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**‘Another year and another year’:  
Polish migrants in London extending  
the stay over time**

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**Summary Report**

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**2015**

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**SPRC**

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*Everybody I know from Poland, every time they come over here, they're like "just go there for a year, two years" so it's very easy to come over but it's very difficult to go back... once that year's over, it's like another year, another year, another year, another year, yeah so... cos life is easier here (Patryk)*

## **Introduction:**

When Poland joined the EU in May 2004 the large flow of migrants to the UK became a subject of enormous interest amongst politicians, the media and other social commentators. Many migration researchers claimed that this large-scale, intra-EU migration heralded a new form of transient mobility associated with short-term, temporary and circular migration, and high levels of transnationalism.

However, some researchers were cautious about such claims and observed that a number of Polish migrants were making longer term plans to extend their stay, bringing their families to join them in the UK and establishing their children into the British educational system (Ryan et al, 2008; 2009; White and Ryan, 2008; Ryan and Sales, 2011; White, 2011).

Now, after an interval of several years, I have gone back to interview some of this early wave of migrants who, despite their initial short term plans, are still living in London. Based on 20 in-depth interviews with Polish migrants, I have sought to collect rich qualitative data on their migration decisions, career trajectories, social and family relationships, hopes and aspirations for the future.

I am interested in why they choose to stay here and what factors shaped their decisions. I focus in particular on how their career trajectories have developed – from initial experiences of de-skilling to gradual improvement over time. But migration is not simply a quest for employment opportunities. As the preliminary findings in this short report reveal, other factors such as romance and family relationships, lifestyle opportunities, children and schooling can all play a part in why people migrate and why they extend their stay abroad.

Based on the experiences of migrants who have been in Britain for approximately 10 years, these preliminary research findings point to the importance of taking a longer term view in migration research. I urge caution in rushing to herald new trends and innovative concepts based on short term evidence.

This report offers a short summary of my initial findings and also makes some tentative suggestions about how these observations may contribute to wider discussions in migration research. Quotations from participants are used to illustrate particular points. All the names have been changed to protect participant anonymity.

Before discussing the findings, the report presents some statistical data on Polish migration to the UK and then outlines the research methods used in my study. But first, I briefly consider the usefulness of taking a longer term view in understanding migration trajectories.

## **Taking the Longer Term View**

Within migration research, much of the discussions around settlement, integration, belonging and transnationalism, tend to focus on the practices of refugees, third country nationals, 'guest workers' (see Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). By contrast, migration scholars frequently discuss intra-EU migration in terms of circularity, temporariness and 'liquid migration' (Engbersen and Snel, 2011). The focus on intra-EU mobilities, means there has been insufficient academic attention to how European migrants negotiate attachments, belonging and processes of settlement in destination countries (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013).

The processes of how intra-European migrants settle into a new society has been the focus of my research for many years (Ryan, 2004; 2008). In addition, I also suggest that comparative research drawing on historical examples, may also offer useful insights into how migrants use mobility rights while also negotiating attachment and belonging (Ryan, 2009). For example, as I have argued elsewhere, a comparison of Polish and Irish migrants presents precisely such opportunities (Ryan, 2013). Irish migrants have long used their mobility rights, as a former colony, to enter the British labour market in very large numbers (Hickman and Walter, 1997). My oral history interviews with migrants who moved from Ireland to Britain in the post-World War II era, particularly 1950s-60s, offers an insight to the anticipated temporariness of their mobilities. The mantra 'I only came for a year' was not unusual (Ryan, 2007). Although some back and forth movement was common, many Irish migrants, despite initially vague, short term plans, have stayed in Britain. Their experiences suggest that while mobility rights may provide options for circularity and temporariness, migration plans can change over time as processes of settlement may gradually emerge (see also Brannen, Mooney, Wigfall and Parutis 2014).

Having observed this pattern among waves of Irish migrants, I was curious to see if post-accession Polish migrants would exhibit similar patterns. I was unconvinced by the widespread assertions among many migration scholars that intra-EU mobility rights would herald new forms of migratory movement (for a discussion see Glorius et al, 2011). My initial research with Poles (Ryan et al, 2007; 2008; 2009) already began to find evidence of family reunions, family formations and growing numbers of Polish children in British schools; suggesting patterns of longer term stays were beginning to emerge (Sales et al, 2008; Ryan and Sales, 2011).

