

**A8 Nationals in the Borough of Poole
Stage Two Report**

**Experiences of Polish Migrant Workers:
Motivation, Networks and Integration**

Corporate Research Team, Borough of Poole, August 2008

Project Background

This report is written in response to a demand for local insight to develop understanding of the experiences of migrant workers coming to England from Poland following the latter's accession to the European Union in 2004. Although much work has been undertaken into the numbers of Polish people coming to England during this period, there remains a lack of empirically grounded studies on the more human aspects of A8 migration, such as the social impact on, and implications for, both the migrants and the destination community.

As the Audit Commission has noted, "Areas with limited experience of diversity and change may have had limited arrangements for interpretation, and community organisations with little experience of providing relevant support. Local people may be more conscious of, and concerned about, rapid change where it is more obvious because it is new" (Audit Commission, 2007).

The Borough of Poole is one of many such areas. A small Unitary Authority with a population of around 137,000, its non UK-born population at the time of the last Census¹ was measured at 4.5% - only seventy-eight of whom were born in Poland.

Since May 2004, 2,050 Polish migrants have registered for work in Poole². Even given the limitations of these 'official' figures³, this represents a significant diversification of the local population that is clearly notable around the Borough. Employers, schools, churches, hospitals, doctors, banks, and local housing, employment and advice agencies have all reported notable increases in the numbers of Polish nationals engaging with their services.

However, it is not just the scale of the migration that has implications for the local community, but also its rapid speed. Whilst previous migrant communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Portugal have settled and integrated into Poole over past decades, they have done so, in numbers, much more gradually, and over a much longer period of time – thus distilling the impact on local services and communities.

Unfortunately, history shows that a large sudden influx of 'foreigners', particularly during a time of economic uncertainty can result in increased tensions within the destination community – that can easily be exacerbated by a lack of cultural understanding, a language barrier, and an acceptance of self-perpetuating myths.

This report therefore seeks to develop knowledge of the experiences of Polish migrant workers, in order to advance local understanding and to help ease their transition into the local community. It will consider whether some of the key forms of motivation, adaptation and settlement pursued by economic migrants in the past remain relevant for A8 migrants moving through open EU borders to new areas in the present. It concentrates on personal accounts gathered through in-depth interviews with fifteen Polish migrant workers who live and work within the Borough of Poole. In particular it considers the choices these migrants made, the barriers they have faced and the ways in which they have been able to 'fit in' to an unfamiliar English society.

¹ 2001 Census data: www.statistics.gov.uk

² Workers Registration Scheme March 2008.

³ WRS figures do not include families or dependents of migrant workers, there is no deregistration data and self employed migrants don't have to register.

The Motivation to Migrate

Reflecting on individuals' motivations to migrate can help to provide further understanding of the decisions and direction they choose to take in relation to the host country.

In the case of the participants in this study, their apparent motivations were threefold: to gain work, to earn better money and/or to improve their English language. However, underlying these factors was a keen desire to improve their prospects of achieving a good quality of life.

Essentially, by migrating to England these migrants were trying to exercise control over their own future within the context of political and economic conditions. They had considered their ongoing prospects were they to remain in Poland, and compared this with their likely trajectory if they took advantage of the newly opened EU borders and came to live and work in England.

“At this time Poland was in the European Union and it was easiest. Because all the time in my adult life it had been complicated to find any kind of vacancies. . .I decided that maybe I should change my life.”

“I don't think that people came here to make money. They came here to have better opportunities to live.”

Of particular interest to this study however, was how this motivation influenced the migrants' likelihood of integration into the host society. To a notable extent this depended on how the participants defined a 'good' quality of life – their own personal priorities.

Some were very clear that their time in England would enable them to re-finance their lives in Poland – to achieve their dream of buying a home or providing a better life for their families. These migrants fully intended to return home to Poland as soon as they had built sufficient savings – and thus had the clearest idea of how long they planned to stay – usually for a further one to two years.

“I think maybe at the end of the year I will be leaving England, because actually I have bought a flat already in Poland and I came here only for earning money, to have an easy life in Poland.”

