

# What is the role of schooling in the integration and settlement process of ‘new’ Polish migrants to the UK?

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# The 'Polish migrants' project

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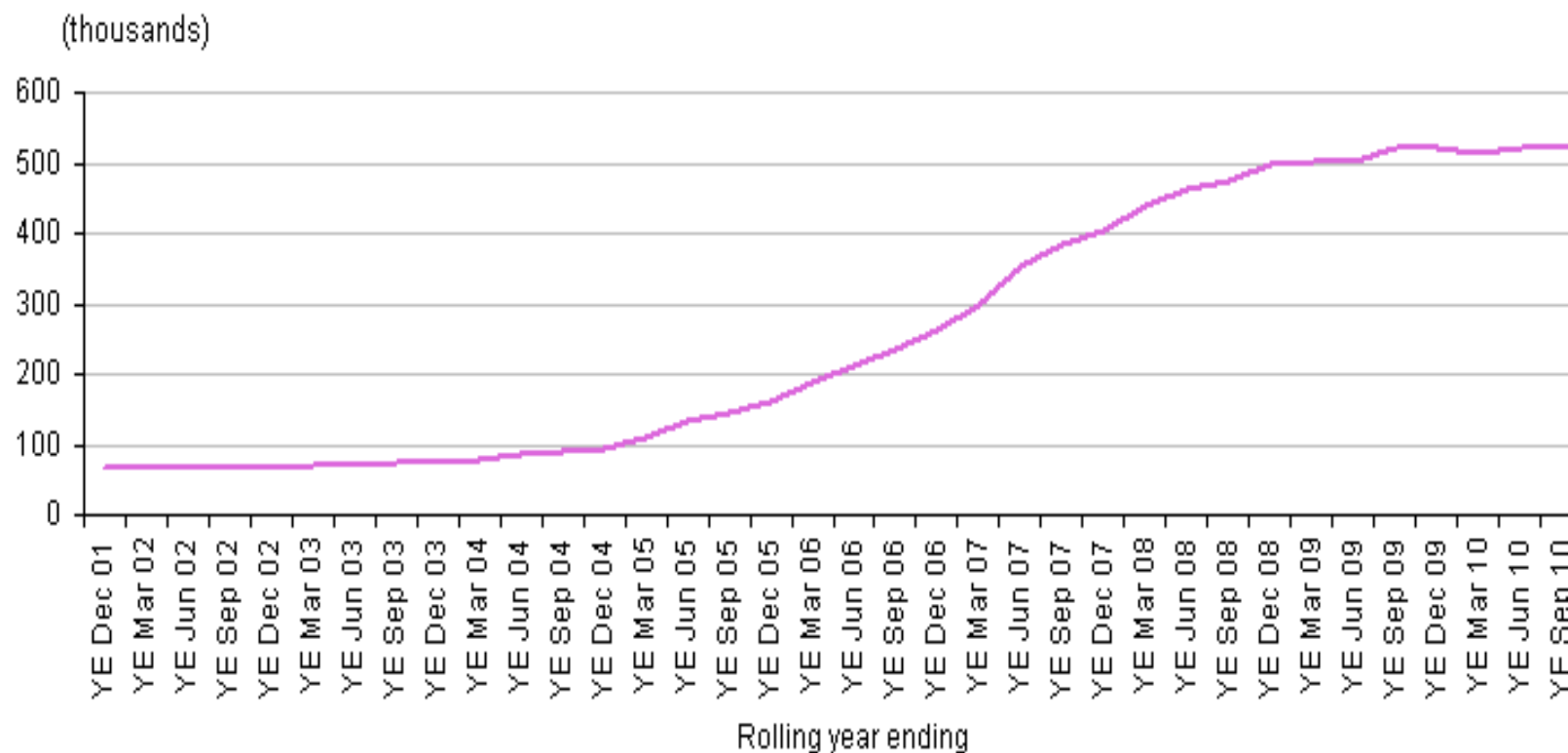
3-year ESRC research project (2009-2012)

'International labour mobility and its impact on family and household formation among Polish migrants living in England and Scotland'.

