Social Policy Research Centre

Middlesex University in London

**Research report for RES- 000-22-1552 ESRC study:**

# Recent Polish Migrants in London:
# Social networks, transience and settlement

**Louise Ryan, Rosemary Sales, Mary Tilki and Bernadetta Siara**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# BACKGROUND

European Union enlargement in May 2004 expanded legal avenues to employment in Britain for workers from Eastern Europe but the impact on migratory strategies of EU workers is uncertain and likely to be contradictory. On the one hand, new legal status and the ability to claim EU citizenship rights could bring more prolonged stay and greater permanence as family settlement becomes easier. Official figures suggest that, whereas in the past migration from Eastern Europe was male dominated (Kepinska, 2004), nearly half of workers registered under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) are women (Home Office, 2005: 11). Research suggests that women may have different and more complex motives for migration tied to family migration strategies (Kofman *et. al.* 2000). On the other hand, mobility could also increase as borders are easier to cross, facilitating movement between Britain and Poland. Enlargement thus represents a potentially crucial transition in relation to migratory strategies, but little is known about its impact on the plans of new migrants or those who migrated before then.

Our research explored the implications of EU enlargement for the strategies of recent Polish migrants, the largest group of new migrants in Britain, with over half of registrations under the WRS (Home Office: 2007: 8). We examined whether new patterns of migration to Britain are developing which reflect neither the permanent settlement of past generations nor the extreme transience of the past decade. It aimed to contribute to theoretical understandings of contemporary migration by exploring diverse migratory strategies, particularly in relation to gender and family situation, and the different ways in which men and women access and construct social networks in both Britain and Poland to sustain their migratory projects.

Our research drew upon a social networks approach. Migration is rarely a purely individual project, but involves networks of family and friends (Castles and Miller, 2003; Jordan and Duvell 2003). Networks linking migrants to their place of origin are crucial in facilitating and sustaining migratory flows (Boyd, 1989). Regular contact with home and the payment of remittances demonstrate migrants' complex family considerations, mutual support and continuing loyalty. Thus, migration creates transnational kinship networks. For temporary migrants, maintaining strong links with home may be more important than establishing close relationships in the host country and 'social networks and family support are tied to the home base and form an essential element of the survival strategies of households' (Wallace, 2002: 617). Transnational ties may be reinforced through 'global care chains' or 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring' (Hochschild 2000:131).

These networks are not static and ties to the home base 'change once larger migrant communities are established abroad' (Wallace, 2002: 617).  It is important, therefore, to examine how migrants access and establish networks within the 'host' society. Migration theorists often assume that migrants arrive and simply slot into networks that provide them with jobs, housing and emotional support (Wierzbicki 2004).  A social networks approach is particularly useful since it is 'principally concerned with delineating structures of relationships and flows of activities' (Wellman 1979: 392). In other words, it is neither spatially bounded nor static. This enables an analysis of how networks operate across geographical locations and how they change over time.  In this study we were interested in how friendships and acquaintanceships are formed, the ways in which kinship ties operate both locally and transnationally, the types of support provided, and how these relationships may develop as migratory strategies change.

## RESEARCH AIMS

**1. To examine recent Polish migration to London in the context of EU enlargement and particularly to explore:**

- o Changing migratory strategies in relation to transience and permanent settlement as differentiated by gender, family situation and qualifications and occupation

- o The use of networks in Britain and Poland both formal and informal, and their impact on migratory strategies

**2. To contribute to a gendered understanding of migratory processes and strategies and of transnational networks**

**3. To examine policy implications in relation to the needs of Polish migrants, particularly those with caring responsibilities, in both Britain and Poland,**

# METHODS

This was an exploratory 12-month study which aimed to explore the migratory experiences and strategies of this group and to include participants with as wide a range as possible of these experiences. It was thus predominantly qualitative to allow us to understand participants' aspirations, feelings of belonging and their household and individual strategies. It included migrants who planned short and longer stay, and people in manual, skilled and professional occupations in Britain. A major focus was on gendered differences in migratory experiences which have been little explored in previous research (e.g. Compas, 2004; Duvell 2004). Thus participants had a range of family situations, including caring responsibilities in Britain and/or Poland

We focused on London since, although only 25% of those registered with WRS are employed there, it represents the largest concentration of new migrants (Home Office, 2007). Many of these jobs in London are permanent and so offer the possibility of long term settlement. London has also been the major destination for undocumented labour (Duvell, 2004), and has long established Polish community groups and networks (Stachura, 2004).