Many of the participants were young Poles who had just finished studying. Aged between 22-25, they were uncertain about their future career in Poland and wanted to gain both professional and life experience. In a sense they were opportunistic, moving to England to take advantage of openings they felt were unavailable to them in their home country. Although they envisaged returning home eventually, they were open to the opportunities that arose in both countries. If, after some time in the UK, they were given the chance of progression or a move to their 'ideal' job they would consider extending their stay. If the economic situation in Poland improved, they would look to return.

“I think though there are still more opportunities here, and my employer is much more understanding and helpful. It is different in my country. You have to fight about lots of stuff.”

Others had come because they were tired of life in Poland and wanted to try something different – a new adventure in a more dynamic country. They had tried working in Poland, but had decided to come to England as the partiality of career progression and the gap between earnings and costs in Poland meant that their prospects for improving their quality of life there were limited. They felt that England would offer them a better start in life, with less constraints and more freedom of choice.

This group had often travelled to England with their partners or children, and were the most likely to envisage much longer-term stays.

“I worked only 5 months in Poland, but I didn’t see any reason to stay there, because it didn’t give me nothing. I still live with my parents, I couldn’t move from them, so I wanted to get something more and try something different.”

“In Poland we haven’t got such a good start as we’ve got here. I would never think about university there, it was just a dream. I had no money. Here maybe, I start university next year, maybe not, but at least I can dream about it here.”

It appears therefore, that motivation does seem to affect intent and length of stay. However, perhaps surprisingly it seems to have less impact in terms of the participants’ attitudes towards other aspects affecting integration, such as learning the English language, developing new relationships or adopting a different culture.

Barriers to Understanding

Very few of the participants had ever visited England before their migration. Although most had learnt basic English in schools, they had little prior experience of using the language in everyday life. As the narrative of their migration proceeded, it became clear that in adapting to their new country they faced a number of common barriers.

Language

Without fail, the participants recognised the importance of the English language in facilitating their resettlement – in terms of both communicating and understanding. Indeed, many had chosen England above other countries as they already had some knowledge of the language, and questioned how they would have managed without this.

“I couldn’t come to some foreign country without speaking the language. That’s a problem, it’s a really big problem. So I don’t know how [migrants who can’t] can find out about a place to live and work, things like that. And working for someone, your employer, and your employer saying to you what you have to do and you don’t understand him!”

However, on arrival most had found that their basic understanding was not enough to enable them to interact effectively. They had found that the different usage of the language tripped them up and dented their initial confidence. Slang, colloquialisms and speed of speech all acted as a further barrier to understanding. Those who had moved to Poole from other parts of England spoke of their relief at being able to understand the locals – stronger accents in other areas had meant they had struggled to understand anything at all.

“I thought that my English was quite good and I wouldn’t have any problems. When I heard the communication – the colloquial, everyday English, it was quite difficult. It is good enough to get by, but not enough good to feel comfortable.”

“The first day I went to work, they asked me to do the tea at 5pm. And I think this was a cup of tea because I didn’t know that. I knew it was dinner but not tea, you know.”

“When I moved to Yorkshire, I haven’t got a clue what they are talking about for three months! So moving south made it much easier for me.”

Unfortunately, such experiences made them question their language abilities. Many noted that at first they were less comfortable about using their spoken English as they were cautious of making mistakes.

“I was so scared of speaking. I was always getting nervous, and losing my words, and my mind is going somewhere else and I always don’t know what to say, and all my fluency of speaking is gone somewhere else.”

In many cases, they felt that their inability to effectively communicate their needs and issues left them vulnerable to being misled or taken advantage of, as people could use their language as an excuse. They clearly saw their language as a barrier to improving their employment prospects too – when asked about their ideal job this was often one that they were qualified for in Poland, but did not feel that they could aspire to in England until their language had improved.

“When I tried to explain to people and they don’t want to help they say that they don’t understand what I say. But I try to be clever and I use a different word that means the same, to show these people that I really know, and they change their mind and they discuss with me. Maybe they think at first that it will be very hard to discuss with this person, and it is easier to say that they don’t understand.”

“So many Polish people they have problems with language and that is the reason they are looking for a job at a really low level, just a cleaner or factories.”