- Fieldwork in 4 locations across the UK
  - Southampton,
  - rural Dorset,
  - Glasgow,
  - rural Scotland (Perthshire & Angus).
- 83 in-depth interviews with adult Poles who had been living in the UK for at least 12 months:
  - 23 in Southampton, 20 in all other locations,
  - included 55 interviews with parents, in this with 24 parents whose children attended primary and/or secondary schools in the UK.

# 'New' Polish migration to the UK

## Polish-born people resident in the UK 2001-2010



Source: ONS, August 2011

# Key characteristics

- Young: 81% of those arriving between May 2004 and May 2009 were aged 18-34 (Home Office 2009)
- Main reason behind migration: economic.
- Fastest growing migrant community in present-day Britain
  - In England and Wales near 20,000 Polish children born in 2010; Poland has become the most common country of origin for non-UK born mothers (ONS 2011)

*Polish is now the most commonly-spoken first language among non-English-speaking newly-arrived migrant school children across England'*

(DCSF in Pollard et al. 2008)

- Highly dispersed community: Polish nationals registered in every single LA across the UK (Rabindrakumar 2008)



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# Integration through schooling

- Generally, successful transition to schooling and school adaptation largely depends on:
    - knowledge of English
    - age and previous school experience
    - individual characteristics, i.e. the child's personality
    - ability to establish friendships
    - reception by the teachers/other pupils
    - school composition
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# Schools as ‘sites of socialisation’

*My son [who started school in England at the age of 5] didn't know a word of English. So he was very lonely in the beginning, children didn't want to play with him, there weren't any other Polish children in his class (...). I would take him to school and he'd be crying his eyes out. (...) **It came to this that he would vomit in the morning because he didn't want to go to school so much** (...). So he'd vomit and fall asleep, then he'd wake up after 15 minutes and I'd say, 'Come on Jasiu, we have to go to school' and he'd rush up straight back to the loo to vomit again.*

Dorota (32), Southampton

*It was difficult, it was very difficult, it was a very difficult period (...). **Renata** [who was 14 at the time] **entered a certain group, sort of barged into this environment, and she wasn't accepted. She was different, while the younger girls didn't have the same problem.** I think things are most difficult for those children who are 12 to 14 when they come here, who don't know the language well, and they are most rejected. Things weren't easy. There were these situations where Renata would scream (...) 'I want to go back to Poland!'*

Krystyna (48), Southampton

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# Degree of language support (1)

- Scotland vs. England:

*When she came over [at the age of 13] (...) she didn't know English [sufficiently] and she had a barrier, she had problems with understanding. [So] she was sent to [an international school] for an intensive English course. She went there from October to Christmas. [S]he did that intensive course (...) and she did very well in it. Everyone would praise her, all her grades were 'excellent'. When it was decided that her English was sufficient, she was re-admitted to the school here.*

Urszula (52), Glasgow

*Naturally, it was difficult for her [then 8-year-old daughter] to focus during lessons, because she didn't understand anything. She couldn't find any friends because she couldn't communicate with them. So the first year was really difficult for her because she was so isolated.*

Elżbieta (32), Southampton

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# Degree of language support (2)

- urban vs. rural areas

*Grzes [who began school from Year R] was the first child in that school who didn't speak English. So for them it was a novelty and they experimented on him a little bit, how to teach him. (...) In the beginning they didn't know how much help he needed, how much is sufficient. He had the teaching assistants who would sit down with him and do the lessons one-to-one but they weren't really sure how to do things, they had received some guidance but of course if you're doing something for the first time, you will make mistakes.*

Dominika (34), rural Dorset

*She [then 8 year-old] got a lot of support. Initially, she only had one to one classes with a teacher who was allocated to her. Initially she was spending time with her teacher, outside the rest of the class, learning English.*

