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UK workplaces ‘less accepting to foreign workers after Brexit’

19 Jun 2019 By Annie Makoff-Clark

Poll finds almost one in 10 overseas-born employees has left a job because they didn’t fit in



Nearly one in 10 workers born overseas left a job in the UK due to culture clashes, as workplaces have become ‘less accepting’ since the EU referendum, new research has suggested.

A poll of UK workers – including both UK nationals and those from overseas – found 8 per cent of non-native respondents had left a job because they did not feel they fitted in sufficiently.

The survey, conducted by Jobsite for its report *Lost in Translation* (<https://www.jobsite.co.uk/worklife/lost-in-translation/>), also found nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of workers in multicultural teams felt their workplace had become less accepting of non-British colleagues since the European referendum.

Alex Sydney, director of Jobsite, urged employers to do all they can to champion diversity and multiculturalism but warned that not all cultural issues could be solved by having policies in place.

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“Employers and employees alike should focus on fostering an inclusive, welcoming team and an atmosphere that allows for sharing experiences and learning,” she said.

Helen Jamieson, founder of Jaluch HR, told *People Management* the political and social environment around Brexit had created a sense of instability among the general public, which may have led to less inclusive views and behaviour becoming entrenched in the workplace.

But Jamieson said these views tended to be as much an expression of self-preservation as exclusion.

“This entrenchment manifests as sticking with who you know and digging in, derived from a desire to self-protect, so it’s really about ‘me protecting me’, not ‘me excluding you’ – in this case, the non-UK worker,” she said.

“But in my view, we’re fighting the wrong battle. Trying to get rid of people with intolerances or dislikes is a waste of energy. Instead, let’s help them learn how to explore and manage [intolerance] instead.”

The Jobsite report, which polled 1,011 UK-born and 1,009 foreign born workers in April 2019, found more than a third (35 per cent) of those born abroad said they suspected their nationality had a negative impact on career progression, while 13 per cent believed they had been overlooked for promotion and just under half (44 per cent) wanted their employer to ‘do more’ to promote cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

This was despite 95 per cent of UK respondents believing their workplace embraced multiculturalism and diversity.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there are an estimated 3.56 million non-British workers in employment across Britain, which Jobsite said accounted for around 17 per cent of the total UK workforce.

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of UK staff currently work within multicultural teams, yet the report suggested cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication were increasingly causing problems. More than eight in 10 (84 per cent) employees reported experiencing a cultural-related misunderstanding, whether deriving from accent, cultural references, body language or colloquialisms.

Barry Stanton, partner and head of employment at law firm Boyes Turner, said it was HR's role to ensure everyone was aware of the benefits of a diverse workforce and to ensure managers were seen to be positively embracing a culture of diversity.

"It is also important that they reinforce the knowledge and understanding that should be present in the workforce about the need for tolerance and the potential implications of what, to some, may be perceived as 'banter', but for others, may be deeply hurtful and distressing," he said.

Chris Tutton, partner at Synchrony Law, told *People Management* he had seen an increase in workplace discrimination claims since Brexit, and called on businesses to demonstrate to staff they remained committed to diversity and inclusion. "They also need to ensure that equal opportunity policies remain up to date and staff receive training," he added.

The Jobsite research follows a report by ADP which revealed workplace discrimination is higher in the UK than elsewhere in Europe. Two in five (38 per cent) UK respondents said they had experienced workplace discrimination relating to either age, gender, appearance and race/nationality, compared to 30 per cent in the rest of the Europe. While workplace discrimination decreased across mainland Europe in 2018, the UK saw a 1 per cent rise.

Jeff Phipps managing director at ADP UK, said the research showed a "worrying pattern" that was not changing: "While other European countries seem to be reversing the trend of workplace discrimination, employees say it is simply becoming worse here in the UK," he said.

Back in March, *People Management* reported that employers were [still taking the wrong approach to diversity](https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/employers-still-taking-wrong-approach-to-diversity) (<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/employers-still-taking-wrong-approach-to-diversity>). Experts speaking at the Future Talent Conference urged HR leaders to think of diversity as a "strategic initiative" instead of a policy.



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