In particular, the participants were wary of their language skills when using the telephone. They found it difficult to process phone conversation - given its faster speed, and struggled without face-to-face contact, as they could not gauge expression or read body language. This issue was of particular concern as it meant that they struggled to engage the services they needed (eg. mobile phones, internet, water, electricity) or the support that they required (eg. for tax or benefits issues), as in most cases the initial contact method was the phone.

“When you are talking with somebody you see the face, you see everything. So if you don’t understand some words or something you can just see what the people want from you. And when you are talking by phone you can’t see, you just have to listen.”

“On the phone lines, the help lines. . . when you ask them to speak slower they don’t take notice of that. . . You find them just unwilling to co-operate, to help you. They just want to go through the procedure and get rid of a difficult client.”

But it was not just services that were difficult to engage. Without a good understanding of English, the participants found that even developing new friendships could be frustrating, as they were unable to understand slang, colloquialisms, jokes or even keep up entirely with the flow of conversation and respond accordingly. As discussed below, their lack of comfort in these social situations often meant that they were more likely to gravitate towards others of their own nationality when wanting to relax.

“I can communicate, but it is not enough for jokes and things like that. These are not accessible for me in the way I would if I was in Poland with Polish people. There is a barrier.”

“I’m not so good still in English to speak with them like they’re best mates. . .when I’m with English guys I really wish I could speak like them, not missing some words from what they are saying.”

These situations were often exacerbated by long working hours. As noted previously, a key motivation for the participants in coming to England was to earn better wages, improve their English language, and subsequently improve their quality of life. However, the three employment sectors in which they were working tend to be characterised by shift work and basic wages that they found incompatible with the high cost of living in Poole. Within this context, each migrant felt that they were faced with a choice between their work and their desire to learn the language. They themselves had observed that comparatively few Poles

chose the latter. Although the locally provided language courses were no longer free, it was constraints on time, rather than cost, that provided the real barrier.

“I don’t have the time to learn English. I have a bright mind but I have to rest so I am not learning. I don’t have time for things like that, because the job is physical, so when I get home I am tired I’ve had enough.”

Without language therefore, it seems that the migrant workers are vulnerable to a developing pattern of isolation. They see language as key to improving their quality of life in England – enabling them to exercise their rights or better their employment prospects, but choose to work long hours to maximise their financial potential, thus restricting their opportunities to learn English. They also have little time to interact with wider society and find conversing with English people difficult, so tend to migrate towards other Poles. However, these people are also working long hours and often are too tired when they finish work to make the effort. Unfortunately this appears to be a self-perpetuating issue, often further compounded by homesickness and weakening of ties in Poland.

Culture

Despite both England and Poland being part of the European Union, the participants found that, in addition to learning a new language, they also needed to develop their understanding of a new social and political culture, where even basic everyday processes could be unexpectedly tricky.

“I had to learn. It was like being a newborn, different society, different rules and everything was strange for us.”

“It is very difficult to drive on the other side of the road. My arm was really hurt because generally I do everything with right hand, and having to change gears with my left hand. It was completely strange for me.”

*“I can’t understand why, you’ve got hot and cold taps – no mixer! In Poland, everywhere you get mixers, in bathroom, in kitchen. Little things but, you know, you wake up in the morning and brush your teeth and it’s hot water, and you’re closed eyes, and it like [sighs] ‘s**t, yeah.”*

Primarily, however, they were concerned about the differing ‘rules’ and systems of the host society, when compared to those in their own country. They felt that their lack of understanding made them vulnerable to both risks and missed opportunities.

Housing provides a particular example, although the migrants’ narratives contained isolated incidents with employers and service providers that also followed a similar pattern. Where issues arose – usually around maintenance, they found their landlord could be unwilling to respond. At the end of their lease, they found it strange that their landlord tried to retain their deposit. The participants tended to see this as a direct affront – the landlord was taking advantage because they were Polish and because they did not fully understand the ‘rules’. Although it felt wrong, maybe this was how things worked in England? Where could they seek advice? How could they be sure that what they were being told is right?

“The whole system is strange here. I have bad experiences with council tax, water. I don’t like going to different councils and sort something because it takes a long time to sort it. . . It is about not understanding the system.”

