

## Changing status, changing lives? The socio-economic impact of EU accession on low wage migrant labour in the UK

### Background

*Changing status, changing lives?* was motivated by the accession of ten new countries to the European Union (EU) on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. The ten accession states include the “A8 countries” - comprising the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia - plus Cyprus and Malta. Among the member states of the pre-enlarged EU (EU15) only Sweden, Ireland and the UK granted A8 nationals free access to the labour market immediately upon EU enlargement. This enabled A8 workers to migrate and take up employment in the UK without restrictions (as long as they registered in the Worker Registration Scheme). It also meant that overnight A8 nationals who were already working in the UK before EU enlargement experienced a “change of status” acquiring, most of the rights of an EU national. This included the right to live and work without restrictions, to remain permanently in the UK, and to bring in dependants to join them. For A8 nationals in the UK illegally, 1<sup>st</sup> May was, in effect, an amnesty. For those in the UK legally but with restrictions on the work that they were permitted to do, acquiring EU rights has given them the freedom to change employers and sectors.

### Aims and Objectives

*Changing status, changing lives?* aims to study the consequences of granting on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, most of the economic and social rights of an EU national to A8 nationals **who were already working in the UK before 1<sup>st</sup> May** with “legal” or “illegal” status. It sets out to address three sets of research questions:

- What are Central and East European migrants’ experiences and perceptions of working in low-wage jobs in the UK? What is the role of immigration status – including “illegal residence” - in determining migrants’ experiences and outcomes in the labour market?
- What is the nature of employers’ demand for migrant labour? How are employers meeting their demand for migrants? What is the role of migrants’ immigration status in employers’ recruitment decisions?
- What are Central and East European migrants’ experiences and perceptions of life in the UK outside the workplace? How is this affected by immigration status?

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

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## Methods

The project has worked at formulating an interactive methodology drawing on quantitative (survey) and qualitative (in-depth interviews and diaries) methods. Both survey and in-depth interviews are exploratory and contemporaneous, and, when applied to migrants, conducted in the interviewees' mother tongue. Most of the data collected were purposely selected rather than randomly chosen. This means that the samples are not representative. While the results of any analysis are thus not generalisable, they do serve as an indication of potential patterns and relationships. *Changing Status Changing Lives?* comprises two waves of research. Wave 1 was conducted between March and May 2004 and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC); Wave 2 was conducted between November 2004 and July 2005 and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). The study focused on the employment of migrants in four sectors: agriculture, construction, hospitality and au pairs. Four accession nationalities were selected for study on the basis of their prominence in the UK's legal schemes for employing migrants in low-wage occupations: Czech, Slovak, Lithuanian and Polish. As a comparison group of people whose immigration status would not change with EU enlargement we selected Ukrainian and Bulgarian migrants.

Data gathered include:

- Survey interviews with migrant workers and au-pairs (wave1 n= 333, wave2 re-interviews n=109, retrospective interviews n= 243; total survey respondents = 578)
- In-depth interviews with migrant workers and au-pairs (wave1 n=51, wave2 re-interviews n=20, retrospective interviews n=42; total interviewees = 93)
- In-depth interviews with employers, host families, and recruitment agents (wave1 n= 44, wave2 n= 33)
- Mail survey of host families (January 2005 n=268, response rate 33%)
- Mail survey of employers (April-July 2005 n=365, response rate 6.8%)
- Migrants' diaries (Nov 2004-May 2005 n=8)
- Interviews with key informants and stakeholders (May-June 2005 n=16)

### Outputs:

- "Immigration status and *compliance*: Exploring "illegality" in the employment of migrant workers" -Paper prepared for British Journal of Industrial Relations conference March 2006.
- "A fair deal? Central and East European migrant workers in low wage employment in the UK" - To be published by the JRF May 2006.
- "Changing Status, Changing Lives: Methods and participants" - Available on the project website May 2006.
- "Life in the UK for Central and Eastern European migrant workers" - To be published by the JRF October 2006.

Other academic articles, seminars and policy events are also planned for 2006/7. A full timetable of papers and events will be made available on the project website: <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/changingstatus/>

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