

MIGRATION CASE STUDY: POLAND TO THE UK

Introduction

On 1 April 2004 Poland was one of ten nations joining the European Union. Eight of these countries (known as the A8 by the EU) were Eastern European nations (Figure 1), the other two the Mediterranean island states of Malta and Cyprus. The EU allows free movement of labour between its member countries. An increase in migration into the EU's more prosperous nations was anticipated following the accession of the A8 nations, most of which had higher unemployment rates and lower standards of living. The UK government predicted there would be 15,000 migrants from the A8 countries moving to the UK for employment.

Migration from Poland

Nationals from A8 countries who wish to work in the UK for over one month are generally required to register with the Home Office's Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). Rather than the 15,000 predicted, by July 2006 447,000 people from Eastern Europe had applied to work in the UK (Figure 2). 62% (264,555) came from Poland. An additional 105,000 moved between July and December 2006, taking the total of Polish migrant workers to 370,000 since April 2004. An additional 150,000 people from the A8 nations migrated to the UK as self-employed workers, such as builders and plumbers, who do not need to register with the WRS. The Polish Embassy stated that the number of Polish workers in Britain was between 500,000 and 600,000. This would mean that Poles are now the third-largest minority ethnic group in the UK, after Pakistanis and Indians.

More Polish long-term migrants came into the UK in 2005 than citizens of any other country. 49,000 migrated into the UK in 2005, almost three times the total of 17,000 in 2004. The proportion of Poles within the A8 group migrating into the UK for at least a year increased from about 35 per cent in 2004 to over 70 per cent in 2005. Overall, an

Figure 1: The A8 Nations which joined the EU in April 2004



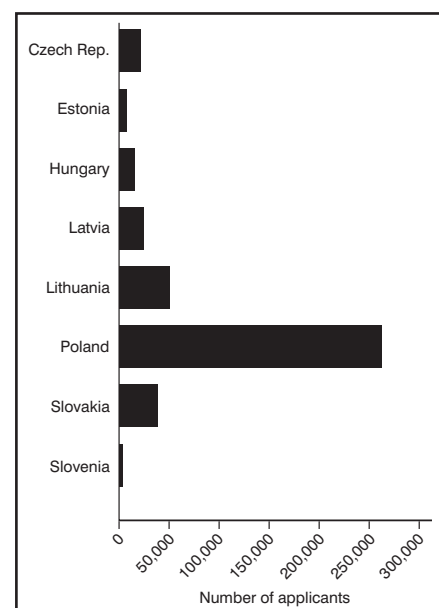
estimated 64,000 more A8 citizens migrated into the UK for at least a year than left in 2005, compared with 49,000 in 2004. In 2005 16,000 A8 citizens left the UK, in 2004 only 3,000.

Reasons for the migration

Why are Poles coming to the UK in such numbers? There are a number of 'push' factors encouraging Poles to leave their own country, and a number of 'pull' factors attracting them to the UK. Whilst the desire to experience life abroad and to learn or improve their spoken English are factors, the fundamental reason is the contrast in the two nations' economies:

- In Poland the unemployment rate averaged 18.2% in 2005, the highest unemployment rate in the 27 nations of the OECD, with some rural areas having

Figure 2: Applications to the UK's Worker Registration Scheme from the A8 nations



Source: Home Office

unemployment rates of over 40%. Young Poles, even with a high level of education, faced a youth unemployment rate of over 40%.

- The UK's unemployment rate is only 5.1%, and the country is experiencing significant skill shortages as well as a high demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labour.
- The average number of job vacancies in the UK for the three months to January 2007 was 607,900. This was up by 6,200 over the year.
- In Poland annual GDP per head in 2006 was around \$12,700, compared to \$30,900 in the UK.

An important factor is that the UK, along with Ireland and Sweden, were the only three countries in the EU not to restrict immigration from the A8 following accession. Ireland has received an even higher proportionate in-flow of A8 migrants than the UK, including an estimated 170,000 Poles. Finland, Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain opened their labour markets to these workers from mid-2006. The remaining EU member states (including France, Germany and Austria) chose to retain restrictions on immigration for up to seven years.

The author's conversations with Polish migrant workers provide anecdotal evidence that they can earn four to five times as much pay in the UK, whilst the cost of living is only about twice as high. Many are planning to work in the UK for a few years and then return to Poland with their savings.