Mirka (34), rural Scotland

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# School/class composition

- The benefits of being the first/only foreign child in the class/school

*Both here and in [other school] he went to a school where there were no other Poles so he simply had to learn the language, because he only had contacts with Scottish children. (...) With the older children it wasn't this way. They went to the same school as they go to now, there were 30 Polish kids there, and they would stick with the other Polish kids. Wherever they went, they'd only meet up with other Poles. [In consequence] **the youngest learnt [English] the quickest because he had contacts only with Scots, no Poles, so he picked the language up very fast (...). The older boys had it a bit more difficult because they kept too much with Poles.***

Czesław (40), Glasgow

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# Reception

- Generally positive though cases of hostility reported in both urban and rural areas

*The people there [at the school] were really great, the teachers were great, the other children were also great. **There were never any problems with discrimination or anything like that. Never.** There was never anything like, oh, he's Polish [meaning 'worse']...*

Angelika (35), rural Dorset

*She was discriminated against by a Scottish student there [at school]. She stopped going to school. It took a while before we realised. She burst into tears one day. We also found out that **some Polish girls in the schools were beaten up, even had broken noses (...).** So she was afraid and stopped going to school because she was being threatened by that Scottish girl.*

Urszula (52), Glasgow

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# ‘Non-integration’ of the parents

- Language barrier

*I can't really say what the level of education is like because I don't socialise, I don't take part in school life. Because language is a big barrier for me, I don't go up to talk, I don't interfere with anything, I just take Janek to school and pick him up. If there are any outside school activities, I simply don't take part in them. In Poland there wouldn't be such a situation, I'd probably be in the parents' committee. But here language is a big problem for me.*

Dorota (32), Southampton

- Lack of knowledge about/understanding of the system

*Schools here (...) don't need support from parents. When they organise activities or events, I can't see the parents taking part in this. They organise everything themselves, they have enough staff, they don't need the parents' help. If they did, I would be willing to take part and help.*

Ryszard (52), Glasgow

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# Schooling as barrier to return

- Differences between education systems make it difficult to (re-)enter the Polish system for children over the age of 9:

- considerably ‘higher’ educational standards in Poland

***I don't think it's possible [for my children to re-enter the Polish education system] because my children will be backward in comparison to children in Poland (...). They would definitely be backward in terms of knowledge because the system is different here.***

Krystyna (48), Southampton

- insufficient language skills in Polish (specialist terminology; writing)
    - having to adjust to a different philosophy of teaching: discipline, high requirements, more traditional methods.
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# Impact on migration decisions

- Not wanting to interfere with their children's education

*If I were to go back I would consider Jasiu's education, so that he could finish one stage of education here and start the other in Poland. Not to throw him back in the middle of something.*

Stanislaw (35), Southampton



**may prospectively lead to long-term migration  
or even permanent settlement**

- *I also miss Poland sometimes, I'd like to go back. But we'll see how it goes. For the time being we want to let the girls finish school and then we'll see.*
- And how many years of school do they have left?
- *Oh no, they want to study here, so I'll be a grandfather by the time!*

Andrzej (40), Southampton

**Also: lower propensity for internal migration**

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# Conclusions

- Schools act as natural ‘sites of socialisation’ for the children but not their parents
    - but – how well the child integrates largely dependent on Ig support, reception and class/school composition
  - The degree of language support for migrant children differs greatly in England and Scotland → impact on children’s learning and school achievement
  - Polish parents’ lack of knowledge about the system and inability to support children in their learning may impact on their future educational opportunities
  - For Polish families schooling is a ‘double-edged sword’ – encourages stay but at the same time is a barrier to return
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# Recommendations

- Adapt language policies (at local level) in England more to the needs of migrant children
    - greater emphasis on language teaching in preschools
  - Actively encourage mixing of migrant children with British peers (e.g. through ‘buddying’ practices), esp. in schools with large migrant communities
  - Widely available (e.g. distributed through schools) information packs on the British schooling system for migrant parents (in their native language; including information on the differences between the schools systems of the sending and receiving country and advice on how they can ‘keep up’ with learning according to the native country’s education system)
  - Involving migrant parents in the school community; language/ community support for parents
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