



POLISH MIGRATION TO THE UK

Introduction

Ethnic minorities contribute about 9% to the UK population with a **net immigration** (in-migration minus out-migration) of around 200,000 to the UK in recent years (**falling** to 150,000 in 2008). The Poles are just the latest in a series of flows of economic migrants to the UK.

In 2004, eight new countries joined the European Union (EU). Known collectively as the Accession 8 or A8 countries, they are former communist bloc countries in central and eastern Europe – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Citizens of the EU have the right to live and work in any EU country and the UK has welcomed the new members. In 2005, 43% of immigration to the UK came from A8 countries and more than two-thirds of these migrants were from Poland. Their migration is for economic reasons and, in many cases, temporary (this type of migration is known as churning).

The History of Polish migration to the UK

Since the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, there have been three major waves of Polish immigration to the UK. By 1951 there were over 160,000 Polish refugees settled in Britain.

1. First, as the result of wartime displacement and deportation with the Nazi occupation of Polish territory.
2. Then during the Cold War despite heavy restrictions on movement imposed by the communist authorities, several thousand Poles joined existing groups, for example in Ealing and Northumberland coalfield.
3. And now with the movement away from the post-socialist country that is undergoing economic transition as a new member of the EU.

When they joined the EU on 1st May 2004, it became legal for Poles to work in Britain. Other EU member countries placed limits on the rights of people from the A8 countries, fearing the impact this may have on their labour markets. Of the 427,095 workers from eight EU accession states who successfully applied for work in UK between May 2004 and June 2006, nearly 62% were from Poland (*see Table 1*). In 2007, the Federation of Poles in Great Britain suggested that there were about 750,000 people with Polish connections living in the UK, about one third of whom were British citizens of voting age.

Why have the Poles come to the UK?

- Most of the EU states initially put limits on the number of migrants from the A8 countries after their entry into the EU in 2004, this put pressure on the three that did not: Britain, Ireland and Sweden.
- English is spoken as the second language of the many other countries so it is easier for migrants to move to an English-speaking nation.
- Technological advances and more accessible travel options have made migration much easier, especially with cheap flights offered by budget airlines such as Ryanair or Easyjet and special Polish coach services.
- The UK had a skills shortage, for example in dentistry and plumbing, and needed workers in key industries such as construction and agriculture so there were plenty of jobs available – though the recession since 2008 has reduced the job market.
- Polish workers have been able to earn five times more in the UK than in Poland, enabling them to send money home or save to buy homes or start businesses when they return.
- One in five workers in Poland was unemployed in 2004 (especially in Gdansk).
- Even low-paid work in the UK is attractive as the average monthly wage in Poland was £800 a month in 2004.

Surveys conducted in 2006 found that 20% of Polish migrants came here to earn money seasonally and rarely stayed more than 6 months at a time, returning the following year, 22% intended to stay here long term, and 42% had not made a decision about their future. Television, internet connections and telecommunications have created a more international workforce with wider horizons. Many of the new migrants are commuters rather than settlers, crossing international borders with ease and so more likely to return to their homeland than earlier emigrants.

