



# UNMET NEEDS OF MIGRANT COMMUNITIES FROM EUROPE:

Particularly EU 10 And EU 2 Member States

A Discussion Paper

**Beth Wilson | Bristol Refugee Rights**

beth@bristolrefugeerights.org  
www.bristolrefugeerights.org

**David Jepson | ACH**

david.jepson@ach.org.uk  
www.ach.org.uk

# Background

**Over the last ten years the number of inhabitants in Bristol who were not born in the UK has risen to more than 67,000 or 15% of the population.** A very significant element of this has been the arrival of migrant workers from countries in Central and Eastern Europe which joined the EU in 2004 with two further countries joining (Bulgaria / Romania) in 2007. The largest component of this were people from Poland with an estimated 15,000 residents of Polish origin now living in the city. There are also numbers from Latvia, Lithuania, Slovak Republic and Romania. Within Bristol, many migrant workers live in Lawrence Hill, Easton, Ashley and also Lockleaze, Avonmouth Cabot, St George and other areas with cheaper private rented properties. Whilst many are young and single seeing their stay as temporary, increasingly individuals have settled and have children at city schools.

**They tend to be young with 70% under 35 and well educated with 60% having a university or college qualification but many working in occupations well below their capability, in sectors such as manufacturing, transport and distribution, office and administrative work, retail, hospitality and leisure and social care. Many of these workers are women working in retail, hospitality and social care.** Often work in these sectors is precarious with low pay, little social protection and job security. Of course some highly qualified workers from Central and Eastern Europe are also playing significant roles in growth sectors such as business services, finance, health care and tech.

There is also a significant small business sector originating from these communities which includes retail and personal services aimed at the polish / migrant worker community, business services and self employed / micro / small firms in construction and property maintenance. Mainstream business support organisations have not really given any priority to this group.

ACH / Himilo deliver training, career advice, job search and employment advice to people from refugee and migrant communities, including direct working with employers. We also assist small businesses from refugee / migrant communities. **However, the numbers engaged from migrant communities from EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe has been very low.** ACH also provides housing for refugees only. BRR give humanitarian support, legal advice and information on financial support, housing and public services to asylum seekers and refugees including those with no recourse to public funds. **But have not as yet regarded migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (or elsewhere) as part of their target client group.**

Local data is very limited but at a national level, EEA (a wider group including more affluent member states) migrants included more than 25% not in housing in a decent state of repair, 30% could not save regularly and 35% were struggling financially. A study of a small number of polish migrant workers in Bristol revealed the health implications of precarious work undertaken by many. **Such workers**

**will be vulnerable to changes in demand or restructuring of sectors and individual businesses with those laid off not always eligible for benefits and so likely to lose their accommodation and be unable to return home or stay in the city.**

Over 3 million people have now applied to and had their application concluded to the EU Settled Status scheme. However, it is impossible to predict how many have not applied. It is understood that approximately 40 individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) have been accommodated by Bristol City Council as part of the Government's "Everybody In" programme and that some of these are EU nationals who may not have applied to the scheme. Although the Council are talking to the refugee sector about the Refused Asylum Seekers accommodated as part of "Everybody In", **we are concerned as to whether these other individuals have the same level of advocacy and support and are being referred appropriately for specialist legal advice, information and support.**

Bristol City Council has advised us that they believe there are a handful of young people in their care who should apply to the EU settled status scheme. This compares to the city of Leeds, a similar size to Bristol, where Social Services have identified around 70 young people in their care who should apply. **This, along with other factors, raises concerns about the robustness of Bristol City Council's processes for identifying these individuals.** WRAMAS is a Bristol City Council Welfare Benefits Advice

service which supports people to apply for welfare benefits. They report that although benefit entitlements for EEA nationals are substantially the same as for British citizens, there are additional hurdles to demonstrating entitlement and for many without advice and support, this can result in lengthy delays and/or refusal. Service such as WRAMAS are **already working at capacity, expecting a spike in demand as the furlough scheme comes to an end, and it is likely will struggle to meet the needs of EEA nationals. They will not be in a position to advertise or reach out to communities that area harder to reach.**

**The impact of the COVID19 crisis and other factors has led a small but significant number of individuals to become homeless and destitute** and now accommodated in city hotels such as the Holiday Inn, Travelodge and Arnos Vale. They are offered support by St Mungo's, City Council Homelessness Team and other agencies and includes help via the City Council Learning Communities Support Service-Move In, Move Out and Move Up which is specifically for EU/EEA nationals with NRPF, and also Future Bright employment scheme. Job drop in sessions at Holiday Inn, Travel Lodge, Arnos Vale are held. Individuals who have experienced homelessness, may also need support in relation to drug / alcohol dependency via Bristol Drug Project or in relation to other complex needs.

Though the numbers here are in the tens, this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg as many others are couch surfing, staying with friends,

sleeping in cars or other temporary arrangements. Initially, it is anticipated that many will approach individuals within their own communities and existing known and trusted networks for advice rather than unfamiliar government or the organised community sector.

This can be a positive step but may also lead to poor quality or incomplete information. **Even larger numbers are one step away from this situation being vulnerable to termination or unexpected reductions in work arrangements.** With the end of the furlough scheme and post lockdown redundancies leading to a large increase in those seeking jobs from all communities this situation would seem likely to get worse in the months ahead.