### Key informants interviews

We began by interviewing eleven key informants with experience of working with the Polish community, including representatives of community organisations, other voluntary agencies, trade unions and the Polish Church. These interviews explored understandings of recent patterns of migration and settlement, the experiences and needs of recent migrants and the networks they use. These informants' expert knowledge supplemented official information and statistics and helped frame the topic guides for the next stages of fieldwork.

### Focus groups

We conducted three focus groups with migrants who had arrived in Britain within the previous five years. These were chosen to include participants from different backgrounds and involved a group of Polish students at a central London university, parents at a Polish Saturday school and Polish mothers attending a mother and toddlers group. In addition, before securing ESRC funding we had carried out a pilot focus group with young Polish migrants in West London (October 2004). This helped to identify key issues which were explored further in the other three focus groups. The topics for discussion included migratory strategies, reasons for migration, attitudes to living in Britain, plans for return and involvement in social networks.

*Individual Interviews*

We carried out interviews with 30 individual migrants. These explored experiences of migration, the role of kinship and other networks and the main sources of practical and emotional support available in Britain and Poland and aspirations for the future, particularly in relation to migration and/or settlement.

Most individual interviews were conducted in Polish by the Polish-speaking research fellow, while some individual interviews were carried out in English by the principal applicant. Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted in English and Polish by members of the research team.

**Recruitment**

Participants were recruited using a range of methods including advertisements in Polish newspapers and magazines in London, through formal networks and organisations, personal networks and snowballing. We used purposive sampling to include a balance of men and women from a diverse range of ages, life stages and occupational backgrounds.

**The Participants:**

There were a total of 46 participants in the three focus groups and individual interviews. Our 30 individual interviews were split equally between the sexes but the focus groups were largely female. The majority of respondents were aged between 21 and 39, with approximately 20% aged between 40 and 59 which roughly reflect the age ratio of Polish arrivals in Britain (Kohn, 2007). Just over half had children. The majority of these lived with them in London but almost a quarter had children living in Poland. More than one third of participants were working in professional occupations in London with the remaining two thirds in manual jobs or not in employment (mainly due to caring responsibilities). A higher proportion had had professional jobs in Poland, providing some evidence of deskilling.

**Analysis**:

All interviews/focus groups were recorded on audio-tape, fully transcribed and translated. Translated transcripts were transferred onto a software programme (NUDIST) which facilitated complex management and analysis of qualitative data. The research team read all the transcripts and met regularly to examine, discuss and seek consensus on the direction and interpretation of the data. The structure of the interviews and the research aims listed above guided, but did not limit,

the analysis. Data were examined and coded by the principal investigator and the research fellow working independently. We then interrogated the data to identify and code detectable differences in terms of gender, family situation and intended stay in London. The analysis was presented to the research team for checking of consistency, coherence and comprehensiveness.

# RESULTS

## *Migratory strategies in the context of EU Enlargement*

Poland's accession to the EU impacted on our participants' migration strategies in varied ways. Just under half had entered Britain before May 2004 and accession provided an opportunity to regularise their employment status, travel with ease between Poland and Britain, to be joined by relatives, particularly, partners and children, and to extend their stay in Britain indefinitely. For those who entered after 2004, access allowed them greater flexibility and the ability to plan a long term stay.

We did not find much evidence of the sort of transience usually associated with recent migration from new accession countries (Coyle, 2007). This may be partly a result of our recruitment methods, as transient migrants may not respond to advertisements for research participants or be picked up through community organisations. Nonetheless, the data from the 46 migrants in our study challenge any simplistic assumption that all recent Polish migrants view their stay as purely temporary.