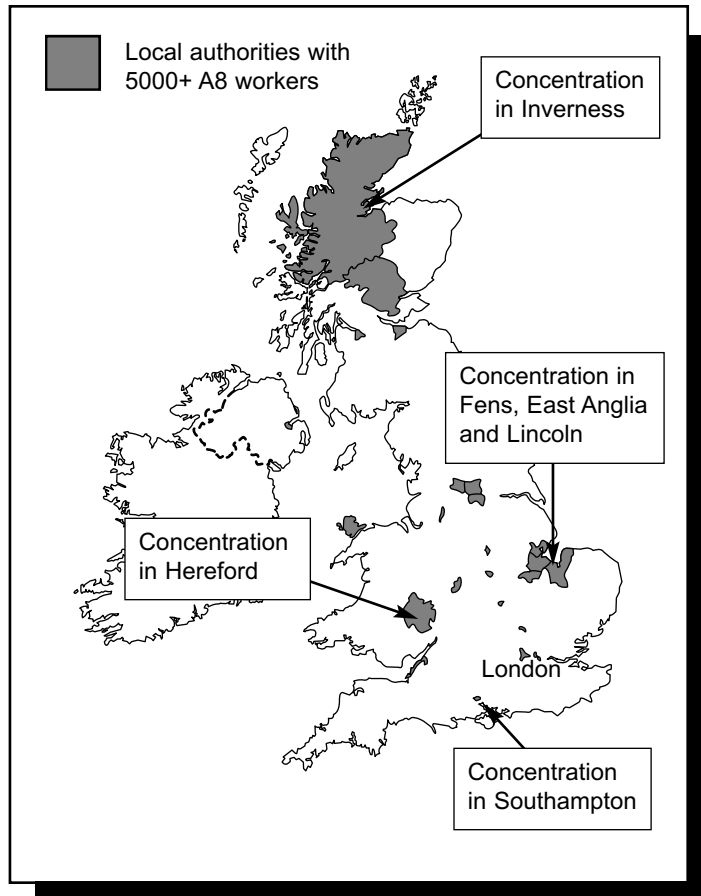
Table 1 Nationality of applicants approved between May 2004 and June 2006.

Country of origin	Number of applicants	Percentage of total	Population of origin (2009)
Czech Republic	22,555	5.3	10,211,904
Estonia	5,110	1.2	1,299,371
Hungary	12,870	3.0	9,905,596
Latvia	26,745	6.3	2,231,503
Lithuania	50,535	11.8	3,555,179
Poland	264,560	61.9	35,482,919
Slovakia	44,300	10.4	5,463,046
Slovenia	420	0.1	2,005,692
Total	427,095	100.0	73,155,210

Where in the UK are the new Polish migrants settling?

New migrants first go to where Polish communities already exist, such as Peterborough, but then, if they cannot find work, they go elsewhere encouraging others to follow, so many new Polish communities are appearing around the country. Unlike previous flows of in-migrants, many of the new Poles have settled in smaller towns and rural areas such as Crewe, Slough, Boston Lincolnshire, and in north Scotland. These locations reflect the types of work being taken up by the new migrants: 29% of those working in hospitality and catering were based in London – far more than in any other region – while 27% of those working in agriculture were in Anglia, followed by the South West (16%).

Fig. 1 High concentrations of A8 workers in the UK 2004-07.



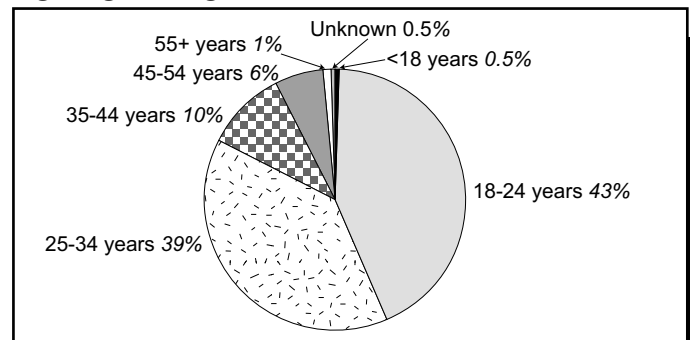
Put another way, nearly half of the Polish migrants in London were working in hospitality and catering and more than half of those located in the Midlands were working in administration, business and management. Destinations like Crewe, where nearly 3,000 Poles have arrived since 2004, or Boston in Lincolnshire with the largest percentage increase of Polish residents (9.4%), contrast significantly with more traditional migrant destinations, notably the major conurbations. Only 40% of the new Poles have opted to live in London.

Who are the new migrants?

The eastern Europeans who come to the UK consider themselves EU citizens or workers rather than migrants. The majority of registered workers from eastern Europe are young and seeking work and the chance of a new start in a land of perceived opportunity. While many come to study in the UK, a third of new Poles in the UK are graduates.