Whilst front line agencies are delivering vital support to those in most immediate and

identifiable need, **there is little in the way of pro active promotion or dissemination about the services and support which is available mainly due to lack of capacity and resources.** Further there is a lack of preventative intervention both to support this group from the immediate consequences of redundancy and loss of income and in terms of longer term support to access better quality, decent work through training, networking and career development.

**The city council now has a legal obligation to prevent homelessness** through the Homelessness Reduction Act, not just to respond to it once it has taken place. Those dependent on work in the gig / precarious economy are much more vulnerable in these circumstances.

## Capacity

Currently, BCC homelessness team and social care offer support to those who are identifiably suffering from impoverishment and destitution. Employment support schemes such as WECA funded Future Bright are also available. Within the voluntary sector, organisations such as St Mungo's, Bristol Drug Project are playing a vital role in offering front line help to this priority group. ACH and mainly BRR do have capabilities to deliver pro-active and preventative support which is currently targeted to other communities such as refugees and asylum seekers.

Within the Polish and new member state communities, there are a wide range of organisations and networks at national level covering representation and lobbying, support, culture and business. Locally the Polish Catholic Church on Cheltenham Rd plays an important role and there is also the Anglo Polish Association for Bristol and SW and the Polish Club. There are also formal and informal business support networks and locally. Business network meetings are also held from time to time. There are also important informal networks of professionals from within these communities.

# What is needed

The Polish community and indeed residents from EU10 and EU 2 member states **comprise a very significant element of the population of Bristol and make a major contribution to the economy.** They will have faced a number of challenges making their lives here uncertain including the general impact of austerity, Brexit with related proposed changes to the immigration system and most recently the Covid crisis. Some of these communities seem to have only integrated to a limited extent with cultural, social, civic and political processes and networks.

**Firstly, there is a wider need to encourage greater engagement from and with these communities within Bristol to ensure greater inclusion and to ensure their voice is heard at community and individual level and needs are met.** Here there is a need to map and engage with community organisations and networks, to identify any gaps and to explore mechanisms for improved engagement and communication. There is a need for the City Council and wider group of stakeholders to acknowledge the contribution these communities have made to the economy and life of the city and to make it clear that despite Brexit and Covid we welcome them to stay in Bristol and play a full part. It should also be noted that EU migrant workers in the UK have until now been eligible to vote in local and European elections. It is not clear whether the entitlement in relation to local elections will be retained after completion of the Brexit transition process.

**Secondly we need to ensure that the skills and experience available from these com-**

**munities are used to the maximum benefit of the economy and to the satisfaction of the individuals concerned.** There is evidence that many are working in jobs below their level of capability and small businesses lack capacity to fully utilise the entrepreneurial talent available. This reflects lack of resources, social capital and lack of access to wider social networks as well as lack of engagement with key agencies. Support in relation to careers advice, training, accessing employment in growth sectors as well as small business support should be better targeted at this group. Business support organisations have had little engagement with enterprises from this group and ACH entrepreneurship service, despite having dealt with dozens of businesses from many backgrounds have not had a single contact from firms of this type.

Also, the cumulative impact of sudden changes to the economy and labour market and key sectors such as leisure, transport and retail **will have posed the threat of destitution for many in precarious work and with little or no savings, insecure housing and often no recourse to public funds.** Some may regard themselves as being settled and resident in the UK with children at school or other caring or wider community roles. Others may not have the resources or willingness to return home. We need to focus and target advice and support for those from those communities who are experience impoverishment and destitution or at risk of it. This is needed not only for humanitarian and human rights reasons but also to reduce the long term impact on public spending which will increase where early support is not provided.

Finally, those who are not currently economically active and may be seen currently as a drain on the public purse **need proper support and advice to explore their options and achieve their potential.** For those accommodated as part of the “Everybody In” programme, there is a need for legal advice to ensure that they understand and secure their immigration status and the implications of their status on accessing the labour force and welfare benefits. For those the Council holds corporate parenting responsibilities, those in care, those leaving care, and those under the support of Adult Social care, equally there is a need to ensure support is provided to access EU settled status as a gateway to future economic activity. There is scope for greater information and dissemination concerning the help that is currently available to those who are destitute or at risk. This could take place via businesses, schools, children’s centres and other organisations. However, there is a lack of capacity to provide the information as well as to respond to the increase in demand for support that this would bring.

Further to these points above, it would seem that the **main strategic need is for a long term, sustainable and holistic approach to support to ensure better inclusion and integration for those who moved to Bristol from other EU member states to undertake vital work in the city.** This includes proactive measures to strengthen access to decent, long term work opportunities through careers advice, training and access to social capital and social networks. This would prevent many from being vulnerable to sudden changes of circumstances which are created through precarious jobs. Further, early intervention and advice for those who are at risk but prior to eviction or other consequences would be also an invaluable step. The City Council and organisations such as ACH, BRR and others all have a vital role to play in this approach which would save significant amounts of public money, would reduce the human cost and would be to the wider benefit of the economy of Bristol.

**Bristol Refugee Rights**  
Safety · Solidarity · Action for Change



**ACH**