



University  
of Glasgow



**SSAMIS**  
Social Support and  
Migration in Scotland

## **Submission to MAC call for evidence: EEA workers in the UK labour market**

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This submission is based on the results of the SSAMIS project (Social Support and Migration in Scotland: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/gramnet/research/ssamis/>), a 5-year (2013-2018) ESRC-funded study led by the Universities of Glasgow and Swansea on migrants from Central and Eastern Europe living in Scotland. Therefore, we will be referring to EU migrants from A8/A2<sup>1</sup> countries in particular. In the course of the research we have spoken to over 200 such migrants and 60 experts (including employers) in both urban and rural areas (Glasgow and Aberdeen, and Angus and Aberdeenshire, respectively). We have also conducted observations at workplaces, sites of service provision and places where people meet socially. Our study includes issues around local labour markets, work, experiences in the workplace, and skills and education, from the point of view of both employers and (EEA) employees. On this basis, we would like to provide evidence applicable to this call.

### Migration trends

Our research clearly points to a shift from temporary/circular patterns of migration in the years immediately following the 2004 EU enlargement towards longer-term settlement. While initially it was mainly single persons (especially men) arriving, typically with a view to working for some time, gathering some savings and then returning home, with time many of them decided the UK offers a better future for themselves and their families. Therefore, once more established in the UK (in terms of employment and housing), many had decided to bring their families over rather than return home; this has been reflected in the increase in numbers of A8 children in schools as well as in births to women who are A8 nationals.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while the majority of EU migrants who arrive in the UK/Scotland are young<sup>2</sup>, we have also been observing a wave of 'older' migrants from EU countries (45+).<sup>3</sup> Frequently, these 'older' migrants found it impossible to find work in their home countries and were left with no resources; hence the decision to come to the UK and work towards their pension here. These trends towards longer term and more settled patterns of migration, often

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<sup>1</sup> A8 countries (which joined the EU in 2004): Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia; A2 countries (which joined the EU in 2007): Bulgaria and Romania.

involving families, are a positive development in the Scottish context and particularly in rural areas for demographic as well as economic reasons (see below).

Looking at the Scottish rural context in particular, we have observed that temporary/circular patterns of work have often developed into all-year round work over time, a development welcomed by both migrants and employers. In many cases, seasonal employment on farms and coming to work on the same farm every year eventually developed into permanent stay with migrants settling in rural areas of Scotland. They would either remain employed in agriculture by moving from one seasonal job to another, or their employer would 'patch up' their employment through a combination of different work roles extending it from seasonal to all-year-round. This pattern has been a highly positive development in rural areas of Scotland where employers have gained a reliable workforce on a permanent basis and migrants have been able to secure more stable employment conditions and settle.

While in the years immediately following the 2004 EU enlargement recruitment agencies played a major role in facilitating migration from A8 countries to Scotland and the rest of the UK, networks of family and friends have been of growing importance in this process over recent years. In terms of settlement, having stable employment and housing are important factors but it is children who are key to settlement decisions, especially as children who are growing up in the UK typically develop a strong sense of belonging here, and the stark differences between the education systems of the UK and the home countries acts as an additional barrier to return.<sup>4</sup>

Although migration remains an open-ended process and longer-term plans are often in flux, the likelihood of return to country of origin recedes over time.

### Employment

The vast majority of the people we spoke with in the course of the research were employed, and occupied positions in a wide range of sectors. Nevertheless, the majority were located in less skilled occupations, with a minority in white-collar and/or highly skilled professions. Key sectors included: farm work; factory work; hospitality and catering; the care industry; construction; food processing; beauty and hairdressing; interpreting/ translation; IT; office work; oil industry; retail; third sector. Type of employment was also influenced by location and the characteristics of local labour markets, i.e. most migrants in the rural areas researched (Angus, Aberdeenshire) were employed on farms and in food processing factories, while in the cities (Glasgow, Aberdeen) many migrants were also employed in food processing but a wider range of other employment opportunities was available, e.g. in catering, hospitality and cleaning.