Characteristics of the Polish migrants

Skilled and unskilled industrial workers and tradesmen form by far the largest social group among the recent immigrants from Poland to the UK. They are prepared to go to the UK in search of a better life, as they are among the poorest in Polish society, typically having to survive on £150 a month in Poland; they often have young families too. Another important sub-group of migrants consists of Polish students taking a gap year before or after completing their university degree course.

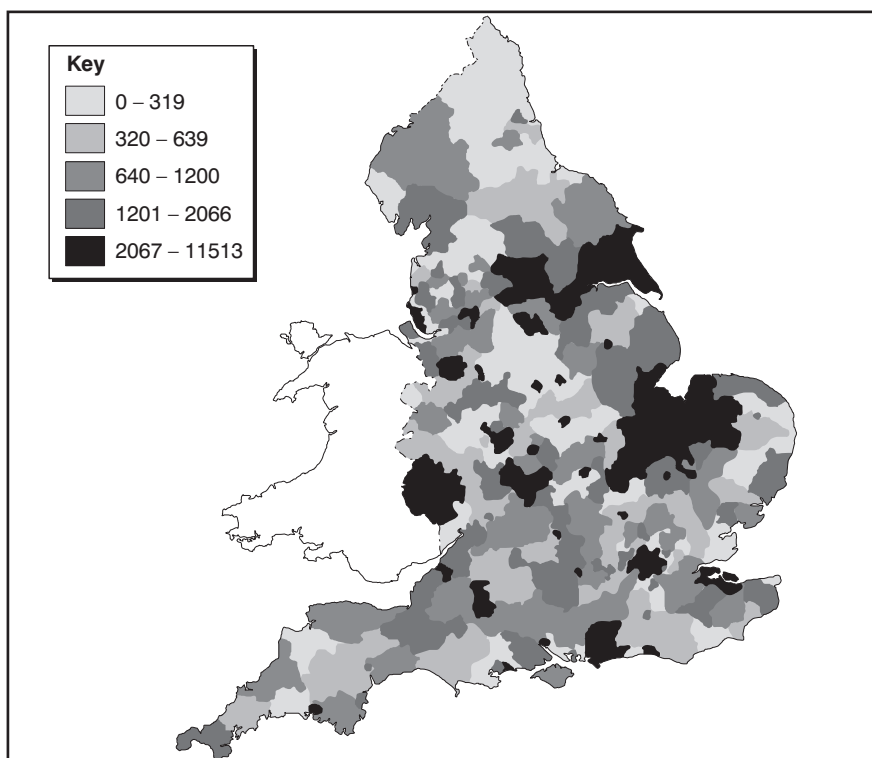
Table 1 shows that factory workers

Table 1: Leading occupations in which registered workers were employed (June 2004–June 2006)

Occupation	Total
Factory worker	95,865
Cleaner, maid, hotel room attendant	33,925
Farm workers, crop harvesters and fruit pickers	29,705
Kitchen and catering assistants, chefs	28,975
Warehouse operative	25,215
Packer	24,130
Waiter, waitress	15,840
Care assistants and home carers	12,610
Food processing operatives	11,325
Sales and retail assistants	10,535
Building labourer	10,525
Drivers (HGV and delivery vans)	6,315
Bar staff	6,030
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	310,995
Others	77,270
TOTAL	388,265

Source: Home Office

Figure 3: Geographical distribution of A8 migrant workers across England



make up the largest group of A8 workers registered with the WRS (accounting for 25% of the total between June 2004 and June 2006). Low-skilled jobs including cleaners, maids, farmworkers, kitchen assistants, waiters, building labourers and packers make up another 37%.

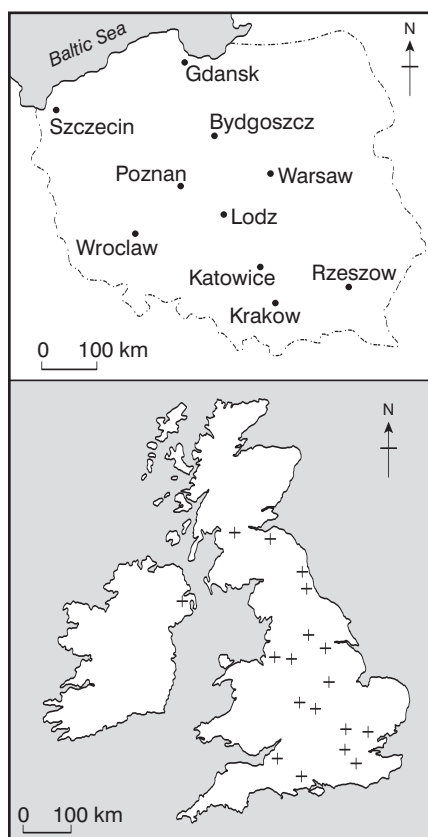
It is not clear how many of the migrants registered with the WRS are in the UK at any one time, however the Labour Force Survey

