



EMBRACE NI
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Poverty & Destitution Experienced by People from Other Countries

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Most newcomers come here and live successful lives, earn enough to live comfortably, contribute to and integrate well in local communities. A few are less fortunate. People in some categories are particularly vulnerable:

A8 Nationals

Eight additional countries joined the European Union in 2004. People from these A8 countries, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, used to have to be in registered employment for 12 months before they could be considered for eligibility for most benefits. From May 2011 they will be in the same situation as other longstanding EU members, who have much the same entitlements as local people, once they pass a 'habitual residence' test. However failure to register in the past may affect their status in passing the preliminary 'right to reside' hurdle and leave them ineligible for support.

Romanian and Bulgarian (A2) Nationals

When Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU their nationals were not given full access to jobs here. They can get permits as skilled workers or work here on a self-employed basis but they cannot apply for jobs in the normal job market. Most are excluded from welfare entitlements.

People from Outside the European Economic Area

People recruited here for skilled work enter on work permits. Their passports are stamped 'No recourse to public funds'. They have no safety net if they lose their jobs and it can now take up to 8 years to get residency or citizenship in order to acquire the same rights as the rest of us.

People in the Asylum System

Most people who seek asylum here are offered accommodation and some financial support while their case is being heard. They are usually penniless when they arrive and may experience destitution until their support begins. During their claim there can be glitches in support and some may also experience difficulty in accessing a job or normal benefits when their claim is successful, and they lose their asylum cash support and accommodation. Failed asylum applicants lose their support and, if they cannot safely be returned home immediately they have to make a case for emergency assistance. Many end up completely destitute, relying on charity.

Relationship Breakdown and Domestic Violence

Some people's rights and immigration status depend on the fact that their partner/spouse is working here. If they leave the household because of relationship breakdown or abuse, or are abandoned, some may lose financial support without the hope that the state will assist them and others may lose their right even to stay here.

The Reality of Job Loss for Foreign Nationals

People whose short-term contracts have ended, or who have lost their jobs can become homeless quite quickly. They may lose tied accommodation or flat mates find it impossible to support them for long. Savings are quickly used up, especially if they may have been sending money home to their families. If they have no right to welfare benefits, hostels supported by the Housing Executive will often deny them a bed. Having no welfare support also makes it difficult to access other rights. For example, Eriks Prenclavs, an A8 national lost his sight in an accident at work. Because he was not in registered employment he is without welfare support while he tries to get financial compensation and continue his rehabilitation.

Irregular Migrants and Trafficked People

Some people have no legal right to be here and are often labelled 'illegal immigrants' but many have come here legally and a change in circumstances means that they have lost their right to stay. In 2004, for example, Oksana Sukhanova from the Ukraine, who was here with a work permit, lost her job, her tied accommodation and therefore her right to remain. She had no entitlement to housing or welfare support and when her money ran out she slept rough, got frostbite and had to have her lower legs amputated. Information about rights is better now and some emergency support can be available for vulnerable people, but the situation is largely unchanged.

Some people may have been tricked out of large amounts of money and come here to find there is no job and no prospect of employment. Others may be in the control of people who trap them into forced labour such as prostitution, the growing of cannabis, or domestic servitude. They often stay with their captors partly because they fear that they will not be believed and will be treated as criminals. They may also have language difficulties and little knowledge of their rights.

Life on the Streets

Anyone who ends up sleeping rough is vulnerable to the temptations of crime and substance abuse and they are also in danger due to hunger, depression, disease, hypothermia and physical attack. People die on the streets each year. Foreign nationals on the streets are also especially vulnerable to racist abuse.

Action

Concerned NGOs are lobbying local politicians to provide emergency support for destitute migrant people who fall into the gaps in welfare provision. The **EMBRACE Emergency Fund** and **Embrace on the Street** project both support the needs of destitute people from other countries through recognised homelessness and refugee support groups. See <http://www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/projects/>

Further reading:

Roisin Devlin, and Sorcha McKenna. *No Home From Home, an Investigative Report into Homelessness and People who are Excluded from Accessing Public Funds.*

Belfast: NI Human Rights Commission, 2009.

[www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/108/No_Home_from_Home_\(September_2009\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/108/No_Home_from_Home_(September_2009).pdf)

House of Commons briefing on the Habitual Residence Test:

<http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsp-00416.pdf>

Blue Blindfold anti-trafficking web site: <http://www.blueblindfold.co.uk/>