Trapped in in-work poverty
and social exclusion: multicultural informal work practices

**Background:**
Recent migrant workers are often hidden in UK statistics and are not always included in discussions about the relationship between ethnicity, employment and poverty. However, there is evidence that migrant workers are particularly vulnerable due to their low-paid and low status work. The migrant workers at the lower end of the labour market are concentrated in occupations where wages are much lower than average concerning age, gender and site of work (for example domestic work) and affected on the level of vulnerability.

Government bodies and service providers have raised questions about the prospects for migrants’ job opportunities and highlighted challenges relating to demand for and adequacy of service provision, yet these remain largely unanswered (4).

The term ‘in-work poverty’ has been officially recognised in the last couple of years. A household that contains one or more adults doing paid work and has an income below the level recognised as defining ‘poverty’ can identified as a living in ‘in-work poverty’. Impacts of ethnicity and intercultural differences on in-work poverty have considered in a large number of recent studies and policy reports (1; 2; 3; 5).

**Aims** of the proposed project explored:
- to identify the specificity of the cultural differences in relation to the work culture of the migrants from the countries of post Soviet space.
- to analyse the characteristics of the interaction between employers and employees groups of migrants justifying the existence low-paid jobs and describe the factors impeding the withdrawal of poverty for in-work migrant families
- to develop recommendations for practical steps to reduce poverty in in-work migrant families

**Methodology:**
The proposed study contends that through the use of insights from contemporary migration theory, poverty theory, cultural studies, human geography, in tandem with wider anthropological understandings of in-work poverty among ethnic minority migrant groups with the application of relevant and innovative research methodologies, factors which lead to falling into the trap of in-work poverty can be better understood.

We used model with several stages at which ethnic backgrounds can be a cause of trapped in-work poverty: recruitment, promotion, training and retention.

Analysing semidetached interviews and informal communication between employees and employers we are hoping to get new theoretical insight and academic understanding of the correlation between ethnicity and in-work poverty, as well as fostering practical and political initiatives in this regard.

**Discussion and conclusion:**
All the materials and the analysis of the interviews are going to be represented in this pilot and all of these allow the following to be concluded:

1. Informal practices which appear at the working places are less regulated. The existing set of formal documents such as Equal Rights, which are used by companies to ensure all their work force are backed by it, still cannot resolve the problem because of the specifics of informal communication.

2. Intercultural differences in the behaviour of the employed are as follows: the attitude to the hierarchy, taking the initiative, involving team work, precisely following informal rules. All these elements of the informal ethics very much depend on the country labour culture in general. Migrants, when they transfer their experience formed in their own country, can find themselves in situations, which impede the development of their career. They start working in low paid jobs, they also develop their careers far more slowly. The next important issue leading to poverty in this environment is not the low payment per hour, but the low number of hours these employees have to work. At many enterprises which employ migrants the number of working hours per week very much depends on the employee’s ability to negotiate with their manager (i.e. in hospitality, tourist, security, in a café).

3. Gaps in understanding humour, internal tension and nimbleness of migrants very often causes difficulties in team work. When instructed to do certain work, but being uncertain about its purpose or content, migrant workers are embarrassed to check with the manager as they fear it will make their manager think low of their abilities. At the same time they do not rely on help of their colleagues as their friendly relationships are not easy. As a result - due to misunderstanding of the instructions - very often migrants make mistakes, which leads them being paid less for their work.

4. Poverty amongst migrants is mainly a result of institutional differences between qualifications and experiences, as well as difficulties of intercultural communications which appear during the process of work. If the first can be improved by the work of specialised agencies, better integration of migrants in work activities is a very complicated process which requires activation of the special resources of local communities.

5. When the situation deteriorates, migrants who are unable to independently integrate into working patterns can find themselves in social isolation. In some families the risk of depression, alcoholism and antisocial behaviour increases. It is very important to support work integration during the first years of arrival into the country. Being stuck long term in poverty can decrease work activity and can destroy the migrants’ potential for work.

**References:**