That is not to suggest that extending the stay means losing connections with the home country. In the age of new technology, skype, facebook, cheap phone cards and more affordable flights, it is clear that migrants now have more opportunities to maintain regular contact with family and friends 'back home' in the country of origin. However, as the findings of this study also reveal, long distance relationships do not remain frozen in time but may alter through the life course as needs and responsibilities change. Thus, taking a longer term view can also provide insights into how transnational relations evolve and change through time.

## Background

The enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 brought new forms of intra-EU migration. The United Kingdom was one of only three of the pre-2004 EU member states which at that time opened up its labour market immediately to new EU citizens and hence was a major recipient of this new migration (Burrell, 2009). Migrants from Poland have been by far the largest component of these flows.

Between 2004 and March 2009 there were over **600,000** registrations by Polish people with the Workers Registration Scheme which was established to monitor the labour market impact of EU enlargement. This represented 66% of all registrations from A8 countries (Home Office, 2009: 8). Their numerical dominance meant that British media coverage focused on this group and there were exaggerated claims about the numbers with some newspapers suggesting there were as many as a million new Polish migrants in Britain (see for example *The Times*, 16 February 2008).

In the decade since accession, the numbers of Polish migrants in the country have remained steady. According to the 2011 Census there are **579,000** Polish-born residents in England and Wales. Despite predictions that large numbers would return home, particularly during the recession, the total number of Polish-born people resident in the UK as a whole remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2010<sup>1</sup>. Official estimates in 2014 suggest that **726,000** residents in the UK, as a whole, have Polish nationality<sup>2</sup>.

However total population figures, may disguise flows in and out of the country. It is clear that significant numbers of new arrivals are continuing to enter Britain from Poland. In 2013/14 over **101,000** new national insurance numbers were issued to people born in Poland making Polish the largest migrant group entering the UK for employment in that year<sup>3</sup>. Thus, some people may be returning to Poland, or moving on elsewhere, while new comers are arriving in Britain. Hence, there is clearly some fluidity in the migration flows. Nonetheless, there are also signs of longer term settlement particularly amongst people with school age children (Moskal, 2011; Sime, 2014). Polish is now amongst the top 5 languages spoken by children in British schools, overtaking many of the other languages traditionally spoken by migrant groups in this country<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/migration1/migration-statistics-quarterly-report/august-2011/polish-people-in-the-uk.html>)

<sup>2</sup> ([http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_375449.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_375449.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> (nino-analytical-report-may-2014)

<sup>4</sup> (<http://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-advocacy/eal-news-summary/150112>)

## Methods

In 2014 – a decade on since accession – I decided to interview 20 Polish migrants who had been in Britain for approximately 10 years<sup>5</sup>. I wanted to understand the process whereby short term, temporary migration ‘*coming for a year*’ were gradually extended to 10 years and how migrants negotiated belonging in the place of destination while also maintaining transnational relationships with back home.

This was **not** intended to be a representative sample. Instead I aimed to use rich qualitative data to gain an insight into processes of extending the stay. I wanted to hear the individual stories of people who had initially arrived in London with temporary migration plans but who had gradually extended their period of stay so that 10 years later they are still here. I wanted to understand how and why their stay here became extended, what factors influenced their choices and decisions and also to discuss what their future plans might be.

Participants were recruited using a range of techniques including convenience sampling through Polish networks<sup>6</sup> in London, facebook and LinkedIn, as well as snowballing through Polish contacts. The criteria for selection was that participants needed to have arrived in London approximately 10 years ago. In a few cases participants had been here for much longer than 10 years, while several people had been in London for slightly less time. Interestingly, some people had not stayed here continually but rather than gone back to live in Poland at some time during the last decade but had since re-migrated to London. Clearly, this sample is skewed in that participants were currently living in London. I did not interview anyone who had permanently returned to Poland.

### Description of sample<sup>7</sup>:

Gender: The majority of the participants (17/ 20) were women.