Similarly, whilst they knew the mechanisms of the Workers Registration Scheme well, they were less clear about other opportunities and entitlements. Child benefit was a key example here – those with children had heard that they might be entitled even if their child was in

Poland, but they were being told different things by different people and were unsure what the 'rules' were. Overall, they questioned how they could make the most of the opportunities available to them if they did not know what those opportunities were?

"If you don't know anything about the rules in this country then you don't know how to ask about basic stuff."

"May I go to the hospital? For example, if I have a cough or I feel sick? So if I am really sick I need to go the doctor? And to the hospital? And what next? I don't know."

Unluckily, the participants found that it was not just 'legal' rules, but also social rules that were interpreted differently in England. Overall, Poland was seen as a more traditional society than England. All highlighted the significance of religion and family in their lives. Their Polish background was also reflected in the manner in which the participants choose to spend their free time. Unlike the English 'pub culture', the migrants' social life fitted more closely with their experiences in Poland of a social life built around the home, the church and close ties with friends and family.

"It was a shock for me during the Christmas. It is a very quiet time for us, when we are going to church and spending time thinking about Jesus. . . And here in England everyone was thinking about the Christmas party, about dancing."

"We are not going to the pub – it is not our culture, but we like spending the time with neighbours to have a BBQ or to have a party."

The participants had observed that Polish society was much more conservative, whilst England was cosmopolitan with more relaxed 'social rules'. Consequently, they believed that English society offered much more freedom to choose their own way of life.

"People in my country they worry a lot about what people will say. That's why I like here. I can wear clothes like that and I can go and do my shopping – in my country people will say 'oh god, look at her', and here I feel more comfortable still, than in my own country."

"The tolerance is really good. Like that I can say to you that I am Catholic and you can say that it is good, that it is nice that you believe in something. In Poland it is completely bad to be different."

However, although English people were perceived to be tolerant of difference, they were also felt to be very insular. A number of the participants observed that it was unusual for English people to go out of their way to interact with Polish people outside of work – that perhaps they were indifferent; or tolerated, rather than were tolerant.

"Maybe not welcome but I feel alright. It's ok, you are here, you are Polish, we don't have any problem that you are here."

"Maybe I feel that they don't really care to have Polish friends. So they are just a bit closed in their English community, and they don't really care."

This perspective gained further resonance as the participants began to expand on their perceptions of the welcome they had received from local people. Although generally they felt that they were welcomed in Poole, they were beginning to observe more instances of intolerance as the English economy declined.

*"This customer who made the call, he didn't know that I was Polish, and he started to talk to me that he needed to cancel his policy because he didn't have money because these 'f*****g Polish people came here and I can't find a job because of them."*

“I have long term experience of living in Britain for almost four years, unfortunately there is I think increasing, not hostility, but distance. Which worries me a little bit because I thought it was going to get better and better over the years. And I don’t know what is fuelling it, whether it is the newspapers or the other way round – the newspaper take the moods of the society. But you can feel it.”

In order to evade these issues, the migrants hoped that they could find a way to develop understanding between the two cultures, so that whilst they were trying to adapt to English culture, English people would learn more about why Polish migrant workers were coming to England, and about the Polish way of life. They felt that both migrants and locals could find much in common if only they took the opportunity to look.

“I think we need understanding more than anything else. I mean, a lot of us are trying to learn the language, how to behave, understand the culture as well. Not all of us can do it, but we are trying to do it. And in some way we expect the same. We’re not trying to put our culture in here. We are not trying to force you to take it. But just to understand some of our things.”

Finding Their Feet.

So how did the participants deal with these barriers? What assistance did they utilise to help further their understanding of the host society? Overall, they identified three areas of support, covering both practical and emotional issues – local people, Polish compatriots, and an international communications structure.

Local Assistance

With the assistance of the Internet, media or agencies in Poland, all but two of the participants had arranged their employment before coming to England. Their view was that this was of considerable help with the initial stages of their time in England, as their employers also provided a first port of call for other aspects of their migration. For example, many of the migrants’ employers had provided housing, at least for an initial period to enable them to find their feet. And by walking straight into a job on arrival, assistance was also provided with much of the official documentation such as registering for National Insurance and Worker Registration Schemes.