Our research shows that A8/A2 migrants across Scotland predominantly work in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, filling gaps in the labour market and taking on work native workers commonly shy away from. This point has been reiterated to us by employers, especially those in agriculture. As one rural employer put it:

*"Seven-eight years ago, I was going through the job centre, I put an advert in the job centre. We got over 80 applicants for the job of packing flowers, interviewed, must've been about 50 of them. And then, after the 50 I interviewed, I staffed 30 on the Monday, and by the Friday, I was down to less than 10. On various excuses of, can't work, not working, you know, I need a day off. So that's usually*

*local labour. And that's why we are where we are now. That's when I started moving towards the more reliable migrant labour. But the door is still open for people. It doesn't matter whether you're Scottish, English, Irish or Polish or whatever. It doesn't matter, I need reliable people. That's the downside of where we are just now, the local people are not as reliable as, or have the same work ethic as Europeans have."*

Local employers generally see EU migrants as reliable, hard-working, and willing to accept the kind of working conditions offered including: working long and/or unsociable hours (e.g. afternoon or night shifts), lack of employment security (seasonal employment, zero hour contracts, agency work), minimum wage payment, difficult working conditions (e.g. work in cold, in dust etc). Moreover, EU migrants are highly resourceful in finding ways to access work, e.g. in the case of remote work places with no public transport connections they would team up with co-workers who had their own cars and make arrangements to be able to get to work this way. Moreover, as earlier mentioned, EU migrants, especially those living in rural areas of Scotland, have demonstrated that they are an overall resourceful workforce, able to accommodate the year-round need for seasonal employment in different sectors. Many migrants have been able to develop a strategy of moving on from one seasonal job to another with various employers, in result securing almost continual employment throughout the year. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while this is highly beneficial to employers who can depend on their 'regulars', it is less beneficial for this flexible workforce in terms of employment security (e.g. when crops start growing later than in previous years and hence beginning work is delayed such workers are left with no resources with the length of registrations for out-of-work benefits working against them. Further changes to social entitlements of EEA nationals, for example curtailing access to social housing, could make this form of year-round employment impossible).

As mentioned earlier, EU migrants (and migrants from A8/A2 countries in particular) are typically clustered in low-skilled, low-paid sectors. This often results in situations where they are working almost exclusively among other migrants, either compatriots or people from other A8/A2 countries. EU migrants are often overqualified for the jobs they carry out; for example, many of the migrants in our study were working in low-skilled jobs in agriculture or food processing despite having degree level education. Hence, in this respect they differ greatly from native workers. For EU migrants, work segregation results in lack of opportunities for acquiring/improving knowledge of English in the workplace and for expanding social networks, in effect supporting deskilling and acting as an additional barrier to occupational mobility. Other barriers include lack of understanding of how the UK labour market works, difficulties in accessing education and training, difficulties in getting non-UK qualifications recognised, lack of resources, high childcare costs. Nevertheless, there were indications of some progression amongst our study participants; for example, in local councils or educational institutions where migrants filled a niche dealing with migrant specific issues but then moved either sideways or upwards into another role; also within farm/factory work where on occasions people could move from manual jobs to office jobs; or move into a more supervisory role within the workplace, e.g. from being a cleaner to becoming a supervisor of a team of cleaners. A number of migrants have also established their own businesses, thus creating jobs as well as providing services locally.

From our research it follows that a reduction in the availability of an EEA workforce would negatively affect a number of businesses and sectors, especially in agriculture and food processing. Currently,

employers in these sectors are significantly reliant on migrant labour and losing this reliable and flexible workforce would pose a huge challenge to them considering the repeatedly voiced problem of being unable to source native workers. The type and conditions of employment offered in these and many other low-skilled sectors are not attractive to native workers who (typically having more resources and more support from personal networks and institutions) are under less pressure to accept 'any job' than migrant labour. Therefore, the advantages of employing workers from the A8/A2 countries is that they are reliable, flexible, have a strong work ethic, and are willing to work for the minimum wage, to accept insecure employment conditions, and to accept jobs which are considerably below their qualifications level. Considering this and the demand for labour in low-skilled sectors, it is imperative that the current shortage occupation list is expanded to cover lower skill levels.