- Around 80% are aged 18 to 34.
- Only one in ten have brought dependants with them.
- Only 3% have brought dependants under the age of 17.
- The average age of Polish immigrants is 28.
- Most of them are single.
- The ratio of males to females is 58:42.

Fig. 2 Ages of migrants from Poland 2004-06.



Case Study 1: Boston, Lincolnshire

Population: 57,000 (2001 census)

Registered A8 immigrants: 5,479 in first 18 months

Estimated number of immigrants: up to 20,000

In Boston, where the population is now around 70,000, new Government figures show that 25% of people living there are from Eastern Europe. It is estimated that 30% of Boston's newcomers are Polish, 28% Portuguese, 18% Lithuanian and 10% Latvian.

According to one survey in 2007, 21% of the local population had a negative attitude towards the migrants, but it has been suggested that Lincolnshire would go bankrupt without the migrant workers, as they take the jobs that local people do not want and spend their money in the town. Gradually integration is happening – a Polish pub landlord in the town said: "Many of us have adopted English ways and, of course, support your football teams."

The Borough Council highlights the benefits of migration: migrants have not added to the council house waiting list as most have moved into the private rental sector; and there has been "a growth in small businesses, local employees have benefited and our culture has become more diverse". A range of ethnic shops, bars and delis has been established from the Wodka delicatessen to the Frzierski hairdresser. There are speciality Polish shops and restaurants and a Polish Catholic church, but most new migrants are keen to become part of the local community.

The local economy is based on agribusiness farming and packing for supermarkets so Boston is a prime target for Eastern Europeans seeking agricultural and factory jobs. Lincolnshire supplies around 25% of the UK's packaged foods. Every morning, young men and women wait for vans to take them to the Fens, where much of the planting, tilling and harvesting is still done by hand. Or they go to the massive warehouses where they wash, grade and pack potatoes, peas, beans and other produce. The average wage for an immigrant worker here is around three times what they could earn at home.

In-migration has impacted on services such as health, transport, housing and education. But there are now 500 Eastern Europeans working in Lincolnshire NHS, including three Polish doctors in the local hospital. The youthful age of the migrants has affected the local birth rate; in 2003, 1,664 babies were born in Boston's maternity unit, in 2004 – when the A8 countries joined the EU – 1,810 babies were born, and in 2005, there were 1,884 births recorded.

At Boston College, there are 500 migrants learning English with more on the waiting list. Initially the one-year course was free but now they pay £130. At a local primary school 40% of the children have English as a second language. Many are from Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Russia and India, and the school has taken on bilingual staff and bought foreign language books. The English children "are getting a cultural experience they would never have got in rural Lincolnshire" according to the school head.

Case Study 2: Slough, Berkshire

Population: 120,600 (2001 census)

Registered A8 immigrants: 9,000 in first 18 months

Estimated number of immigrants: over 30,000

Located close to Heathrow airport, Slough has long been a magnet for immigrants and now a third of its residents are from ethnic minorities. Migrant workers, come here because there is plenty of well-paid work in the area and they fill vacancies where there is a lack of indigenous applicants. Growth sectors in the town include telecommunications, biotechnology, consumer electronics, ICT, transport, business and financial, pharmaceuticals and healthcare.

Due to long-term out-migration from the town, Government figures had predicted a fall in population from Slough and cut funding accordingly but local council evidence suggests that the population is increasing and is conducting a campaign to receive fair funding for its growing population. By the time the next census is taken in 2011, the borough will have lost out on about £15 million and will need to raise council taxes to make up the gap.

Local services are coming under huge strain as a result of unprecedented levels of immigration according to council chiefs. An estimated 10,000 Polish migrants alone are putting pressure on Slough's health, housing, education and welfare services.

A Borough Council spokesperson said the arrival of thousands of migrants has led to overcrowding problems, with as many as 15 migrant workers in a single house. She said she feared that the newcomers could threaten the social cohesion of the town, which already has more than one third of its residents from ethnic minorities.