“It is good to have somebody that you can go and ask about everything, and you know I have my agency, which is good. I can’t think imagine what should be if I had to go to England without anything.”

Encouragingly, many of the participants had also found their employment to be a source of ongoing support, if not directly, then at least through some of the personal contacts they had made there. They had found that both colleagues and clients could be a useful immediate source of ad-hoc advice and information

“I was working with older people. They have been really, really good for me. . .If I didn’t have something – for example when I had just come I only had two cereal bowls, and they were ‘I can give you two more if you want’, and they give me advice to go to charity shop, ‘it would be cheaper for you if you don’t stay here forever.”

Indeed, the participants felt that the workplace provided them with the best opportunity to develop a wider circle of English contacts. The working environment enabled them to meet English people and to build understanding and trust by working alongside them. Considering their long working hours, they found this contact to be invaluable in helping them to learn more about the language or the local area.

“I have got very good English friends. When I first started at my employer they were really good, really helpful”.

“They sent me to a training centre at first, which was quite good timing. I could pick up a bit more English too. There were no more Poles at that, so it was brilliant – a good time. They [other trainees] are still my friends.”

Polish Support

Whilst employers tended to provide initial structured support to the participants, they also noted a further type of assistance – that of their fellow migrants. This support tended to develop over a slightly longer period of time, and took a more empathic role - providing advice and sharing of experiences.

The particular importance of Polish contacts above all others was their shared perspective on the migrants' new lives. These were people who the participants could really identify with. They had embarked from their home country, faced similar barriers and, importantly, spoke their native language. They were able to offer emotional as well as practical support, and to curb the onset of homesickness. In addition, being with Polish people, speaking with Polish people was seen as a key form of relaxation – it could be done without effort.

“It is important to be honest, it is. I’m really, really missing my country and friends and family, so it is important. And I find it easier to get on with them, more than with English people.”

“It is like a second rest. One rest is when I go to sleep, and the second rest is when I speak Polish. But with people who are on the same level. So we may change our experience, speak about a lot of things – ‘don’t worry, it will be better’, so this is really important.”

In addition to these personal contacts, the participants also benefited from more structured opportunities that were beginning to emerge in response to the growing Polish community. For example, in the neighbouring borough of Bournemouth, a local Catholic church has begun holding a Polish service to meet the spiritual needs of the migrant workforce (Over 90% of Poles are Catholic).

Unfortunately, shift patterns prevented some of the participants from accessing this important support, but those who had found it useful not just spiritually, but also as an opportunity to meet other Poles. The Church was also a key distribution point for the local Polish newspaper, set up by Poles in order to provide assistance in finding jobs and housing, and in signposting to information relating to the specific issues that Polish migrant workers faced.

“There is a Polish Mass in Sacred Heart Church, so many people are going there. If you go there you will be really surprised because it is a full church of people – where have they all come from?!”

“Most of the information we’ve got is in Polish Echo. . .Where is the Polish dentist, where is the Polish GP and which school will be the best for your child. It’s very good. They have got all the information what you really need.”

Interestingly, as their time in England progressed, the participants were also beginning to find that they too were becoming an integral part of this support. As their own knowledge developed, they found that newer migrant workers were looking to them for assistance as they had looked to others.

“I came first with my boyfriend and after a few months my brother came. I just asked my employer if they could find any jobs. Everyone wants us to find a job for the rest of the family, cousins and that.”

“I’m usually sorting out the problems of my mates. Most of the time I’m still asked to go with them to the hospital when they’re going. . . To explain the things, what you need, or what’s hurting you is quite difficult to explain if you don’t know the words.”

International Communications

In addition to these local human supports, the participants were also able to utilise the support of more international phenomena such as cheap flights and the Internet.

The Internet was considered an absolutely invaluable tool. Indeed, the information it provided had been used long before my migrants even came to England. Often they had gone online as part of the decision making process, to learn about the country and to gather initial ideas about where exactly they might like to have their base. Some had found their jobs online before coming to England, some had downloaded maps and tourist guides of Poole to help them find their way around. In essence, they were able to arrive armed with some initial information, rather than stepping entirely into the unknown.

