

## Project: Immigrant Work Strategies and Networks in London

### Synopsis

This project aims to investigate the role of immigrant work strategies and their networks in the process of integration into the UK, and specifically in London. The project focuses on four immigrant groups – Ghanaians, Portuguese, Romanians and Turkish – and one sample of British-born people. The research involves surveys, in-depth interviews and informal interviews with relevant parties such as community associations, local government officers and NGOs.

### Background

In Britain today there is a perception that asylum seekers, irregular migrants and other 'shady' migrant groups and ethnic minorities are driving the growth of a hitherto non-existent informal economy. Deregulated labour markets lead to flexible and casualised labour and this in turn can lead to high and low wage sectors, unregulated work and an informal sector. However, the public perception is that immigrants and other ethnic minorities are the direct cause of these effects. These groups are seen to be hiding from the law - through tax evasion, through circumvention of labour laws, by being instrumental in lowering wages and by defrauding the public purse through social security scams. While there seems to be a moral panic about asylum seekers and the asylum process, the 'pull' factors in the UK economy and policies that attract irregular migrants and undocumented workers have been, until recently, conveniently ignored. Some governments have chosen to ignore parts of the informal sector in order to allow some industries or firms to compete in the international markets and to subdue protest about inadequate delivery of services and jobs.

The **overall aim of the project** is to chart the work strategies (including formal and informal work) of several groups of recently arrived immigrants to the UK and to explore how these strategies are shaped or mediated by their social networks. Immigrant work strategies and their social networks are likely to have a considerable effect on their settlement patterns and their accommodation/integration into the local and national imagined community. The **relevance and significance** of this project is three-fold. First, to provide in-depth knowledge about immigrant work strategies and trajectories in a globalized and segmented labour market. Second, to illustrate the importance of immigrant social networks, both transnational and local, in the process of settlement and immigrant accommodation into a culturally diverse society. Third, to provide evidence for policy makers, such as the importance of training and labour market programs for immigrants; that may benefit from a deeper understanding of immigrant networks, and processes of participation and inclusion in a culturally diverse society.

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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## Aims

1. to examine the legal, policy, institutional and economic factors that lead immigrants into informal employment;
2. to investigate the immigrant work strategies (both formal and informal employment) in various localities;
3. to explore how these economic and social work strategies are shaped or mediated by their social networks;
4. to analyse the effects of particular work strategies (ie informal employment) on settlement process and immigrant accommodation/participation/integration.

## Methods

- 155 survey **questionnaires** have now been completed, covering demographic questions and other specific information with immigrants. There were approximately 30 from each of the selected groups,
- Follow-up **in-depth interviews** with the most 'informative' subjects – approx 10 from each group have been completed.
- Approximately 10-15 **semi-structured interviews** with 'experts' and 'gate-keepers' were conducted.

An approximate equal number of women and men were included in order to cover gender differences. The interviews were taped wherever possible though, given the delicate nature of the topic being addressed (involving informality and illegality), some preferred not to be recorded. We adopted snow-ball technique in the selection of samples and in order to minimize sample bias, we sought multiple access points. SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data, while NVivo will be used to order qualitative data.

## Work In Progress

Most of the field work has been completed and data analysis has begun. 5 conference papers have already been delivered (by Ellie Vasta and Aykan Erdemir) on conceptual issues and early data. A briefing on the main project findings is currently being prepared for the respondents, their communities and relevant NGOs and other user groups. Numerous conference papers and articles are also planned for 2006, as well as monograph.

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**Timetable:** Analysis and write up to be completed by December 2006

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