Many migrants are exploited by ruthless landlords and the council claim there are at least 1,000 overcrowded homes in the borough. Some employers are paying just £2 or £2.50 an hour. Most of the first wave workers were single men living in rented houses but when families started arriving, local schools came under pressure. Schools have had to take on interpreters and Polish speaking classroom assistants. The number of Eastern European children going to school here has doubled to almost 13,000 in 12 months. Each new pupil costs around £5,500 a year, making a total of about £70 million additional funding needs.

One obvious sign of growing population is in the rising number of Polish shops in Slough. Many have signs written in Polish and the windows are full of advertisements for work. Polish shops in the borough are stocked with traditional drinks like vodka as well as soups, sausages, pickles and dumpling from their homeland. They also sell Polish newspapers and magazines.

What work are they doing in the UK?

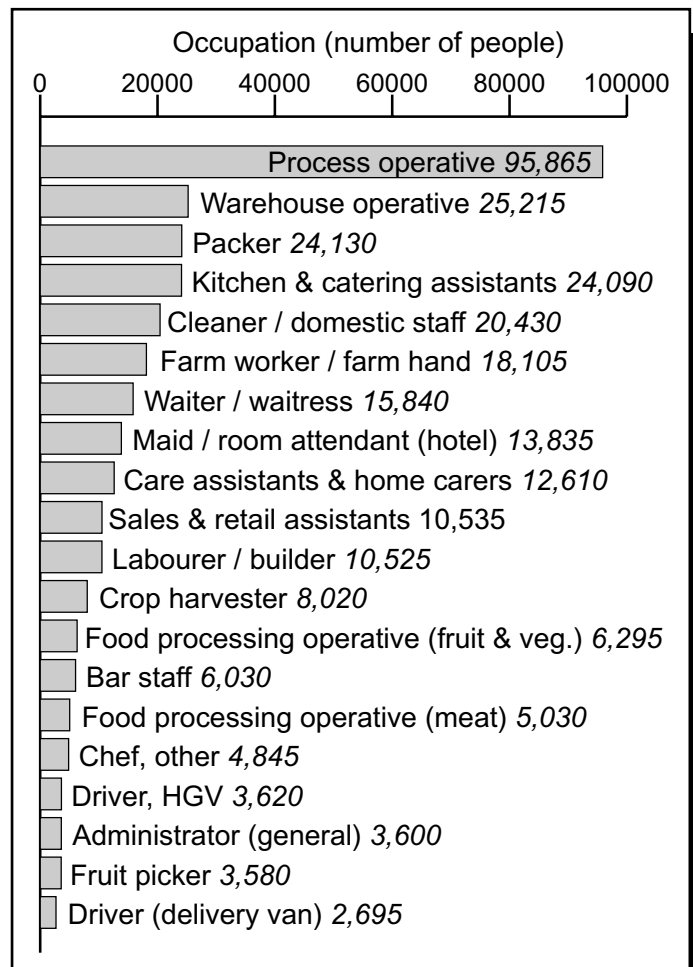
Many Polish men work in light industries, such as food processing and packing, while women find work in restaurants and hotels, and as nannies and cleaners. They are employed on building sites and in other unskilled positions, although many have qualifications. The Polish newspapers and free magazines carry advertisements and advice, and Polish shops have bulletin boards where jobs and rooms for rent are posted daily. Those arriving without official job offers are encouraged to register with proper agencies and Job Centres to avoid exploitation.

97% of Polish migrants were working full time in June 2006, about half each in temporary employment and in permanent employment. Agriculture, food processing, hospitality and administration are the main sectors and low paid manual work predominates (see Fig. 3). The top five occupation groups, for workers registering between May 2004 to June 2006, were Administration, Business & Management (34%), Hospitality & Catering (21%), Agriculture (12%), Manufacturing (7%) and Food, Fish and Meat Processing (5%).

Agricultural work is often seasonal, the number of employees peaks in the summer and falls in the winter. The contribution of Polish workers to agriculture has been particularly welcomed in Scotland and rural areas like Wales and Lincolnshire where they have effectively rescued Britain's fresh food production.