Age: The average age was 36 years.

Year of Arrival: The mean year of arrival was 2005, with the majority of participants moving to the UK between 2004 and 2007, though some came earlier even before accession.

Marital status: 13 were married, 5 divorced and 2 were currently single.

Parenthood: There was an even split between those with and without children, 10/20.

Tenancy: The majority were currently in privately rented property, a few were council/ housing association tenants and 4 had bought homes in London.

Education: Of the 20 interviewees, all but one were graduates. Most had arrived from Poland as graduates, though most also did some form of further study post-arrival in London.

Employment: All, bar one, of the participants were currently in paid employment. The level of career trajectory was very significant for most participants. Despite arriving as graduates, many

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Prof Anne White for her encouragement of this new research.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues Dr Paulina Trevena and Magda Lopez Rodriguez for their suggestions and support with recruitment.

<sup>7</sup> I would like to extend my deep gratitude to all the participants who gave so generously of their time.

had initially found jobs as waiter/ waitress, a few had been cleaners. Now most had achieved considerable career mobility and were working in jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Three participants were currently pursuing further training courses.

## **Preliminary Findings**

### **Initial Short-term Plans**

*Initially, as probably most people say, we set up for ourselves one year - to see how things are progressing, where we're going to be, if we're going to like it, and then we're going to make our minds up and decide what to do (Dominik)*

In line with the findings of other studies (Eade et al, 2006), the vast majority of my participants described their initial migration plans as somewhat short term. Like Dominik, above, most people spoke about coming for a year: 'I was planning to stay for a year, only for a year' (Patryk).

Nevertheless, the twenty people in my study had gradually, sometimes unconsciously, extended their stay over time. In the interviews, some people appear to suggest that it just happened, they never consciously decided to stay: 'I sometimes look back and think "whaaaaat? How did that happen?" ...It was kind of a plan, but it was never defined, like sort of defined plan, it was more plan as you go along' (Sonia).

This gradual extension of the stay is interesting because it suggests that researchers need to pay more attention to how plans change over time, rather than the initial intentions expressed by migrants. Clearly, 'initial return intentions often do not match with actual return behaviour' (Erdal and Ezzati 2014: 6).

### **Reasons for coming:**

#### A bit of adventure

Several people described their migration as almost accidental, happen-chance, holidays that gradually extended into longer term, though often indefinite, stays. The process of coming to London was frequently connected to stories of friends who had already or were about to travel to Britain. Marika was typical of these 'happenchance' migration narratives. Having failed to secure a university place on her preferred course in Krakow, she decided, at rather short notice, to accompany her friend who was going to London. She described her decision as 'really, really quick' because 'if I will think about it for a bit longer I probably wouldn't do it' (Marika). She anticipated staying for a year to learn English and then reapply to university in Poland. So moving to London was a way to 'kill time' and have 'a bit of adventure'.

A sense of adventure was common among those who arrived when young and single. Angelika similarly described her decision to move to London as an adventure, associated with parties and fun, adding: 'I didn't actually plan to stay that long'. Like several other young arrivals, Patryk had decided to take a 'gap year' from his university studies in Poland. He intended to make some money in London: 'I just wanted to go and may be have fun for a year'.

### Gap year or working holiday

Several participants had originally arrived as students on working holidays or 'gap years'. In most cases, they went back to Poland but, having got a taste of London, planned to return once their studies were completed. For example, Mateusz came for a gap year and then went back to university in Poland but returned to London immediately after completing his degree. Izabela took a longer route to migration. Having worked in London for two summer holiday periods, she then stayed in Poland for several years completing her undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Nonetheless, she always knew that she would return to London.

In these cases, short, temporary migration and return home, serves almost as a trial run for longer term migration. All these participants explained how their working holidays had helped them to prepare for their later relocations to London. Upon return, they were already familiar with the geography of the city. In addition, these working holidays had enabled them to improve their conversational English.

### Study

Some participants such as Magda came to London specifically to study. However, an interesting observation from my data, is that some who arrived for 'fun' and 'adventure' later decided to attend university in London. For example, several participants including Patryk, Sonia and Marika discovered opportunities to study for free in the UK, before the introduction of university tuition fees.