Some people had clearly defined short term plans, for example to finish their studies or save enough money to complete a specific project and then return to Poland. Most respondents were uncertain about how long they would stay and when or if they would return to Poland. Plans also changed over time. A key informant told us that many migrants 'have stayed longer than they intended' adding that temporary residence will be extended as people find 'all the things they are happy with' in London. This was expressed very clearly by Kasia, a 26-year old receptionist: 'the longer I am here, the harder it is to leave, but certainly I want to go back. I just don't know when'. This kind of uncertainty was not unusual: 'At the moment I can't say whether I would like to go back to Poland or not, because I don't know. We'll see, time will tell how things develop' (Mikolaj aged 25, barman).

Several participants had decided to extend their stay in London for their whole working lives. Adam, a construction worker said: 'we have decided that we will live here … it is not fun in Poland…We have decided to stay here, permanently. We'll see how it turns out, until retirement'. Darek, a technician, also said that he would stay in Britain until he retires.

Another key informant, a Polish Priest, observed: 'I think generally that after Poland's accession to the EU, more and more Poles will be settling here and they will plan to stay for longer, not just to make money quickly and go home again'. He added that people 'will want to go back to Poland one day' but the lack of opportunities in Poland will make that decision difficult. This point is clearly illustrated by Tadeusz, a 28 year old construction worker, who had initially come to London for three months but decided to extend his stay: 'I would like to go back to Poland, too, but not now. In 20 years…it may be different in Poland then. At the moment we wouldn't like to go back, but in future, I think yes'. This quote highlights the importance of conditions in Poland. Several people said they would go back to Poland if the economic situation improved but for the present saw no reason to return. Another key informant, from a new Polish organisation in London, told us people's plans 'depend on many factors, how they cope here, what happens in Poland, what links they create here, their financial situation'.

Some people were more certain about their plans to remain in Britain. Ewa, a 30 year old, administrator, said:

> I definitely don't plan to go back…I have much better opportunities to do things that I like, to change career whenever I feel bored which is impossible in Poland…. People are freer here. I can be freer. Poland is a very conservative society.

These long-term plans did not have to be a choice between returning to Poland or staying in Britain. Several people spoke about moving to a third country. Mikolaj, aged 25, said: 'I would like to spend some time in London. When I have earned enough money, I would like to go somewhere else'. He would like to join his uncle in New Zealand. Similarly, Aneta (aged 21) said 'I would like to go to Australia. I will certainly go there, at least on holiday, and I would like to stay there'. Agnieszka (aged 31) had started to contact employment agencies in Canada and New Zealand.

Interestingly, occupation and qualifications did not appear to be a major influence on future planning, with no appreciable difference between manual workers and professionals in terms of

their plans to return, extend their stay or move to a third country. More significant factors appeared to be age, life stage and family situation.

### *The role of family and partners: gendering migration strategies*

There is evidence of growing diversity in Polish migratory strategies following EU enlargement as the proportion of women migrants increases. While our research indicates a good deal of family reunion, a key informant at a Polish Club described two distinct family strategies. Some people prefer to improve their standard of living by relocating the entire family to London, while in other cases an individual comes alone to earn money to send back to the family Poland. The first involves higher living costs and thus fewer savings, but means that the family can enjoy the fruits of their labour together. 'So I think that there are two kinds of people, those who come here for a short period of time, they save and go back, and those who decide to stay here and live a normal life' (Key informant, Polish Club). While we found examples of both strategies, we also spoke to participants who had more complex experiences.

In the focus group at a Polish Saturday School several women described how they had recently joined their husbands in London. Initially, Basia's family strategy conformed to that described by our key informant above, as she remained in Poland with her children while her husband worked in London. After two years Basia became worried that 'our marriage will break up' so she decided to reunite the family by relocating to London. In other cases there was an agreed plan that husbands would come first and wives and children would follow after a short interval. Anna told us: 'it was planned with deliberation – 3 months… this was the period needed to find accommodation and work'. While these accounts may suggest that wives simply followed their husbands, the women in our study generally presented themselves as active participants in family-oriented migration strategies. Their children's education was particularly important to them. Several mentioned that it would be difficult to take children out of school and move them back to the Polish system.