The Poles' work ethic is much admired by their employers and they have often taken jobs that the indigenous population do not want. Out of 500 employers surveyed, 61% said they hired Poles for their superior skills and only 16% because they were cheaper. But four out of five registered Polish workers were earning £4.50 to £5.99 per hour in 2006, around the minimum wage. While some are building promising careers in areas such as accountancy, banking and responsible jobs in industry and administration, many are kept in low-paid jobs and often work illegal hours in bad conditions. Some people with poor knowledge of English have been exploited by both English employers and Polish middlemen. But many take lower unskilled jobs until their English improves and then seek work to suit their skills.

Fig. 3 Occupations of Polish workers in the UK in 2006.



Case Study 3: Crewe, Cheshire

Population: 48,000 (2001 census)

Registered A8 immigrants: 2,620 in first 18 months

Estimated number of immigrants: at least 6,000

In 2001, less than 2% of Crewe's population were of ethnic minority origin but now more than 6% are Polish. Six months before EU enlargement, recruitment agency Advance Personnel's managing director, Jason Canny, decided to pen an office in Poland – the largest of the accession states – because it was difficult to find local people for the low-wage, part-time factory jobs in the town. With unemployment in Poland reaching almost 20%, the office in Gdansk recruited easily, especially as the agency also provided cheap rented accommodation. Canny estimates that 70 to 80% of the Polish migrants in Crewe have passed through his agency.

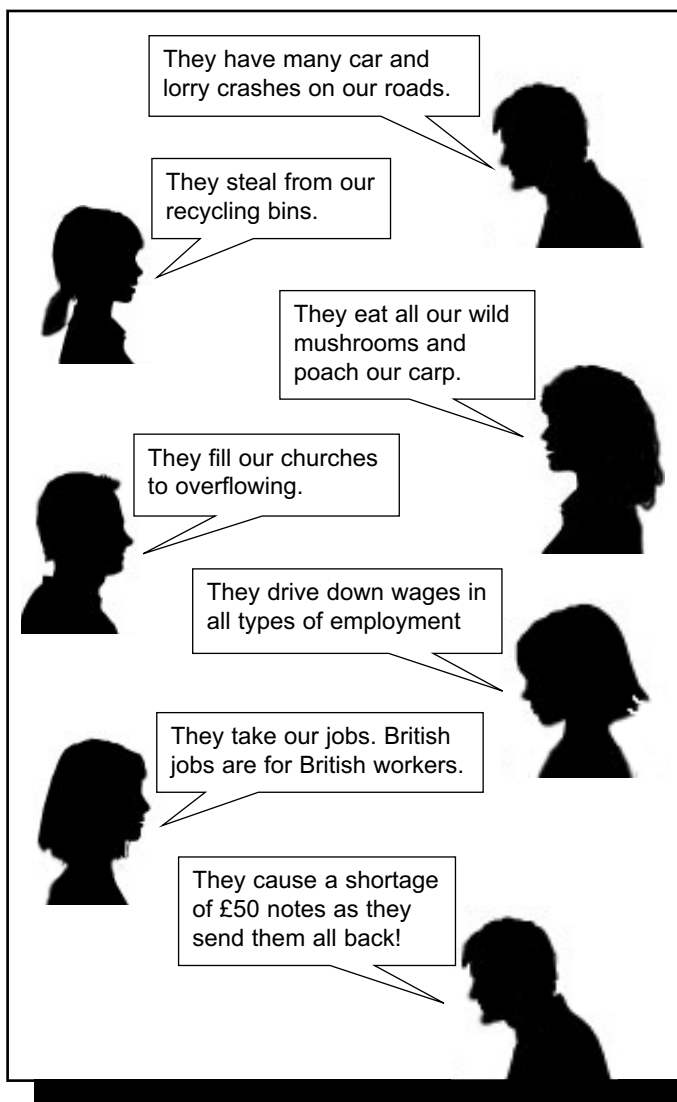
Located just off the M6, Crewe developed from a Victorian railway town to a distribution hub, home to big packing, distribution and food-processing plants. The warehouses and factories around it offer newcomers £800 a month to take home pay plus plenty of overtime – four times the rate of the same job in Poland. Companies such as Primebake, which supplies supermarkets with garlic bread and pizzas, and the mobile-phone wholesaler Caudwell pay just above the minimum wage.

