty in recruiting potential members to Usdaw if we cannot be understood.

Employers have tried to address language concerns in a number of ways. Some insist that reasonable spoken English is a requirement for the job and some use bilingual staff to translate on the shop floor. These may work to a point but imagine having basic English and wanting to discuss a complex grievance with your employer (or trying to do this through an interpreter). Clearly you are likely to hit some obstacles along the way.

This can also lead to issues of status in the workplace with many migrant workers feeling they are treated as **'second class citizens'** and not respected at work. And it can be extremely difficult for a migrant worker to put across this point of view to their employer.

In some workplaces we have witnessed clear lines of demarcation with migrant workers carrying out lower skilled and more repetitive jobs than their UK counterparts.

In some workplaces this feeling of lower status can come from fellow workers especially if it is felt by UK workers that they are missing out on overtime or promotion opportunities.

We also know that **housing** is a problem for a number of migrant workers. The main problems fall into two categories.

Firstly, in some areas where there are large numbers of migrant workers there is a squeeze on affordable rented accommodation and this allows some landlords to exploit and take advantage of the situation.

This can mean sub-standard accommodation or letting houses to multi-occupants. Migrant workers who are new to the country do not necessarily know their rights when faced with this or where to go for help and support.

Secondly, some employers link the offer of a job (or a placement with an agency) with accommodation provided by the employer. This can work to everyone's satisfaction but can also lead to some major problems.

Migrant workers can find themselves 'tied' to a job and unable to leave because if they give up their job they have to move out of their home. Similarly, they feel unable to complain either about the accommodation or conditions at work as they could lose their home if they lose their job. Also, accommodation is virtually always provided on a shared basis which can lead to problems sharing with strangers.

Concerns over linking housing to jobs has led to a number of agency providers no longer providing housing and instead linking migrant workers with local housing providers and support services.

Migrant workers have been candid with us about **reasons why they have not joined Usdaw**. A common reason is that they have not been asked. Sometimes this is down to the Union being slow in approaching migrant workers but mainly it is due to language difficulties.

Other reasons given for not joining include:

- Being unsure what the Union does and what we can offer.
- Not being clear how long they will be staying in the UK.
- Finding Union recruitment literature difficult to read and understand.
- Being concerned that we will be unable to represent them effectively (this is especially true for agency workers).

## Section 5: The Difference Between Agency and Migrant Workers

We can sometimes confuse migrant workers and agency workers as meaning the same thing. But this is not true.

The normal working definition for an **agency worker** is a worker engaged through or by an employment agency. Crucial to describing the legal status is the concept that neither party has any obligation to provide or carry out work. In UK employment law this means that the worker is not an employee and, therefore, not covered by many aspects of employment law, including unfair dismissal (because the worker will never be dismissed – just not offered work).

A **migrant worker** can be described as a worker who is engaged in paid work in a country of which he or she is not a national.

It is true that a lot of agency workers are migrant workers from a number of different countries (and some agencies specifically recruit in other countries) but a significant number of migrant workers are permanent workers on contracts of employment identical to UK workers.

For example, the food manufacturing site in the case study provided in Section 7 has 854 permanent staff of which 684 are UK nationals and 170 are migrant workers from a variety of different countries. In addition to the 854 permanent workers there are 471 agency workers of which 444 are migrant workers and 27 are UK workers. This means that there are 614 migrant workers on site of which 170 are permanent and 444 are agency workers.

It is important to distinguish between agency and migrant workers as we need to be aware of the different issues these two groups of workers face at work.



## Section 6: The Agency Workers' Directive

The European Union States have been discussing for a number of years the possible introduction of an Agency Workers' Directive. At present these discussions are stalled but the Trade Union Movement is lobbying for its early introduction.

The Directive would give UK agency workers the right to equal treatment with a comparable permanent employee on issues such as job security, pay, working time and holidays, maternity rights and protection against discrimination.

The Directive would also ensure that agency workers are informed of any vacant posts and that agency workers are not prevented from applying and accepting such posts once their assignment comes to an end. Further, the Directive would improve temporary agency workers' access to training and career development opportunities.

Some employers have argued that any Directive should only be effective after a qualifying period. The TUC supports the introduction of equal treatment rights for agency workers from day one. Labour Force Survey statistics (spring 2004) show that 74% of all UK agency workers would lose out on rights to equal treatment if a 12 month qualifying period were introduced, whilst 53% would lose out under a six month qualifying period.

