

# Geographies of Young Polish Migrants: Experiences of Community

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# Context

- Since EU enlargement in May 2004, the UK has received one of the **most concentrated flows** of voluntary migrations in the world today (Pollard et al, 2008)
- The **short-term** and **fluid** nature of these migrations have raised significant issues for policymakers (Sumption, 2009)
- The Local Government Association (2008) argues A8 migration favour **town** and **rural** locations

# Why Northamptonshire?

- Worker Registration Scheme data shows that between May 2004 and Sept 2008;
- There were **894,575** approved WRS registrations nationally
  - **594,500** (66%) were from **Polish nationals**
  - **44%** were aged between **18** and **24** years old
  - **24,295** approved WRS registrations in Northamptonshire

Source: Home Office, 2008

# The Urban Lives of Young Polish Migrants Residing in Northamptonshire

- Multi method approach
- Participants recruited from a snowball approach
- Interviews conducted in Polish and English

Narrative Exercise



Case Studies



In-Depth Interviews with  
Local Service Providers

# Preliminary Research Findings

- Motivations
  - Economic
  - Cultural
  - Individual
- Experiences
  - Host communities
  - Migrant Communities
  - Positive
  - Negative

# Motivation 1: Economic

- Opportunity to earn a good wage
- Conditions to provide for family
- Limited economic prosperity in Poland

*“You have this **goal**... **save** some money and go back...  
you are going to be happier.” (Bogumił in Polish)*

*“Here you can **save** some money and still afford to live.”  
(Zenon in Polish)*

## Motivation 2: Cultural

- UK viewed as a place to meet new cultures

*“It’s a good feeling to meet new people, different cultures because we don’t really have that in Poland. We have **just got Polish people.**” (Maryla in Polish)*

*“I can find out about people, a **totally different point of view.** You wouldn’t have this in Poland.” (Juliet in English)*

## Motivation 3: Individual

- Sense of adventure

*“At that point in my life, it was like an adventure... I had just finished university and thought **why not.**”*  
(Michał in Polish)

- Education

*“I was like mum give me **this chance**, if it doesn't work then I can always come back but if I don't I will **regret** it.”* (Grazyna in English)

## Experience: Host Communities

- Contact with host communities limited
- Located into ethnic-specific circles

*“When you work in my place, you have **loads of Polish** around you and it’s **difficult to learn.**” (Lucjusz in Polish)*

*“I think it’s really bad. Some [Polish] people are here and they **don’t assimilate**, they don’t learn anything new.” (Jowita in English)*

# Experience: Migrant Communities

- Large scale inward migration received mixed reviews
- Trust revealed to be significant dimension to Polish communities
- Idea of community for a few was non-existent

*“You find out the next day that the person you was trusting to has done **something horrible** to you...you are feeling **is that my Poland?**” (Natalka in English)*

*“I shouldn’t say it but **I feel ashamed** that [Polish] people come here without language, for me it’s the most important thing when you live in a foreign place.” (Janina in English)*

## Experience: Positive

- New beginnings

*“You can start everything from the beginning in a **new life**.  
You can **reinvent yourself** because nobody knows you.”*  
(Maryla in Polish)

- Forward Planning

*“In Poland, everyone was **in a rush** and you had to **worry**  
about the future. But here I feel **safe** and I can **plan** my  
future step by step.”* (Wilhelm in English)

## Experience: Negative

- Being 'homesick'

*“Although I have got my friends here, I will **never** consider **this place** as home.”* (Maryla in Polish)

- Stereotypes

*“You have to **fight stereotypes**... ‘Polish people are stupid’, ‘Polish people steal your jobs’... you have to prove it’s not true.”* (Grazyna in English)

# Summary

- Range of experiences are **diverse, contradictory** and **insightful**
- Idea of community is **challenging**
- The present is **uncertain** and **temporary**, and the future is **flexible**

# References

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