In interviews it was challenging to uncover precisely why and at what point these temporary migrants, motivated by fun and adventure, had decided to explore study opportunities in London. Sonia decided 'out of the blue' to investigate university courses here: 'if I am educated here it always looks better, even if I go back home I will be able to get a better job there as well' (Sonia). Thus, deciding to embark on a three year degree course in London was not a commitment to long term settlement but also a way to keep options 'open' including acquiring additional qualifications to facilitate possible return to Poland.

### Job opportunities

While participants who gained British university degrees appeared to have a much faster and easier route into the British labour market, acquiring entry level jobs commiserate with their qualifications, (see also Szewczyk, 2014), those who had studied in Poland often had a much longer and more challenging route into professional occupations (Trevena, 2011).

For those participants who came to Britain specifically to explore employment opportunities finding a 'proper' job (Paritus, 2014) could be more challenging than initially anticipated. Although having completed a Masters in Law in Poland, Adrianna worked for two years as a cleaner in London, while studying English language. Now a senior administrator in a large organisation, she reflected back on her trajectory: 'I knew that it was a temporary measure and obviously I couldn't ask really for more bearing in mind that I wasn't able to speak any English...'

Despite having a degree from Poland, Oliwia who now works in publishing, had initially worked as a cleaner: 'It was my limited English that was the only thing I could do... it was like, yeah, you just have to accept reality, it was either that or going back to Poland and 'oh, god, no' that was not an option'.

The study findings highlight the role of language in initial experiences of de-skilling. Developing English language proficiency was crucially important to how participants improved their employment opportunities over time.

Another strategy for those who had the resources to do so was to undertake re-training in Britain. Several participants switched career in Britain (see also Szewczyk, 2014), for example, Mateusz made the pragmatic decision to train as a nurse. Others who started off in low skilled and poorly paid jobs in catering and retail, undertook courses that gradually enabled them to develop recognised credentials. Sylwia for example started off selling sandwiches while pursuing a professional qualification, and now has a senior role in the health service.

**But not everyone's migration story was narrated through employment related opportunities. As discussed in the next section, romantic relationships also motivated geographical mobility.**

#### Romantic relationships and Family Migration

Martyna was one of several women whose trip to London was motivated by romantic reasons. She had begun a holiday romance with a Polish man, based in London, during his visits to Poland. They carried on visiting each other for some time but when it was apparent that he did not wish to return permanently to Poland, she decided to 'give it a go' in London to see how they would get along together. Upon arrival, she had no clear plans about how long she would stay or if the relationship would develop into something stable. Other participants engaged in more traditional forms of family reunion (see also Ryan et al, 2009). For example, Klaudia's husband first moved to Britain to look for a job and an apartment. Later, she and their young son joined him in London. However, it was not just women who followed partners, Dominik's migration was initiated by his girlfriend.

While for others, romance had not informed their initial move, it became a reason to extend their stay. Adrianna met 'a boy' in London. After a year of studying English, she had had a clear plan to return to Poland. However, after meeting her boyfriend she laughingly stated: 'I never managed to buy the return ticket'.

New relationships could result in fundamental re-negotiations of study and career plans. Karina for example was part way through a university degree in Poland when she came to London for a 'gap year' to make money. She then started a relationship with an English man. Nonetheless, Karina did return to Poland to complete her Masters but planned to return to London as quickly as possible: 'the last few months in Poland were very intense, I think I wrote my thesis in about 4 months'.

The impact of intimate relationships on uncertain and circular migratory stories can be illustrated by the experiences of Wiktoria. Having initially met her future husband, a non-Pole, during a holiday in London, she returned to Poland as planned to continue her studies, but as the



relationship blossomed, the back and forth movement intensified: ‘So I kind of kept on coming and then he kept on coming to Poland and visiting me’. However, over time this circularity became difficult to sustain particularly after their son was born. Wiktoria made the decision to move to London and has now reconciled herself to staying for the foreseeable future.