When Poles started coming to Crewe in large numbers in 2004 some were said to have slept in cars, paying a few pounds a week for access to bathrooms. That may be more myth than reality, but there were landlords in the town who exploited people looking for cheap rentable housing. It was not uncommon for 8 to 10 to be squeezed into run-down terraced houses.

Most of the first wave of workers were unmarried men and women, or men who had left their families in Poland, but after a year or so, some started to bring their families. So pressure has grown on the local education system. About one in five pupils at St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Crewe are now Polish. The deputy head says her Polish children have caused no problems in the school as they have integrated well and are learning English quickly.

About half of Crewe's Poles are expected to stay in Britain and half will return home at some stage. The town has accepted its new community and racially motivated incidents have been few. South Cheshire College in Crewe has received many applications for places on its English courses while the borough council has started organising advice sessions and a community association for the incomers. At the Polish delicatessen, selling traditional bread and sausages, there are postcards of Crewe for sale illustrating the delights of the town in Polish.

Fig. 4 Outrageous claims made about the Poles.



The pros and cons of migration for Poland (source country)

In Poland, the media painted a rosy picture of Britain. The first migrants to arrive in 2004 were naive and many ended up in the black economy working for less than the minimum wage. Over two-thirds came from rural backgrounds or from small provincial towns, spoke little English and did not know their rights as employees and tenants.

New arrivals are now better informed and more realistic about their prospects. Publications like 'How to Live and Work in Great Britain' are written in Polish and contain basic and essential information, such as how to register and get a national insurance card. Those with young families have found it easier to integrate as their children have learned about the British way of life at school. Most migrants integrate well although a few are being exploited or are homeless and jobless.

Most Poles earn very little by British standards but the majority plan to stay for a limited length of time and are prepared to work for the minimum wage and live in cramped conditions. They economise by staying in tied or low quality multiply-occupied housing, and they eat and spend frugally so they can send money home and return to set up a business or buy a house.

More than half of Poles working in the UK transfer money home (remittances). Estimates of money sent back to Poland vary but, according to the National Bank of Poland, about £4 billion is transferred each year by Polish workers in the UK to their families at home. Many eastern Europeans, earning higher wages than at home and now having disposable incomes, possibly for the first time, are rapidly learning to exercise their purchasing power and national chain stores are targeting this new market. The flow of Polish migrants to the UK is leading to a rapidly growing shortage of skilled workers in Poland, nearly half of businesses surveyed in 2007 cited the lack of a skilled workforce as a barrier to growth. Nearly seven in a thousand Poles have moved to the UK but, crucially, they are younger working people.

Poland's divorce rate has doubled in just seven years and it is suggested that this due to the pressure of migration as many migrants left spouses behind. Long periods of separation put a strain on marriages, and this is doubled when migrants return home as families struggle to readjust. Most Poles are Catholic but the stigma of divorce has diminished. Also women have become more used to an independent lifestyle.

The pros and cons of Polish migration for the UK (host or destination country)

Eastern Europeans have filled the gaps in the UK labour market and employers have found that the new migrants are prepared to work hard. This has benefited British business: other EU countries have been unable to take advantage of the reasonably-priced labour while UK industries have expanded, easily absorbing Polish, Slovak, Lithuanian and Czech workers have been into the workforce.

British business has also cashed in on the new market. Many of the Polish migrants are young and single, they have more money than they would at home and are keen to join the consumer culture that has fuelled Britain's economic growth in recent years. UK supermarkets cater for Polish and other immigrants: Tesco sells over 100 different lines of Polish food, the fastest growing ethnic-minority range it has ever launched. This growth is being driven by British consumers developing a taste for eastern European food as well as the direct Polish market.

