



## **Fact sheet: Roma from EU Member States and employment conditions in the UK**

Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe and regarded as the most vulnerable and marginalised group. The first Roma from Eastern Europe came to the UK in the 1990s seeking asylum to escape persecution. Since the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007, many more Roma have moved legally to the UK to find work, equal opportunities and a good education for their children (economic and social rights largely denied them in their countries of origin), and to escape racism and discrimination. They have established significant communities in the north of England, the East Midlands, Kent and north and east London. It is not known how many Roma live in the UK<sup>1</sup>. The best estimate is around 500,000. Many Roma avoid declaring their ethnicity.

### Employment restrictions

The UK government imposed employment restrictions on nationals from the new EU Member States, including those of Roma ethnicity. From 2004, those from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia or Slovenia have had to register under the Worker Registration Scheme<sup>2</sup>. Under European Union law, this scheme cannot continue beyond the end of April 2011. From 2007, those from Romania and Bulgaria can only be self-employed or in short-term agricultural work under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS). Otherwise the employer has to apply for a work permit and, if this is granted, then the national must apply for an Accession Worker card (a process to be completed before employment can legally begin)<sup>3</sup>. These employment restrictions make it much harder for Roma to work legally, and makes them more vulnerable to gangmasters and recruitment/employment agencies operating illegally. It has forced many Romanian Roma families to hide from the authorities, not send children to school, register with GPs or access other support. And increased the incidence of petty crime.

Equality strongly advocates for employment restrictions to be lifted, to allow Roma more opportunity to break out of a cycle of poverty and exploitation.

### Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme

The SAWS allows farmers and growers in the UK to recruit Bulgarian and Romanian nationals to plant, gather, process and pack crops and handle livestock for up to six months duration. The scheme works on a quota basis (21,250 places a year) and workers are issued with a work card. Workers must be paid at least the Agricultural Minimum Wage and be provided with accommodation<sup>4</sup>.

### Situation of Roma in the UK

A survey conducted in 2009 '*The movement of Roma from new EU Member States: A mapping survey of A2 and A8 Roma in England (Patterns of settlement and current situation of new Roma communities in England)*'<sup>5</sup> showed that many Roma in the UK work for low wages on temporary contracts organised by gangmasters and recruitment/employment agencies. Their vulnerable position is often exploited. Many live in sub-standard, overcrowded accommodation, shared with other families. This often leads to poor health, and low school attendance and attainment by children.

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Roma from the new EU Member States arriving in the UK usually have established contacts, either friends or family. They will often know where to get accommodation and where to look for work in the black economy. Their poor situation may lead them to take any work available, often paid well below the minimum legal wage.

Equality advocates for stricter enforcement of the Gangmasters Licensing Act to combat exploitation of Roma by illegally-operating gangmasters and employment agencies.

#### Trafficking in human beings and exploitation: Roma

Trafficking<sup>6</sup> of young Roma from EU Member States is still proportionally rare. Despite anecdotal evidence, to date, no research has been conducted in the UK on the phenomenon of trafficking of Roma.<sup>7</sup> Some Roma adults do not believe they are engaging in trafficking or exploitation if a group of young people (under 18 years of age) to whom they are related, are brought to the UK with the consent of the parents and the young people in order to work and send money back to their family to survive poverty or buy property. However, it is exploitive, if the young people are under legal working age<sup>8</sup>. They should be attending school or in some form of training.

Anecdotal evidence indicates there is also a small number of people (often non-Roma) who traffic groups of Roma people, including young Roma under 18 years of age, to whom they have no family connection, for the purpose of labour exploitation and commercial gain.

The trafficking of young Roma from families for the purposes of prostitution is rare and government figures which are by no means comprehensive would seem to confirm this.

Equality wholeheartedly condemns trafficking of both children and adults for any purpose, whether the traffickers are from the Roma community or, as is often the case, not.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on Roma in the UK at <http://equality.uk.com/Roma.html>

<sup>2</sup> Workers Registration Scheme see <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/wrs/>

<sup>3</sup> Employment of Bulgarian and Romanian nationals see <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/bulgariaromania/>

<sup>4</sup> Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme see <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/saws/>

<sup>5</sup> Research by Lucie Fremlova and Heather Ureche. Report available at <http://equality.uk.com/Resources.html>

<sup>6</sup> 'Palermo' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Article 3 use of terms:

( a ) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

( b ) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph ( a ) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph ( a ) have been used;

( c ) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph ( a ) of this article;

( d ) "Child" shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/protocoltraffic.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Preliminary findings of a recent European Roma Rights Centre/People in Need Slovakia research project conducted in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia on the trafficking of Romani children, men and women indicate that Roma are at a disproportionately high risk of trafficking due to low socio-economic status, low educational achievements, high unemployment and pervasive racism and discrimination.

<sup>8</sup> There are special laws to protect the employment rights of young workers 16 - 18 years old in the UK. These concern health and safety, the jobs they can do, and how many hours they can work