### Social impacts of EEA migration

It needs to be underlined here that the demographic and economic situation of Scotland differs from that of the rest of the UK: Scotland needs immigrants in order to address issues of a rapidly aging population and shrinking workforce, especially in rural areas.

Scotland has benefited hugely from EEA immigration: thanks to the flexible framework for mobility, work and study, EEA citizens have come to live and work in virtually all areas of Scotland since the mid-2000s, clearly contributing to Scotland's economy as well as population growth. As mentioned earlier, EEA migrants have filled many vacancies across Scotland in key sectors such as agriculture and food processing, hospitality and tourism, care industry etc. Significantly, they have also redressed population decline with migration from overseas contributing most to population growth in Scotland since 2004 (SPICe Briefing 15/71: 27). Of those living in Scotland who were born outside the UK, 48% were EU citizens which is a higher proportion than in the UK as a whole (37%). Furthermore, 49% of EU migrants in Scotland live outside the 7 largest cities (SPICe Briefing 15/71: 26), hence settling in more rural areas which are most in need of population growth.

Leaving figures aside, the positive impacts of EU migration for Scotland are clearly visible in our research. A8/A2 nationals have filled gaps in local labour markets, they have contributed to the social improvement of areas of high social deprivation through moving into low demand housing (especially in cities), where they are valued by housing associations and other providers as good and reliable tenants (c.f. McGhee et al. 2013). Moreover, they have established new businesses and contributed to local communities in a variety of positive ways. Migrants have added to the vibrancy and vitality of areas where there has previously been relatively little experience of or exposure to other cultures through establishing ethnic shops locally, contributing to local festivities and international cultural events (e.g Peterhead Scotland Week, Fraserburgh International festival etc.). Moreover, in many areas (especially those of high social deprivation) local schools have noted the benefits of having pupils of a migrant background within the school community, such as the expanded horizons this offers to locally born pupils and teachers (opportunities for learning about different cultures informally as well as through organised events) or the high work ethic migrant children often bring, setting an example for other pupils<sup>5</sup>.

All in all, the impacts of EEA migration on Scotland have been very positive and this region faces particular challenges (economic, demographic and cultural) in the event of a withdrawal from EU free movement provisions.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2014). *Statistical Bulletin: Population by Country of Birth and Nationality Report*. London: Office for National Statistics. [[http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_375449.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_375449.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2009). *Accession Monitoring Report*. May 2004–March 2009. A8 Countries. London: Home Office; *Characteristics of Migrants in Scotland; Analysis of the 2001 Census (revised, 2016)*. Scottish Government.

<sup>3</sup> Kay, R. and Trevena, P. (2017) (In)security, family and settlement: migration decisions amongst Central and East European families in Scotland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* (online first) [[http://www.ceemr.uw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/Kay\\_Trevena\\_%28In%29Security\\_Family\\_and\\_Settlement\\_Migration\\_Decisions.pdf](http://www.ceemr.uw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/Kay_Trevena_%28In%29Security_Family_and_Settlement_Migration_Decisions.pdf)]

<sup>4</sup> SSAMIS (2016). *Social Support and Migration in Scotland: Interim Report*. [[https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_481930\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_481930_en.pdf)]

<sup>5</sup> Dillon, Stephen (2013). *The Impact of Migrant Children in Glasgow Schools*. Final Report. COSLA.

[[http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/stephen\\_dillon\\_research\\_report\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/stephen_dillon_research_report_final_0.pdf)]; Kay, R. and Morrison, A. (2012) *Evidencing the social and cultural benefits and costs of migration in Scotland*. Project Report. COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership, Glasgow.