

BEYOND THE SCARE STORIES

BRIEFING PAPER ON IMMIGRATION ON BULGARIA & ROMANIA

In the last few weeks we have seen gory headlines and heard frightening speeches from politicians about what will happen at the beginning of next year when Bulgarians and Romanians have the same rights to move, claim benefits and work as all other citizens of the European Union. Redbridge is a borough with a significant number of Romanians living here and also Roma people from Romania. The fear being whipped up is not conducive to developing good relations in the community so we believe it necessary to put out this briefing paper.

"Within a year 29 million Romanians and Bulgarians will gain the right to live, work and draw benefits here" (UKIP leaflet). This is as misleading as saying that the entire population of France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy..... have the right to live, work and draw benefits here as they have had for decades. Or that the entire population of Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle have these rights in London. Have they all come? No, of course not.

It is worth remembering that at the beginning of the 20th Century Britain did not have immigration controls. Of course the population of the entire world did not seek to come to this country. There was at that time significant immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia. There were campaigns against this, especially stirring things up against Jewish migrants. We seem to be seeing the same today with people campaigning against Bulgarians and Romanians coming here, with people making pointed references to Roma people - 'Gypsies'.

"But won't lots want to come to Britain? We are a soft touch." Over the last few years migrants from Bulgaria and Romania have favoured Italy, Spain and Germany to go to. Britain is down at number eleven of countries these migrants from Bulgaria and Romania have travelled to.

"I thought they couldn't go anywhere. So what changes will be happening next year?" People from Bulgaria and Romania have been allowed to travel in Europe. But they have been denied recourse to public funds. Also they have serious and complicated restrictions on their right to work in the European Union, including Britain, which do not apply to citizens of other EU countries. But from the beginning of next year they will have the same rights as all other Europeans. Which is only right and fair. The present rules discriminate against them.

"Migrants are benefit scroungers" This is rubbish. The vast majority of migrants to this country come to seek work. They are largely in their 20s and 30s. Migrants contribute £2.5 billion more in tax than they claim in benefits. The average British citizen eligible to claim benefits is far more likely to take them up than an average eligible migrant. There is no reason to think that Bulgarians and Romanians will be any

different.

"There will be more begging in the streets" What is remarkable is how little begging there is when you consider that we have communities who have no recourse to public funds and have difficulty establishing their right to work. The effect of the rule change is likely to mean that there will be less begging because people will be entitled to benefits and find it easier to find work.

"What's that about work? Its tough enough for British workers to get work without all these people coming over." First, from what we have said above, we should not expect loads of people to come here anyway. Migrants, including British migrants going over to mainland Europe, go where there are the greatest job opportunities. If these are not available they will go elsewhere. But actually it is immigration Controls, not immigration, which creates a job problem. Immigration controls create a group of workers who are defined as "illegal". This means that employers can use the threat of deportation as a weapon to force these workers to accept slave wages and dangerous working conditions. This in turn has the effect of depressing wages generally and also of meaning that there are less jobs at a decent wage the other people can go for. The way to get a level playing field is to have equal rights for all. Together with more secure contracts so that existing workers (of whatever nationality) cannot be laid off so that others can be employed at a cheaper rate. And strict enforcement of the national minimum wage. So it is in the interests of British workers to have less immigration controls not more.

Sadly, other things being equal, it remains the case that some employers will discriminate in favour of white British males. The RECC challenges such discrimination.