Any qualifying period is likely to lead to employers using short-term contracts to avoid the new rights, which would mean many agency workers would never benefit from new rights.

Usdaw, along with the TUC, believes any Agency Workers' Directive should give agency workers rights to equal treatment from day one.

## Section 7: Case Study

A food manufacturing site situated in Scotland has nearly 900 permanent members of staff. Nearly 20% of the permanent employees are migrant workers. This workplace with a sizeable migrant workforce is well on the way to getting organised. Nearly 95% of permanent migrant workers have joined Usdaw and a Polish rep has joined the team of Usdaw reps on site.

The reps on site, with the assistance of their Usdaw Area Organiser, have put in place a number of initiatives to appeal to migrant workers:

- Union reps and safety reps have their position in English and Polish on their hard hat.
- A statement to agency workers from the Union has been translated into Polish.
- Other letters and leaflets have been translated by workers on site.
- An audio tape in Polish is played to new starters.
- Plans are in place to set up a learning centre and to provide English lessons.
- The 'recruit a friend to Usdaw' prize draw is publicised in English and Polish.
- Extra effort was put into identifying at least one migrant worker Union rep.

The end result of this work is high levels of membership across all sections of the workforce and an integrated workforce where everyone is treated equally. As a result, Usdaw is in a stronger position to engage in meaningful negotiations with the employer on terms and conditions of employment.

One breakthrough has been an agreement with the employer that there is an annual review of the use of agency staff. At the same time as the review takes place agency staff who meet certain criteria are offered permanent jobs with the main employer. The reps have had more success in the annual pay negotiations. The Union has also made progress on Lifelong Learning and is close to delivering a learning centre on site.

On a wider level there are now fewer issues on site about the integration of workers from different cultures. Migrant workers feel they are being treated as equals and no longer feel they are viewed as 'second class citizens'. Workers from the UK work alongside workers from Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Reps are able to take up issues on behalf of all members regardless of their nationality and get results.

In this workplace Usdaw reps and officials have worked creatively to get the Union's message to all parts of the workforce. Reps and officials have had to take into consideration cultural differences and issues around language to successfully organise the workplace.



## Section 8: Agency and Migrant Workers – What have we Done so Far?

Officials and reps in Usdaw have done a fantastic job in getting workplaces organised and we have a number of examples where creative thinking and hard work have helped not only to build levels of membership but also to get results for our members.

The case study on page 13 is one example of many workplaces where we have successfully helped to protect and enhance the working conditions of all workers. This can only be achieved if the Union organises all workers, irrespective of their nationality.

The Union has worked hard to ensure that we base decisions around migrant workers on fact and on what is really happening in the workplace. Surveys have helped us to get the bigger picture and we have supplemented this with a number of site visits to explore in depth the issues affecting both UK and migrant workers.

### Leaflets in Other Languages

The Union has produced a number of publications in a variety of different languages.

Polish is by far the most common language spoken by migrant workers resulting in more material being produced in this language.

The Union has produced a general recruitment leaflet published in different languages.

Additionally, other material has been translated on an ad hoc basis. For example, the complexity of a pay ballot at a distribution site meant that the details of the offer had to be translated into Polish to ensure that all workers understood the offer.



Locally produced materials in other languages have also been used at sites across the UK. Often, it has proved more effective for reps and officials to choose the materials they need specifically for a particular workplace and to then get them translated locally.



## Usdaw Reps

Key to any well organised workplace is well trained, developed and supported reps. This has meant working on two levels.

Firstly, we have delivered training courses for reps about the need to organise migrant workers and how to go about doing so. It has been important to help reps understand what is happening and to devise strategies and practical measures around migrant and agency worker issues.

Other courses have linked in with helping overcome language difficulties through the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses – see page 20 for more details on Usdaw’s campaigning around ESOL.

Secondly, we have ensured that we identify reps who are themselves migrant workers. Once identified, we have ensured that proper training and support is available. We have even run a course specifically for Polish reps with a Polish speaking tutor.

## Agency Agreements

Organising agency workers means getting recognition, recruiting agency workers and winning improved pay and conditions.

Usdaw has signed a recognition and procedural agreement with Staffline Recruitment Group plc. We are seeking agreements with other agencies as part of our on-going strategy to organise agency workers.