From finding work and housing, to seeking advice and information about their problems, and learning about their rights, the participants felt that the Internet gave them a distinct advantage. Where they were unconfident about their language skills they could first look for information on their computer. The Internet also provided a useful alternative to the telephone. Interestingly, they were even able to seek support from other Poles working in England through online forums set up specifically for the purpose of providing support.

“I think the Internet is really helpful for Polish people who are coming here because you can find some advice for how you live in England, what will be the most interesting in your local area, where is your nearest council or where is your nearest GP.”

“There is lots of advice over the Internet in Polish language. There is lots of help for people in quite dramatic situations as for what to do.”

Furthermore, the Internet also enabled the participants to maintain regular contact with friends and family back in Poland, important in alleviating homesickness and for emotional backing. Both email and Skype provided a cheap way of keeping in touch – even face to face contact was possible.

“I need an internet. My friend who lived here had an internet and the first thing I did was calling to everybody, to my mom, to my friends, and now I can speak to them every day when I want. It’s good.”

In addition to the Internet, the participants were also able to take advantage of cheap flights to their homeland.

“I am flying home every two or three months at least for a week. So, it’s not so bad.”

“It’s very easy now, because it’s like ten minutes by car, and then two and a half hours by flying and I’m there.”

It was no accident that many of the participants originated in cities such as Gdansk and Katowice with inexpensive and direct air links to nearby Bournemouth. Once they were financially stable in England they were able to travel regularly to Poland to visit family, to continue studies, to visit their doctors and dentists, and even to get their hair cut! Overall, they felt that this link, even just the knowledge that it was there when needed, made it much easier for them to migrate.

Concluding Observations

A New Freedom of Choice

Although economic and political factors provided the context for migration, the participants had travelled to England in order to achieve very personal goals. Each had an individual view of how their migration would affect their present or future quality of life. Poland's accession to the EU gave them flexibility in their outlook and allowed them make their choices in response to prevailing conditions in both their community of origin and destination. Consequently, although those with specific goals had a clearer idea of when they were likely to return home, more often than not the predominant outlook was one of uncertainty – most were happy to stay as long as their migration provided a better quality of life than returning to Poland.

Due to EU expansion, the migrants are free both to seek work and to return home, their choices are less restricted. As a result they are migrating to new areas in order to maximise their opportunities of improving their quality of life. They are able to exploit demand for their labour by choosing to move on if their initial circumstances do not suit. What the participants have narrated is a very flexible form of migration, distinguished by personal motivation and therefore little inevitability in terms of location or settlement.

Social Adaptation

Despite this new freedom of choice, a number of constraints still apply. If it is considered that society develops through people's interactions with one another, and that this interaction is based on an ability to define and communicate meaning, then it is clear that language and cultural differences between communities can still prevent the removal of social barriers. Despite their preparations in Poland, it was obvious that these were issues that the participants had struggled to overcome. Difficulties understanding the language and culture in England left them vulnerable to deception, isolation and missed opportunities.

It also affected the migrants' prospects of developing English friendships. Although this report does not encompass local people's own attitudes, the participants' perceptions were that outside of work, it was difficult for them to interact with English people - partly because of their own language barrier and lack of free time, but also because of a perceived lack of interest in doing so on the part of the locals. Whilst direct prejudice was felt to be the exception rather than the norm, the participants did advocate a need for greater understanding from both sides in order to ease their integration into local society.

Networks of Support

The experiences of the participants provide a notable contrast to traditional theories of network migration directed by the experiences of family and personal contacts.

Unlike areas such as Southampton and London, Poole had no established Polish community for these Polish migrants to tap into. Instead, the participants migrated to Poole because of their employment. They sourced jobs whilst in Poland, but relied primarily on the Internet to do so. On arrival, their employers also provided the initial network of support, often helping to find them housing, complete legal documentation and make initial contact with both local people and other migrants.

The Internet also considerably facilitated the early stages of the participants' relocation. In essence, it provided a virtual network of information and support that enabled even those with limited language capabilities to seek advice and improve their understanding of English society without relying on direct human contact or use of the telephone. It also enabled

cheap and regular contact with family and friends in Poland. As a 'proxy' network it greatly enhanced the migrants' capacity for independent migration.

