

# Negotiating Britain's racialised hierarchies

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In contrast to recent findings which revealed how being 'white' has not exempted many of the 1.9 million East Europeans who have come to the UK from the effects of racism. New evidence, published online (ahead of print) in the *Journal Ethnic and Racial Studies*, suggests that some East Europeans turn to their 'whiteness' to try to improve their place in UK society.

The study, led by Dr Jon Fox, Senior Lecturer from the University's School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, examined how Hungarian and Romanian migrant workers in the UK use 'whiteness' to 'define and defend' their position in Britain's racialised hierarchies.

The researchers used data from fifty interviews and ten focus groups with two cohorts of East European migrants: Hungarians, who with nationals from seven other 2004 entrants to the EU, have enjoyed relatively unrestricted entry to the UK; and Romanians, who with Bulgarians have been subjected to tighter immigration controls since joining the EU in 2007.

The study found that while East Europeans differ in individual skill levels, relevant experience and English-language competency, they could all claim whiteness as an extra bit of leverage in their struggles to secure their place in UK society. It's not that these East Europeans were not white in some sense East Europe; they were. It's that migration made that whiteness not only relevant but also a potential asset in improving their position in a volatile [labour market](#).

Dr Fox, lead author of the qualitative study, said: "This study has uncovered how East Europeans use their 'whiteness' to assert their position in UK society. There is also growing evidence to show that because migrants are victims of racism they tend to turn to it themselves in an attempt to establish their own racial superiority by aligning themselves with the dominant white majority to help alleviate if not reverse the status degradations they endure."

The study, entitled 'The uses of racism: whitewashing new Europeans in the UK', was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Provided by University of Bristol

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