The agreement with Staffline provides us with a model for future agreements.



# Section 9: Agency Workers – The Way Forward

Usdaw believes that agency workers should have rights to equal pay and treatment at work. The Union supports the TUC in pushing for the Agency Workers' Directive to be implemented in the UK and across the European Union. This would give agency workers the same fundamental working rights as other workers.

An Agency Workers' Directive would help protect agency workers by giving them the right to the same treatment as permanent staff with regard to pay, working time, holidays, protection against discrimination and a legal remedy for unfair dismissal.

## Negotiating Around Agency Working

The use of agency workers is an important issue on the Union's bargaining agenda. Usdaw accepts that there may be a need for employers to use agency workers to cover changes in workload caused by demands at different times of the year, or fluctuations in customer orders, etc. We do not accept, however, that a large proportion of any workforce should be made up of agency workers.

Usdaw believes that the vast majority of any workforce should be permanent employees.

The Union will negotiate with those employers who use agency workers to ensure that:

- The employer only uses reputable agencies who have decent standards of employment and meet certain minimum standards.
- The employer has clear guidelines to ensure that agencies achieve and maintain decent minimum standards of employment.
- The employer justifies the use of agency workers and gives an explanation as to why such workers cannot be permanent employees.
- Agreement is reached as to the use of agency workers in terms of the numbers employed and the work carried out.
- The employer does what they can to help Usdaw achieve recognition with the agency provider.
- We can influence the terms and conditions of our members who are agency workers through negotiation with the employer and the agency.
- Our agency members have access to meaningful grievance and disciplinary procedures (with no fear of reprisals).

One of our aims is to have a workforce that is predominately made up of permanent employees. We want to see the use of agency labour limited and the permanent workforce expand. The Union wants to ensure that there are agreed procedures to allow both local people and agency workers the opportunity to apply to become permanent employees.

Usdaw is seeking to organise agency workers and we will seek recognition agreements with more agency providers. On the back of these agreements we will campaign to recruit agency workers into Usdaw.

## Usdaw and Agency Workers

At the same time as we are pushing for better rights at work for agency workers, we are also looking at what we can do to ensure that agency workers see Usdaw as the trade union for them.

This will mean that when potential members who are agency workers ask us why they should join the Union we will be able to answer that Usdaw will work for:

- Job security and fair treatment at work.
- Effective workplace representation and meaningful disciplinary and grievance procedures.
- Agency staff to have the opportunity to become permanent employees.

Agency workers who are also migrant workers will, of course, also benefit from the other work we plan to carry out detailed in the rest of this Statement.

The message is simple – if you are an agency worker you need to be in Usdaw. If you are a permanent worker working alongside an agency worker, you need to ensure that agency workers join the Union so we can work to protect and improve the pay and conditions of both agency and permanent workers.



# Section 10: Migrant Workers – The Way Forward

The Union's aim is to protect everyone's terms and conditions of employment through high levels of Usdaw membership across all of the areas in which we represent members. This means that the Union must get across this message to migrant workers and those who work alongside them.

We need to make sure that Usdaw, as well as delivering for all our members, is reaching out to migrant workers. To help in organising migrant workers the Union will:

- Develop the range of materials available (in a variety of different languages) to aid recruitment. This will include translating existing leaflets, posters, etc as well as producing new materials aimed specifically at migrant workers.
- Look at what more can be done to encourage migrant workers to come forward as Usdaw activists and how we can ensure that such reps are properly resourced, trained and supported.
- Extend the Union's Lifelong Learning work to ensure that our migrant worker members have access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses as close to the workplace as possible. Section 11 gives more information about ESOL and the campaign to ensure that such courses are affordable for those who need them the most.
- Review the support services the Union offers starting with the 'welcome information' we provide for migrant workers.
- Provide training that will help raise awareness of the issues affecting agency and migrant workers and help spread 'best practice' on how to organise them. In particular, we will build on courses that have already been piloted.
- Carry out a review as to how we can provide fast, accurate and reliable translation services for officials, activists and members across the range of languages spoken by migrant workers in the UK. This will include building a network of activists who can help with translation.

# Section 11: Learning English and Building Solidarity

Most migrant workers are keen to improve their English language skills in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. A lack of English skills makes it difficult to get what you are entitled to, leaves you vulnerable to abuse and makes it difficult to integrate.