Several female participants had decided to stay in London because it provided better opportunities for their children. 'Certainly we are not planning to go back to Poland at the moment … We see better prospects here for our daughter and for us…' (Isa aged 25). For some families this meant staying in Britain permanently. 'Just recently we decided we were going to stay. We have a baby, and we decided it's better and easier if we stay here for the future, for her future' (Dominika,

mother and toddler focus group).  Men's migration strategies could also be bound up with family situation, children's education and their wives preferences:

> When I was thinking about going back, my wife was against it... she thought that we wouldn't manage there, it wouldn't work … Here one has a job, a place, and life is easier, there is no stress… So she was against returning and I think she was right (Tomek)

Similarly, Czeslaw a doctor told us that his future strategy 'depends on family situation, because… my wife works here, and has her own plans and ambitions… it is unlikely that she will want to go back, unless something changes in Poland'.  Now that their daughter is settled in school in London, return to Poland is more complicated.

There were also women among our participants who could be called 'lead migrants'.  Lucja, a medical professional, was one of the most recent arrivals. She came to London in 2006 to investigate opportunities here and anticipates that her husband will follow.  Hanna, a 48- year-old nanny, arrived alone not knowing anyone in London, but has now established an extensive networks of friends.  She has also been joined by her two adult daughters, while her husband and younger children remain in Poland. Although her sons live with their father, Hanna still tries to play an active mothering role.  Hanna's story reveals the complexity of family strategies and the ways in which families can be split and reconfigured through transnational migration

The experiences of our participants reflect the findings of Pessar and Mahler (2003: 827) that migrant women are more likely than men to develop personal and household strategies consistent with long–term or permanent settlement abroad. Our research also highlights the variety and dynamism of family migration strategies and women's active agency in family decision-making.

### The Use of Social Networks in Britain and Poland

Many migrants spoke about the support they derived from networks of Poles in London.  Although most participants had travelled to Britain alone, many were joining established family and friendship networks, thus benefiting from practical and informational support upon arrival.  Bernard, who is 48, came to join his sons with whom he now lives and works. Although he has lived in London for over two years, he does not speak much English and has limited contact with people outside his family. He remains reliant on his sons as sources of information.  Bernard's position was echoed in the interviews of several migrants, particularly older people who lived and worked within dense family networks.

In several cases, networks were based on casual and transient relationships rather than long-established friendships. Through these networks new migrants obtained information about living in London and in many instances practical assistance with accommodation or employment. The experiences of Mikolaj, were typical: 'I had it arranged, because I had many mates here and I contacted one of them and just asked…if she could direct me to appropriate places, where I could find a job, accommodation and she collected me from Victoria'.

Almost one third of our participants had no pre-migration networks when they arrived in Britain. Several described arriving in London, usually at Victoria coach station, without any contacts. 'I came without any idea what to expect, not knowing anyone here,' (Tomek aged 33). Malgorzata at aged 57, one of the oldest participants, arrived with her adult daughter in 2002. As this was before Polish accession, they came on the bus with tourist visas. Marlgorzata has now lived in London for four years and works as a cleaner. She has expanded her circle of friends and has also been joined by her younger daughter. She says that she knows a lot of Poles, so 'there is no problem in socialising'. However, limited English language is her greatest problem and has prevented her from making contact with people other than Poles: 'I don't have English friends'.

Hanna also arrived before EU enlargement with no pre-existing networks and speaking no English. Her early experiences in London revealed the vulnerability of her position, her susceptibility to exploitation and dependence on exclusively Polish networks but also highlight the usefulness of transient acquaintances. As she said, 'Poles helped me to stand on my own feet'. Hanna got a series of 'illegal' jobs including one in a factory for £2.50 per hour. Since Poland's entry to the EU, Hanna has been able to regularise her employment, improving her pay, entitlements and conditions.

Accounts of practical assistance provided by friends already in London conform to the description in other studies (Jordan and Duvell, 2003). However, while Polish friends were often an important source of information and practical assistance, our findings suggest that access to reliable information could be a problem for newly arrived migrants. Marek (aged 30) joined a ready made circle of Polish friends in London but the information they were able to provide about life in Britain was not always accurate.