What these new networks could not provide however was the emotional and linguistic support borne of a common understanding and identity. Although online forums could be used to share experience, they did not provide the personal contact that the participants felt was invaluable in preventing isolation and homesickness. It was perhaps inevitable therefore, that new Polish networks would begin to emerge within the local community. The participants spoke of Polish church services, Polish newspapers, and indeed even their own experiences of helping migrants who arrived after them.

Although still in their infancy, it will be interesting to observe over time how these networks develop and sustain.

Implications for Integration

As the participants began to tell the stories of their migrant lives, it was clear that they saw England as a multicultural society, which is tolerant of difference. Rather than feeling that they should adapt completely to the English way of life, they in fact felt that their migration had given them more freedom to follow their own path than they had in their homeland.

Contact with Polish people with whom they could more easily identify was of particular importance to the participants, and there are early signs that migrant networks are beginning to form in Poole. However, this was not at the expense of friendships with local people, which the participants were willing to encourage, if only they could find the opportunities for interaction. Rather than forming their own enclaves, they advocated the need for integration to become a two way process - not just for Polish migrants to adapt to local society, but also for local society to adapt to them. Their experiences suggest that whilst local people are happy to tolerate new arrivals living alongside, they are less open to engaging directly with them. Given the current economic climate, it is important that adaptation becomes a two way process in order to mitigate the tensions and segregation that can emerge.

A close attachment to family and friends and in some cases a preference for services in their country of origin encouraged the migrants to seek work in areas that enabled them to return home regularly. They had migrated due to the perceived advantages to be gained from open borders, and although willing to adapt to English work, language and culture, socially and emotionally they tended to identify with Polish friends, family or religion - ultimately envisaging their future in Poland.

Four years on from Accession, this study suggests that there remains a need for policy makers to develop an approach that mitigates the challenges faced by migrant workers choosing to live in their community. With traditional migrant networks still in their infancy there is a danger that migrant workers with a limited grasp of English language or cultural processes are unable to alleviate the issues they face, or maximise the opportunities that are available to them, simply because they do not know that such possibilities exist. Overall, there is a clear need to foster understanding, both in terms of the migrant worker, and of the community in which they live in order to overcome stereotyping and facilitate wider opportunities for integration.

The Interviewees

In total, fifteen Polish migrant workers took part in this study, nine of whom were female, and six who were male. Their ages ranged from 22 to 44, although most were in their twenties or early thirties.

The most significant change arising from EU expansion in 2004 was that the British job market was opened up to A8 nationals. Polish workers were now able to move to England freely and seek legal employment in accordance with the Worker Registration Scheme. Occupation was therefore chosen as the participants' defining characteristic. In particular, the migrants were employed in one of three specific sectors – industry, hospitality or social care. Over two thirds of Polish workers in Poole fall into one of the first two groups (LGAR 2008). The third group was chosen due to the high proportion of Poles amongst the social care workforce in Poole – a key function of the Local Authority.

Although the primary criterion for recruitment was employment type, the project also encompassed participants with varied durations of stay in England. It was particularly interesting to speak to migrants who were very new to the country, having arrived only a few months or, in one case, weeks ago, and to consider their 'raw' perspectives in relation to those of migrants who had been in England for one, two or three years. On average, the participants had already lived in England for one and a half years, although the most common term was two years.

The participants also had a wide range of personal circumstances in England, enabling the influences of family and friendship on the decision-making and integration process to be considered. Three had brought their partner and two their children, three had migrated to England with their friends, two lived with English friends or partners, and five had migrated alone - leaving their friends and family in Poland and living with strangers in shared houses.

Next Steps

This report is the second in a series of three papers looking at the migrant worker population in Poole.

The third paper, available in September 2008, will re-examine the migrant interviews in order to develop further understanding of the practicalities of Polish migration to the Borough – considering aspects such as finding work, housing, childcare and contact with local services.

For further information on the Migrant Workers project please contact Corporate Research on (01202) 633367 or visit our website at www.boroughofpoole.com/research