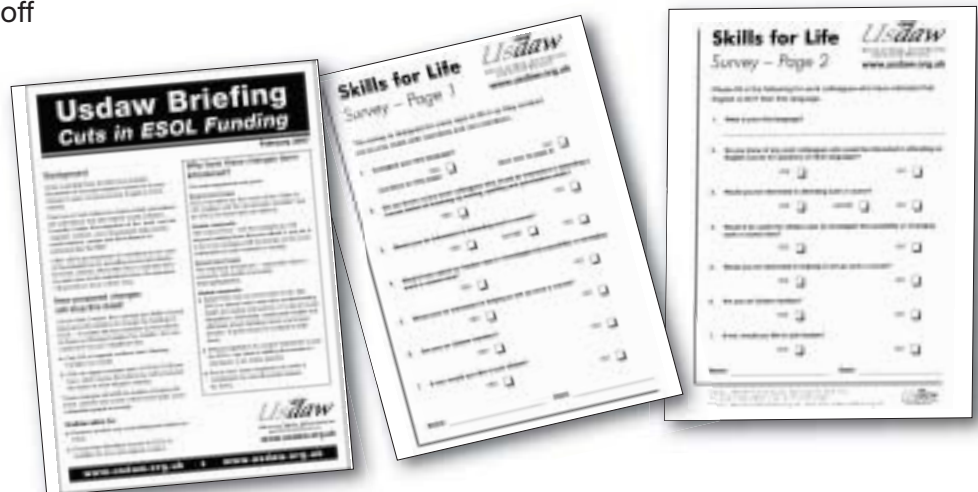
Usdaw Union Learning Reps have helped hundreds of Usdaw migrant worker members access ESOL classes. This not only gives migrant workers more confidence, it also helps ensure safety procedures are understood and followed. Above all, it helps develop cohesion and solidarity within the workplace and the community.

Usdaw reps at many sites have negotiated with employers to help make ESOL accessible for migrant worker members. Different employers have agreed to a range of measures from providing facilities for classes in the workplace and allowing shift changes to attend classes to providing paid time off to attend classes.

Unfortunately, in the summer of 2006 the Government announced that ESOL classes would no longer be fully funded – on the assumption that employers would voluntarily pay for ESOL classes. This has not happened, and low paid migrant workers have been forced to find the money to pay for their classes themselves – or stop attending.

Usdaw is campaigning to ensure that affordable access to ESOL is available for low paid migrant workers. This has involved lobbying MPs, speaking at meetings and tabling a Parliamentary Early Day Motion that was supported by many Labour MPs.

Usdaw Union Learning Reps are continuing to try to make affordable ESOL learning accessible through negotiating with employers, at the same time Usdaw is campaigning more widely to persuade the Government to keep ESOL classes affordable.



# Section 12: Checklist – Organising Migrant Workers

## Checklist – Organising Migrant Workers



### Map your workplace so you know:

- *Who works where and when.*
- *Who's in the Union.*
- *Who's not.*
- *Languages spoken.*

Also, identify if particular groups of workers are less likely to join.



### Carry out an organising audit of your workplace so you know:

- *What shifts or areas do not have a rep.*
- *Is there a need for migrant worker reps.*
- *What help you need with translation and speaking to workers who may not speak much English.*
- *What training reps require.*
- *What needs to be done to raise the profile of Usdaw in the workplace.*



### Arrange regular meetings of the reps on site so you can discuss:

- *Levels of membership.*
- *Attendance at inductions of new starters.*
- *Issues that affect workers.*
- *How to take up these issues.*



### Review the leaflets and publications you use, so you can:

- *Ensure the noticeboard is up to date.*
- *Have a stock of leaflets in other languages.*
- *Decide which leaflets can be handed out to different groups of members and potential members.*



### Talk to your employer about induction sessions, so you can:

- *Make sure that a rep is present at every session.*
- *Make sure each rep knows what they are going to say at the induction.*
- *Overcome any language problems, with the employer providing a translator if necessary.*



### Produce an organising plan for your workplace, so you can:

- *Have a plan as to how you are going to recruit the non-members in your workplace.*
- *Know that every induction session will be covered.*
- *Know how you are going to take up issues on behalf of your members.*

# Summary

Migration of labour is more common today than it has been in the history of the world economy. Trade unions will remain relevant only if we re-double our efforts to organise all workers in the modern workplace.