New clusters of Polish businesses have opened and rejuvenated declining neighbourhood shopping streets. Estimates vary but all agree that the Polish workforce has contributed several billion pounds to the British economy. The young eastern European immigrants have eased the pensions burden and supplied tenants for the buy-to-let market. Polish newspapers and radio stations have started up and public libraries now stock Polish books. Catholic churches have seen their congregations swelled by Polish migrants and there is also an independent Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales.

Many of the new workers are doing useful jobs that cannot otherwise be filled at the wages being offered. But some suggest that this is keeping wages low, a benefit for employers. In a free market, if employers cannot recruit, they must raise wages to attract workers. It is suggested that the migrants may form an underclass of exploited employees. There have been stories in the press suggesting that economic migration deprives British people of work. Almost all of the immigrants have found work while the non-migrant unemployment rate has remained steady, this has generated economic growth, but skill shortages remain (e.g. dentists).

Another accusation levelled at new migrants is that of 'benefit tourism'. The new EU migrants who register to work in the UK can claim child benefit, tax credits and housing benefit but they have to work for a year before they are eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance and other benefits. Such prejudice and misconception illustrates the racism that sometimes greets new migrants, with the use of words like "invasion, flood & swamp" to describe the flow of migration.

It has been harder for smaller settlements to absorb significant numbers of migrants compared to larger cities and conurbations but many people appreciate the eastern European addition to multi-ethnic Britain.

A big problem is that the numbers of migrants are not fully known – only those locally registered for national insurance are recorded but there is no way of counting those who leave the area or those who come in having registered elsewhere. For example, in Wrexham 2,340 eastern European migrants are registered but local estimates suggest there may be up to 8,000 new migrants living there and the number of pupils with English as a second language has increased from 300 to 500 in 18 months. Specialist language teachers have been recruited, and the council has produced leaflets for local people about the in-migration, and a booklet in multiple languages to help migrant workers to integrate.

Return migration

The flow of Polish and other economic migrants from eastern Europe fell by more than 40% as the recession took hold in Britain. Work permit applications dropped to 29,000 in the last three months of 2008, down from 53,000 in the same period in 2007. Also many of the earlier migrants are returning home. Polish officials say that Poles leaving the country outnumber those coming in, though no count is taken of foreign nationals leaving the UK.

A weakened pound has coincided with a strengthening zloty (the Polish currency) reducing the pay differential between the two countries and increasing the costs of living in the UK. Also there is more work available in Poland. The downturn in the British building industry especially has prompted many workers to return home and, also, in their home country they have a better chance of finding work to match their qualifications. Some are going to work in other EU states such as Germany who are now removing restrictions on the A8 migrants.

Many are returning home because they had achieved their short-term goals. Large cities like Warsaw, Wroclaw and Gdansk are encouraging Poles to return with their newly acquired skills. The '12 cities' project invites them to monthly workshops where business people from Poland's twelve largest cities provide those who are considering repatriation with information about the job market.

Conclusion

A survey, carried out at British ports and stations by a Warsaw-based market research firm, indicated that more than 300,000 Poles may stay permanently. It is estimated that in 5 years' time some 60% of the Poles who moved to the UK will not have returned, especially those with good employment prospects or with children in English schools. But many migrants have not enjoyed leaving Poland for the UK and miss the people they have left behind. They were pushed away by high unemployment and the struggle of daily life. All migrants encounter emotional borders, as well as economic ones, when they move. But in an age of increasing international migration, all EU citizens are free to move within the European Union.

Activities

1. Using the data in *Table 1*, calculate the proportion of each country's population that has moved to the UK and consider why people are more likely to move from some countries than others.
2. Draw a table to distinguish the advantages and disadvantages of Polish migration to the UK (a) for Poland, and (b) for the UK. Use a quadrant format.
3. Look at *Fig. 4* and assess the validity of the statements shown.

Further research

For further information, read the Home Office report at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/22_08_06_migrantworkers.pdf

Acknowledgements

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