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A8 and A2 Free Movement

21st June 2010

This information sheet should be read with the “EEA Free Movement” information sheet. It provides information about UK restrictions on access to the job market for nationals of eight countries, which joined the EU in 2004, and the two countries, which joined the EU in 2007.

The A8 nations

On 1 May 2004, Cyprus (but not that under Turkish control), the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia joined the EU. The UK has introduced restrictions on access to the job market in the UK for nationals of these nations, except Cyprus and Malta.

Collectively, these nations (excluding Cyprus and Malta) are often referred to as the A8. This is because there are eight of them, and the ‘A’ refers to ‘accession’ – accession is the technical name for joining the EU.

Restrictions on access to the UK job market for A8 nationals

In May 2004, when the A8 nations joined the EU, the UK introduced the Workers Registration Scheme for A8 nationals coming to the UK to work. An A8 national who was already in the UK, with no restrictions on his or her working in the UK, was not required to join the scheme.

The scheme requires that A8 nationals must register in order to be permitted to work in the UK. The A8 national must do so within 28 days of starting work. There is an application form and an application fee. If the A8 national completes a period of 12 months continuous lawful employment, he or she is then exempt from the scheme, and is free to access the UK job market in the same way as any other EEA national.

If the A8 national changes employer during the 12 months period of the scheme, he or she must complete a new application form (but is not required to pay a new fee). However, this only applies if there is no break in the 12 months period. For this purpose, periods out of work totalling no more than 30 days in the 12 months period do not constitute a break. If there is a break in employment, the A8 national must start again – i.e. complete a new application form, pay a new fee and complete a new 12 months continuous period of employment.

An A8 national working in the UK may, like other EEA nationals, be joined by certain family members. Access to the UK job market for those family members is not restricted.

The A2 nations

On 1 January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU. The UK has introduced restrictions on access to the job market in the UK for nationals of these nations.

Collectively, these nations are often referred to as the A2. This is because there are two of them, and the 'A' refers to 'accession' – accession is the technical name for joining the EU.

Restrictions on access to the UK job market for A2 nationals

In January 2007, when the A2 nations joined the EU, the UK introduced a workers' authorisation scheme for A2 nationals coming to the UK to work. An A2 national who was already in the UK, with no restrictions on his or her working in the UK, was not required to join the scheme. This scheme is much more restrictive than the scheme for A8 nationals (see above).

With some limited exceptions, an A2 national coming to the UK to work must apply for and be granted an Accession Worker authorisation card. He or she will need to complete a form and pay a fee. He or she will need to have been granted an authorisation card before starting work. In order to be granted an authorisation card, he or she will usually need to have found work with an employer who has obtained a work permit to employ the A8 national. An employer will only be able to obtain a work permit if the employer has first tried to recruit from the UK labour market or if the job is recognised by the UK Border Agency as being one for which there is a skills shortage. There are some jobs for which a work permit is not required. Generally speaking, Bulgarians and Romanians will not be permitted to come to the UK to take a low skilled job.

If the A2 national completes 12 months continuous lawful employment, he or she is then exempt from the scheme, and is free to access the UK job market in the same way as any other EEA national. To change employment, an A2 national will need to make a new application for an authorisation card.

An A2 national working in the UK may, like other EEA nationals, be joined by certain family members. Access to the UK job market for those family members is not restricted. However, in order to demonstrate their entitlement to work in the UK, they may need to apply for a registration certificate.

An A2 national coming to the UK in order to study is also subject to restrictions on how many hours he or she is permitted to work during term-time (a maximum of 20 hours per week). During vacation there is no limit. An A2 national student does not need to obtain an authorisation card.

Generally

Subject to the restrictions described here, A8 and A2 nationals, and their family members, have the same rights in the UK as are described in the "EEA Free Movement" information sheet. It is important to note that restrictions on access to the job market do not permit restrictions on A8 and A2 nationals who are self-employed.

The key difference for A8 and A2 nationals, as compared to other EEA nationals, is that access to the UK labour market is restricted. However, the restrictions for A8 nationals are no more than a requirement that the A8 national register (as described in this information sheet). The restrictions for A2 nationals are more substantial. In either case, however, on completing 12 months continuous and lawful employment, the A8 and A2 national will have unrestricted access to the UK labour market. It is also important to note that A2 nationals, in particular, may face greater restrictions than other EEA nationals in accessing social welfare benefits in the UK before they have completed 12 months continuous lawful employment.