Five women in the study had non-Polish partners. In most cases it was difficult for these women to imagine returning to live in Poland permanently because their husbands did not speak Polish and were unlikely to find suitable employment opportunities there. Wiktoria now feels return to Poland is ‘improbable’: ‘my son goes to school, it’d really be hard to take him out of here and then just put him in totally different environment. Not even to mention me finding work and my husband finding work when he doesn’t speak Polish’.

The findings from this study suggest that the connections between relationships and migration decision-making are complex. Four of the participants had experienced marriage break down after they migrated but in each case, they decided to remain in London. Thus, although relationships may have been the original reason for coming to or staying in Britain, it is apparent that, over time, other factors may contribute to the extension of the stay. Dominik had migrated to London with his girlfriend and they later married. Although their marriage has now ended, Dominik has developed his career here and has no plans to return to Poland.

Although, as mentioned earlier, Klaudia had moved to London to join her husband, the marriage later broke down. Nonetheless, both she and her ex-husband remained in London. Klaudia explained that the financial opportunities available in London meant that she could work part time and also take care of her two children. She suggested that being a working, single mother would not be as easy in Poland.

**Thus a key preliminary finding of this study is that the reasons for continuing to stay abroad may be different from the initial motivation for migration.**

### **The role of children and schooling**

As Wiktoria mentioned above, having children in local schools may also be a factor in extending the stay in Britain. However, the relationship between children’s schooling and migration decision-making can be complex (see also White, 2011; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Moskal, 2011; Ryan and Sales, 2011). Ten of the participants were parents and in most cases their children were of school age. Several remarked how having children changed their attitudes towards living in Britain. Magda observed that since giving birth to her little girl, Britain had begun to feel like ‘home... this is where my family is’. Ewa described how having children had enabled her to develop a sense of belonging in British society:

*If you have children you have to participate in everything that’s happening in society. You have to go to the same hospitals, the same playgroups, start the same schools, parent evenings, and you really get more and more understanding of what’s happening. You have to participate... and then you are really settling in because you know your children will grow up here and they will start their families here so you need to be a member.*

The role of children in helping migrant parents forge local ties have been discussed elsewhere (Ryan, 2008; 2011). Other participants spoke at length about how their social networks had expanded significantly through their children and their own active involvement in schools.

Klaudia had become a parent governor at her son's primary school and was now undertaking a teacher training course. Wiktoria had also started by volunteering at her son's school and then gradually developed her role and was, at the time of interview, embarking on a teaching career.

**Thus, my research suggests how local child-centred activities may provide full time mothers not only the chance to make new friends but also to gain work experience and develop career opportunities.**

### **Relations in Poland**

Most participants had retained strong familial ties to Poland and visited regularly. Angelika was fairly typical of the participants when she described visiting 'three or four times a year'. However, others noted that over time they visited less frequently. Oliwia, for example, stated: 'not any more, no, just once a year actually... it is turning into more a duty than a holiday'. A few people remarked that visiting Poland did not feel like a 'proper holiday' and they wanted to travel to other countries for holidays rather than spending all their annual leave visiting Poland: 'there are other places to go as well in life you know rather than just Poland' (Mateusz).

Several people remarked that it was easier if their relatives and friends came to visit them in London and indeed most participants received regular visitors from Poland. In addition, a number of participants were involved in close, care giving and care receiving relationships with family members in Poland. For instance, Ewa's mother was visiting for an extended period to help with the new-born baby. Mateusz's parents frequently visited London to see their grandchildren.

Most participants used new technologies to maintain regular communication with relatives and friends. While many reported that they used phone calls to communicate with ageing parents, skype and other forms of virtual communications were used to contact siblings and friends. For example, Adrianna described one instance where she and her siblings celebrated a birthday on skype: 'we put skype on and they were actually singing happy birthday and they had a cake'. However, others raised some short comings of skype. Ewelina noted that her children found it 'boring' to endure long conversations with their grandparents on skype: 'it's not a natural conversation... so both kids stand in front of it for a little while and get bored really quickly'. On a humorous note, Martyna remarked that while skype was fine for chatting, her parents in Poland could not baby sit her children on a Saturday via skype.

