

# Appendix 1

## Case study UK<sup>25</sup>

### **Polish workers in food packaging (taken from a press release of a recruitment agency).**

A group of Polish people came to work in the UK. A gangmaster's minivan brought them to a house in Exeter in the middle of the night and they had no idea where they were. They were made to wait on the patch of grass outside while the dozen or so Afghans inside were told to throw their things into black dustbin bags. The Afghans looked frightened. They were bundled into the van and driven off. And that was the last the Poles heard of them. The driver was Chinese-looking and spoke no English; the Poles spoke no English either, so they could not ask what was going on.

The Poles said they had been told when they were recruited back home that they would be working somewhere near Southampton. They said there had been no mention of packing chicken for Sainsbury's in Devon. But without language, money, or even the proper name of the boss of the company to which they seemed to have been handed over on arrival in England, they felt helpless. They were not employed directly by the factory that supplied Sainsbury's but subcontracted in a complex chain through a series of labour agencies.

The house where the Poles were taken was unremarkable from the outside. Inside there was no furniture, just mountains of rubbish, piles of syringes, soiled mattresses on the floor and a terrible smell. They slept on the bare mattresses and were taken by the minivan to their 2am-10pm shift.

They have been threatened with eviction and loss of two weeks' wages by their gangmasters if they dared to tell anyone about their conditions. They were also told they must be very quiet and not to go out in groups or the police would come. They said they felt intimidated.

They had been recruited in Poland to come to England after May 1, 2004, as soon as they were legally entitled. Two men from an English labour

agency came to a central Polish city and interviewed workers in batches of ten, non-stop for two days. They had been promised the minimum wage, £4.50 good accommodation for £25 per person per week, and lots of hours of overtime. But the Poles said it had gone wrong almost as soon as it started. There had been no work and no wages in their first week in Southampton. They were told they would have to pay rent of £40 each, although they were sleeping on the floor in the kitchen and in the sitting room. Then suddenly they had all been taken to Exeter in the night and left there.

Their payslips showed that £40 was being deducted from each of their pay packets each week for rent although the legal maximum for those on the minimum wage was just under £25. Several of them were given the same national insurance number. They were having tax deducted at a high emergency rate, though the tax office said it had not yet received payments for them. The contracts they signed were made without translation. After deductions their payslips showed they were getting just £115 a week for 40 hours. But this was not what the runners who brought their cash were actually giving them, they said. Another £15 was disappearing along the line without explanation. Most of them had not registered with the Home Office because the £50 required seemed an impossible amount when they were trying to survive and support families at home on so little money. By failing to do so, they had put themselves on the wrong side of law.

Among the group was also a couple in their early 40's. She was one of two women in the group, sleeping on the floor of what should have been the sitting room. They left their four children with the man's mother after he had been made redundant from his job in financial services in an area of Poland where there is 23% unemployment.

In the corner of the downstairs room that served as a kitchen, there was an electric cooker that had no plug, so the mains cable had its wires stripped bare and pushed straight into the socket.

There was also a great confusion about their pay. A man said to be Afghan had been coming late at night on Saturdays with their cash, but five of them hadn't received any money last week. They did not know who their boss was to complain to, their payslips carried the name of a different company, but it had no address, nothing you could pin down.

The companies involved in this case stopped their operation and some of the debts to the Inland Revenues have been repaid.

The workers managed to escape their conditions thanks to the involvement of the union.

## Appendix 2

### Case study Portugal

A, B and C, Romanian nationals, lived all their lives in an orphanage.

They knew a young man in the village nearby who spoke of the chance to earn money in a short period of time abroad. Because they had no family and practically no future in Romania, they accepted the work offer.

The transportation was made in a van by Romanian citizens and Romanian Roma, with seven other individuals. Upon their arrival, they were sold to other Romanian and Portuguese Roma (to the highest bidder).

Their passports were taken and they were beaten every day.

Every day they were brought to the fields to pick fruit, they were paid for their jobs by the farmers, but their money was taken away from them by the traffickers. They lived in constant fear.

Even though only one of them spoke English, they were able to distract the traffickers and escaped with the help of one of the farmers.

The police took their statement and they expressed their desire to return to their homeland. International Organization for Migration was contacted, because of their voluntary return programme.

### Endnotes

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence, F., *Special Investigation: Polish workers lost in a strange land find work in UK does not pay*, *The Guardian*, 11 January 2005