Our research suggests the importance of factors such as language, occupation and family circumstances in the ability of migrants to extend their networks. Those in our sample with good language skills and in professional occupations appeared to be less reliant upon Polish networks and had access to wider sources of information and practical support. Some with professional qualifications had arranged their employment before leaving Poland either by applying for advertised jobs or through recruitment agencies. For example Agnieszka and Ewa, both university graduates with good English language skills, had arranged employment and accommodation in this way before leaving Poland. Although neither had networks upon arrival in London, they quickly made friends with co-workers and both women now have friends from varied ethnic backgrounds.

Our research also found some evidence that access to and use of networks was gendered in particular ways. Parents, especially mother with young children, tended to make friends with other parents in their local neighbourhoods. Amelia is the mother of two young children. She and her husband had no pre-migration networks in London but through her children's nursery and school she has established friendships with other mothers and has built up a network of practical support, especially around reciprocal childcare. Thus as noted in other research (Ryan, 2007), having young children seems to enable migrant women to access particular types of networks and friendship groups.

Most of our respondents maintained regular contact with friends and family in Poland via e-mail, texting and cheap phone cards. Daily phone calls were not unusual. Darek phoned his wife in Poland every night and Marzena told us that she phoned her mother every day. This kind of emotional support 'at a distance' is well acknowledged in migration studies (Baldassar, 2007). In addition, migrants could draw on transnational networks in other ways to provide practical support, including various forms of care. Several participants told us that their mothers had come to help with childcare. For example, Iza's mother came for an extended visit to help look after her new baby while Iza returned to work. It was apparent that caring relationships operated in both directions as some migrants had to make regular visits home to provide hands-on caring. In some cases one partner remained in Poland to provide this care. Transnational care is a highly gendered activity (Morokvasic, 2004; Ryan, 2007; Zontini, 2004) and it was generally women who saw themselves as having the primary responsibility for caring, whether for children or other relatives.

Despite the high levels of practical, information and emotional support that many of our respondents received from their Polish friends and relatives, the perception that Poles do not help

each other ran through many of the interviews. As Kelly and Lusis (2006) point out, migrants have complex relationships with the wider 'ethnic community'. Most migrants interact and engage with very specific groups of friends, family and acquaintances and while these may be made up of varying numbers of co-ethnics they often distinguish these from the wider and more generalised ethnic 'community'. Our participants tended to regard the wider Polish community with wariness and even in some cases suspicion (see also Eade et al, 2006). Several claimed that Poles deliberately compete and undermine each other. Marysia, a 25-year-old factory worker, said that many Poles were reluctant to talk freely about their jobs 'because they are afraid that you will take up their place'.

This wariness extended to their involvement in formal Polish networks which had generally been established by earlier generations of Polish migrants. They tended to use these networks for instrumental reasons rather than being actively involved or forming deeper connections. Many participants attended Polish churches, seeking information, practical and social support as well as for religious reasons. Several sent their children to Polish Saturday Schools and some attended a mother and toddler group within an established community centre. We also interviewed people who had little connection with any Polish organisations or groups. A number of barriers appeared to impede interaction between different generations of Polish migrants. Their motives for migration and their attachment to the Polish homeland are different and some older migrants see recent arrivals as 'unPolish' in choosing to leave the 'motherland' for economic/lifestyle opportunities. Some of our respondents saw the older generation of migrants, and the organisations they had founded, as closed and not relevant to their needs or situation. There is evidence of the development of some new organisations which reflect the needs of the new migrants, while some older organisations are attempting to adapt to the needs and opportunities posed by the new wave of migration. Most of our participants were also familiar with new Polish media such as magazines, radio stations and internet fora and used the expanding Polish businesses such as delicatessens and internet cafes.

The majority of participants in this study had been in London for less than 5 years. Their networks are still developing and changing and it is unclear how these networks, both local and transnational, will continue to change over time. Nonetheless, even within the few years since their migration, it is apparent that some networks have already grown and diversified while others have remained quite small and close-knit. Migrants establish and access new networks in diverse

ways and our findings show the varied dynamism, fluidity, density and durability of migrants' networks.


## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Government policy has viewed these migrants as temporary workers and made little or no provision for their wider social, educational, familial and housing needs.  They have been seen as workers rather than citizens with social rights and family responsibilities. They have thus had to rely primarily on informal networks and their own resources. This raises a number of policy issues:

- Existing community and voluntary organisations are not geared to supporting their needs. There is a need for statutory support to build capacity within these organisations to enhance advice and information, signposting services, as well as cultural and leisure activities.

- Language was the main issue highlighted by our respondents as impeding employment opportunities and their engagement with the wider society. Migrants with little or limited English were particularly isolated.  There is a strong need for more widely accessible English language classes.

- Several participants had professional qualifications but were currently working below their skill level.  They would benefit from the opportunity to retrain or upgrade their qualifications and enhance their language skills. This would enable them to fill current gaps in the professional market.

- Despite EU citizenship, it is clear that some Polish workers are unaware of their entitlements. There is a need for greater information particularly relating to employment rights and welfare

- There is scope for developing social enterprise, including in collaboration with community organisations and for better information and support for establishing new businesses.

# REFERENCES

Baldassar, L. (2007) 'Transnational families and aged care: the mobility of care and the migrancy of ageing' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33 (2), pp.275-297.

Boyd, M. (1989) 'Family and personal networks in international migration', *International Migration Review* 23 (3): 638-70.

Castles, S and M. Miller (2003) *The Age of Migration: international population movements in the modern world.* Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Compas (2004) *Compas EU Accession Project* Project Summary, June 2004 (Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford).

Coyle, A (2007) 'Resistance, Regulation and Rights: the changing status of Polish women's migration and work in the new Europe', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14 (1), pp.37-50.

Eade, J, Drinkwater, S and M. Garapich (2006) *Class and Ethnicity: Polish Migrants in London*, CRONEM, University of Roehampton.

Duvell, F. (2004) *Polish undocumented immigrants, regular high-skilled workers and entrepreneurs in the UK*, Institute for Social Studies, Warsaw University.

Hochschild, A. (2000) 'Global care chains and emotional surplus value' in W. Hutton and A. Giddens (eds) *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, London: Jonathan Cape.

Home Office (2005) *Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain* Five Year Strategy for asylum and immigration. CMD 6472.

Home Office (2007) *Accession Monitoring Report, May 2005-December 2006*, London: Home Office, www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

Jordan, B. and F. Duvell (2003) *Migration: the boundaries of equality and justice.* Cambridge: Polity.

Kelly, P. and T. Lusis (2006) 'Migration and the transnational habitus: evidence from Canada and

the Philippines' *Environment and Planning A* 38(5), pp.831-848.

Kepinska, E. (2004) *Recent Trends in International Migration*, Poland 2003, Institute for Social Studies, Warsaw University.

Kofman, E., A. Phizacklea, P. Raghuram and R. Sales (2000) *Gender, migration and welfare in Europe*, London:Routledge.

Kohn, M. (2007) 'A very modern migration: the Polish presence in Britain' *Catalyst Magazine*, www.catalystmagazine.org

Morokvasic, M. (2004), 'Settled in mobility: engendering post-wall migration in Europe', *Feminist Review* 77: 7-25.

Pessar, P. & Mahler, S. (2003) 'Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender in' *International Migration Review* 37/3 pp. 812-846

Ryan, L. (2007) 'Migrant women, social networks and motherhood: The experiences of Irish nurses in Britain' *Sociology*, 41 (2), pp.295-312.

Stachura, P. Ed. (2004) *The Poles in Britain: from betrayal to assimilation* London: Frank Cass

Wallace, C. (2002) 'Opening and closing borders: migration and mobility in East-Central Europe' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* vol. 28 no 4, pp.603-625.

Wellman, B. (1979) 'The Community Question: the intimate networks of East Yorkers' reprinted in Scott, J (ed.) (2002) *Social Networks*, pp.390-420. New York: Routledge.

Wierzbicki, S (2004) *Beyond the Immigrant Enclave: Network change and assimilation.* New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing.

Zontini, E. (2004) 'Immigrant women in Barcelona: coping with the consequences of transnational lives', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.* 30 (6): 1113-1144.