Thus, despite regular visits and new communication technology, many female participants, in particular, missed more immediate interactions with relatives in Poland. Agnieszka was among several participants, with young children, who missed the proximate support of extended family networks: 'Definitely with small children it is better to be close to family, grandmothers... I was really missing this, really missing family... I think it's good when children are close to other family members'.

These observations point to the enduring limitations of new technology (see Ryan et al, 2014). As Izabela observed: ‘of course distance makes a difference... well, you can keep in touch but I prefer real relationships to virtual ones. I can upload a picture (to facebook) but it will never be the same really as coffee with somebody’.

This raises questions about whether long distance relationships particularly with friends can endure over time. Some participants, such as Gabi, stated that their important friendships were still their childhood friends in Poland. Similarly, Sylwia spoke about friends in Poland being ‘close to her heart’. This recalls Morosanu’s observation about the role of enduring ‘soul friendships’ in the country of origin (2013). However, several other participants remarked how their relationships with friends in Poland had changed over time. Oliwia described how her old friendships ‘kind of dissolved’. This point was echoed by Dominik: ‘I’ve left 11 years ago and they are different people than I knew 11 years ago, now they’ve got families... they’ve got their new friends’.

**This finding complicate some of the assumptions made in the academic literature about how new technology and cheap travel may contribute to sustaining transnational ties. My research suggests that over time, particularly after a decade of separate, some relationships will change as people may find that they have less in common.**

## Future plans

### Return to Poland?

Many participants continued to miss Poland and in particular felt sad about on-going separation from relatives, especially their ageing parents. Several people mentioned caring responsibilities as a reason to return to live in Poland. Justyna, the oldest study participant, could be seen as part of the ‘*sandwich generation*’; she had an adult daughter and an ageing mother living in Poland. Justyna anticipated a time in the future when her mother would require full time care and her daughter also might need support if she decided to have children.

A few people had bought property in Poland and had clear plans to return. For example, Adrianna stated: ‘I think in a year or two we will try to go to Poland and see whether we can settle there. We bought a little property there so this is also one of the reasons we would like to go to live in something that we actually own’. Like several other participants, Adrianna highlighted property prices in London as a clear disadvantage associated with life in the capital: ‘I think it’s the biggest headache in London’ (for a discussion of housing issues see Trevena, McGhee and Heath, 2013). However, she was also aware that moving back to Poland would not be easy and there was no guarantee she could settle there. She did not rule out returning to London in the future.

Although a number of participants would like to return to Poland they were also concerned about the obstacles they may encounter. For example, despite living in London for significantly more than a decade, Angelika did not feel settled and fully anticipated a move back to Poland, at some point in the future. However, she had some concerns about adjusting to life in Poland

particularly in terms of employment opportunities. As a 40 year old woman, she felt that many employers might consider her too old: 'they don't hire people our age'.

People who had achieved career success in London were uncertain about how this might translate back to the Polish context. Gabi, who worked in accounts management, was worried about her career prospects in Poland: 'because it's all about contacts in Poland and for example the job I do here, how could I translate and transfer my knowledge from here to Poland?' Having studied and worked for so long in the UK she was concerned about the potential risks of returning to Poland: 'I don't want to start from the beginning again'.

Because of these concerns about careers and economic livelihood, several people spoke about moving back to Poland after they retired from work. For example, Ewelina said her dream would be: 'when we retire and we can afford a nice villa in Sopot where I studied, that's the place I'd go to... that's my big sentiment.'

### Remaining in the UK

For participants who moved to Britain at a young age, and spent more than a decade living in London, the prospect of re-adjusting to life in Poland could seem daunting. As Mateusz stated: 'I never had an adult life in Poland'. He felt a stronger connection to London: 'this is where I made it for myself in a way, you know, this is where I've been happy, this is where my family is'. Mateusz had no plans to return to Poland.

A few stated emphatically that they would never return to live permanently in Poland: 'I'm never going back' (Oliwia) or 'actually this is all my life, forever there is no turning back' (Ewa). Martyna was also unequivocal: 'so there's no absolute reason to go back'.

