

Migration Aspirations & Realities: the Experiences of Polish Migrants in the UK

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Research questions

Post-accession Polish migration to the UK – literature review, pilot interviews and personal interest -> focus on female Polish migrant workers

- What economic, institutional, political and social structures shape the migration aspirations of female Polish migrant workers to the UK?
- What economic, institutional, political and social structures shape the migration realities of female Polish migrant workers in the UK?
- How do female Polish migrant workers to the UK mediate their migration experience?

'And at that moment, if I wanted to go back to Poland I would no longer be able to, because I could not leave my family here. [...] I am a very caring mother maybe too much [...] Also, to be honest maybe because I do not like it in the UK, that somehow I cannot fulfill myself professionally.'
(Beata, 54 y, food packing and own small business)

Background

- Polish post-accession migration to the UK: broad variety of research; numerical significance; economic migration = work migration; after 10 years of EU-enlargement -> diverse group
- Feminisation of migration: pushed into least desirable positions vs migrant women as agents of change; feminisation and segmentation of labour market, occupational segregation
- Census 2011 for England and Wales: 51% female of Polish-born

Economic activity	Polish-born, female	Polish-born, male	All residents, female	All residents, male
Source: Census 2011 for England and Wales				
part-time employees	16%	4%	21%	6%
full-time employees	47%	64%	30%	47%
self-employed	9%	16%	6%	14%
unemployed	4%	3%	4%	5%
students	4%	4%	4%	3%
retired	5%	3%	16%	12%
looking after home or family	9%	1%	8%	1%
other economically inactive	4%	2%	2%	2%

- Diverse in sectors and occupations; no differentiation along gender yet possible because of lack of data
- Main sectors: distribution, hotels and restaurants; manufacturing; finances and banking; public administration, health and education
- Represented at all occupational levels

Methodology

Theoretical sensitivity:

- exploring the literature
- pilot interviews
- researcher's own background

Construction of a grounded theory model

Construction of research tools:

- biographical narrative interviews
- semi-structured expert interviews
- secondary quantitative data analysis

Fieldwork and theoretical sampling:

- post-accession female Polish migrant workers in main employment sectors and half-half trade union membership
- diverse in educational background, age, family situation, length of stay etc.
- taking field notes

Data analysis:

- supported by the use of Nvivo
- open coding and axial coding
- constant comparison
- developing themes

'At the beginning I worked in administration, it was not my ideal job [...] and then I changed jobs and worked directly with the people as a caseworker. Later I became a manager in the office and had my team, I had volunteers, students and so after some years it all turned out great.'
(Justyna, 33 y, education project worker)

Emerging Themes

Conditions

- Post-accession labour migration from Poland to the UK
- Gender roles
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Influencing factors

- Length of stay
- Educational background
- Geography
- Age
- Family situation
- ...

Possible dynamics

- downward social mobility
- Moving up the ladder

Consequences

- Feeling stuck
- Pursuing personal and professional fulfillment

Strategies

- spontaneity, coincidence and luck
- Rational decision-making, family decision
- Personal and professional fulfillment
- Mobility paradigm

'They took me into catering [...] and in the meantime I did courses. I have higher qualifications from Poland, but it is not translatable here too easily [...] After 3 years of work in just catering I was promoted to hospitality supervisor.'
(Klara, 38 y, catering staff and hospitality supervisor)