International migration of labour is a two-way process. More and more people born in the UK are living and working abroad. At the same time, there have been increased numbers of migrant workers coming to work in the UK.

The growth of the global economy is creating an increasingly diverse UK workforce drawn from many different backgrounds. To be effective, Usdaw needs to recruit and organise all parts of this increasingly diverse workforce.

Many myths have appeared about the impact of migrant workers in the UK. In any debate we need to be clear about the facts and not make policy on the back of untruths and half-truths peddled by sections of the press.

The evidence is that migrant workers make a positive contribution to the economy. For example, migrant workers are contributing more to the economy in taxes than they receive in public services.

The biggest myth is that the arrival of migrant workers is leading to unemployment. Migrant workers are often filling hard to fill jobs. If migrant labour wasn't available some workplaces would struggle to survive.

Alongside the increase in labour migration from the EU, there has been a growth in the use of agency labour.

Udaw accepts that agency labour may be needed by businesses to cover short-term and seasonal changes in demand. But legitimate concerns have been raised that permanent jobs are being undermined by employers' over-use of agency labour. Some employers are using migrant agency workers as a cheap labour option.

The exploitation of agency workers needs to be tackled to ensure they get equal treatment. Usdaw is committed to recruiting, organising and winning trade union recognition for agency workers in order to achieve this.

Udaw, alongside the TUC, is campaigning for an Agency Workers' Directive that will guarantee agency workers rights to equal pay and treatment from day one. While agency labour can legally be hired at a lower cost than the permanent workforce, some employers will exploit agency workers and undercut existing terms and conditions.

A lot of agencies employ a mainly migrant workforce but it is important to remember that not all migrant workers are agency workers. Many migrant workers are directly employed in core jobs.

Usdaw is committed to organising migrant workers to ensure that all workers are treated fairly at work irrespective of their country of origin. Also, we need to continue to build our levels of membership in order to get the best deals in negotiations for all our members.

The Union faces a number of challenges in organising migrant workers, not least problems resulting from language difficulties. Already the Union has taken steps to produce recruitment and other organising materials in other languages besides English.

Usdaw has successfully organised migrant workers in many workplaces by working creatively to get the Union's message to all parts of the workforce. Reps and officials have had to take into consideration cultural differences and issues around language to successfully organise the workplace.

To help in organising migrant workers the Union will develop more recruitment and organising materials available in a range of languages. The Union will also work to ensure our migrant worker membership has access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. Through these initiatives the Union aims to encourage more migrant workers to join and become active in the Union.

In conclusion, this Executive Council Statement re-affirms Usdaw's commitment to organising migrant workers.



# Appendix 1: Order Form for Recruitment Leaflets in Other Languages

## Recruitment leaflets in 35 different languages

**Usdaw**  
 Union of Shop, Distributive  
 and Allied Workers

[www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk)

Usdaw has a basic recruitment leaflet "Six Good Reasons to Join Usdaw", now available in 35 different languages.

The leaflet is primarily a recruitment tool designed to enable officers, reps and members recruit migrant and overseas workers.

The languages it is available in are listed below. Please indicate which language(s) and quantities you require by filling in the appropriate boxes.

### West Europe

	Qty
French	<input type="checkbox"/>
Italian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Portuguese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Eastern Europe

	Qty
Albanian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Belorussian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bosnian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bulgarian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Czech	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hungarian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Latvian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lithuanian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Romanian (includes Moldovian)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Russian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serb-Croat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slovakian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ukrainian	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Africa

	Qty
Amharic (Ethiopia)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somali	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yoruba (Nigeria)	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Middle East and North Africa

	Qty
Arabic (includes Iraq)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kurdish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushto (Afghanistan)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turkish	<input type="checkbox"/>

### East Asia

	Qty
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philippino	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tamil	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thai	<input type="checkbox"/>

### South Asia

	Qty
Bangala	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gujerati	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punjabi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urdu	<input type="checkbox"/>



Please complete and return to:  
 EQUALITIES SECTION, Usdaw, FREEPOST NAT19525, Manchester M14 7DJ

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

# Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

**Usdaw**  
*Union of Shop, Distributive  
and Allied Workers*



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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