While for some this was largely motivated by economic opportunities in Britain, for others it was also about social issues. Some were deeply critical of the political situation in Poland: 'bureaucracy, it's a bureaucratic country and my personal opinion is that the government has to change, there's still a lot of work to do in Poland, there's still all the same people in power... that really puts me off' (Magda). Others were critical of the role of the Catholic Church in Poland: 'that's a negative thing about Poland, the church is so powerful' (Sylwia).

Several participants compared their lives in Britain with friends and relatives back in Poland. As Nowicka notes (2014), migrants may often use comparisons with non-migrants, back at home, to measure their own success. Several people remarked that even people who held professional posts in Poland had to supplement their income by taking on extra jobs.

It would be difficult to get a job in my profession, lots of people, my friends who are psychologists they do millions of other things as well and I don't like that. I like my '9 to 5' thank you very much, job security, lack of headaches (Karina)

In addition, several participants also cited examples of friends who had tried to return to Poland but could not settle and were now re-migrating to London. Gabi related a story about her friend: 'One of my friends... she went back to Poland 2 years ago it was very hard for her to find anything... she's not happy and now she's coming back'.

This kind of salutary lesson was common among participants. When I met Agnieszka, she told

me about her friend who had recently returned to live in Poland. Agnieszka was not sure how her friend would settle and was watching the situation with interest.

Several participants also noted that return migrants may be resented in Poland: 'I've heard stories of people going back to Poland and they were, they were not welcomed. Like *'ok, you've emigrated; go back, we don't want you here'*. (Martyna)

### Moving elsewhere

Of course, the future did not necessarily mean a choice between staying in London or moving back to Poland. A few people had plans to move on elsewhere particularly through career related mobility. This was especially the case for those who were still relatively young and did not have children such as Marika, Sonia and Izabela. For example, Izabela worked for a global corporation and fully expected to have opportunities to work in other countries: 'Seriously, it can be everywhere, I'm almost sure that I won't be in Poland but it can be Australia, it can be America, it can be UK'.

### Britain's Future in the EU

**An interesting finding to emerge in the research, and one which differs markedly from the findings of my previous research with Polish migrants (Ryan, et al, 2008; 2009), was the growing concern among participants about Britain's future in the European Union.** The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2014 soon after the UK Independence Party had achieved remarkable success in the European elections. Many participants discussed the rise of UKIP, anti-immigration rhetoric in the media, Euro-scepticism and the possible referendum on Britain's place in the EU. I was very surprised by how many participant had applied for a British passport or were seriously considering doing so.

The concerns were summed up by Angelika:

*that's what we worry actually, that because you know, because they (Britain) will leave the EU maybe, because everybody thinks, 'so what will I do, I've been here for such a long time, it's not fair', so everybody thinks about 'maybe I should just get British citizenship'. So yes, maybe we are probably thinking about it right now, just because of the current political climate. And I've been here, I've always worked, I've paid my taxes*

For quite a few participants in this study, concerns about Britain's place in the EU did not encourage them to leave but on the contrary, to strengthen their attachment by applying for British citizenship.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Obviously this is a small qualitative study and the results cannot be generalised to the whole Polish migrant population. As noted earlier, the sample is skewed towards those who stayed or returned to London during the last ten years. Interviewing people who had permanently returned to Poland would have given different results. All, bar one, of my participants were graduates and all were London based, though one had moved out to a town on the commuter belt. The

participants spoke English and all the interviews were conducted through English. Thus, I make no claims that this is a representative sample. However, many of these participants had arrived in Britain with limited English and most had experienced significant 'de-skilling' during their early years in this country. Thus their experiences are similar to many other Polish migrants.

**Overall, the preliminary findings of this study include:**

- The varied and changing reasons behind migration decision-making – the reasons for the initial migration may be different from the reasons for extending the stay
- The changing experiences of many migrants from initial de-skilling to gradual improvement in the labour market
- The role of relationships, families and children in how migration decision-making is negotiated over time
- The complexity of long-distance relationships and the how new technologies and cheap travel may alleviate but not resolve some of these issues
- The uncertain future of the UK within the EU and the different strategies migrants may be adopting to address this issue

The key finding is that migrants are active agents weighing up various considerations and circumstances as their plans change over time. Thus, this study offers a clear argument for the importance of taking the '**longer term view**' in migration research.

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