showed that in September 2005 less than half of those registered since May 2004 were still living in the UK. Thus for most of the migrants their time in the UK is limited.

The distribution of Polish migrants within the UK

Migration often follows a pattern of slow dispersal from the port of entry. Capital cities and large industrial towns are traditionally attractive to migrants. Before 2004 the UK's

Figure 4: Airports in Poland with scheduled low-cost flights to the UK and airports in the UK with scheduled low-cost flights from Poland



largest migrant populations were centred on London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leicester and other urban industrial areas. An interesting feature of the in-flow of A8 migrants has been their broad geographical spread across the UK, not simply across industrial cities but also across rural areas. 120,000 migrant workers registered in English rural areas between May 2004 and September 2006. Herefordshire is the top rural district, with 8,156 registrations; Lincolnshire, the Wash and East Yorkshire also have significant concentrations (Figure 3).

Three economic sectors account for over three-quarters of the WRS registrations in rural areas:

manufacturing (33%), agriculture and fisheries (25%) and distribution, hotel and retail (20%). Whilst accounting for 78% of migrant worker employment in rural areas, these sectors account for only 36% of total rural employment. Migrant workers are under-represented in sectors such as banking and finance, education and health, and public administration.

The migration flow has been assisted by the growth in low-cost airlines, which operate from 9 Polish airports to 18 UK airports (Figure 4). Regional employers seeking cheap and temporary labour can use agencies to bring people in more quickly than before because of the flights to regional airports. Kathy Burrell identified this from one young Polish immigrant:

‘As Joanna, who arrived in Britain in 2005 aged 28 suggested, coming to Britain is not so different to moving to another city within Poland: “I was thinking, I don’t feel like I have emigrated, I feel like I have changed the town for a job change, it’s like I haven’t moved from Katowice to Derby, but from Katowice to Sopot or Gdansk, it’s like that for me. And I am quite happy with that.”’

It is unlikely that Joanna would have ended up in Derby without the low-cost flight to the nearby East Midlands Airport.

The growth in passenger numbers from Polish airports has been remarkable; in 2000 there were 5.7 million international passengers using Polish airports, by 2006 this had increased to 15 million. Whilst traffic from Warsaw almost doubled from 4.3 million to 8.1 million, traffic from eight regional airports increased five-fold, from 1.4 million to 6.9 million (Table 2). Poland is the second-fastest growing air traffic market in the world, after China.

Most of this growth is due to flights to the UK. For example, Gdansk

Airport’s international passenger numbers increased from 138,000 in 2000 to 960,000 in 2006. Of the 2006 figure, 40% was on UK routes: Wizz Air carried 168,000 to Luton, 39,000 to Liverpool, and 28,000 to Glasgow; Ryanair flew 111,000 to Stansted and Centralwings carried 25,000 to Edinburgh.

The impact of migration

Migration from the A8 countries has been the subject of great debate in the UK. Concerns ranged over the costs of supporting poor Polish migrants, of Poles taking jobs from British workers, of young Poles behaving badly, of the growth of Catholicism in Britain, of road signs appearing in Polish, and so on. More academic analysis has suggested that the new migrants are beneficial to the UK in several ways:

- £2.54bn is contributed to the economy annually by eastern European immigrants in the UK.
- Migrants have contributed 0.5 to 1% of the UK’s economic growth in 2005 and 2006.
- 80% of new migrants are working people between the ages of 18 and 35. This offsets the tendency for the UK’s population to age, addressing the difficulties in providing for an ageing population. National Insurance contributions would have to be higher if immigration was lower.
- The Bank of England stated that migration had helped to prevent the rapid rise in oil prices from causing a damaging surge of inflation, which allowed interest rates to remain lower than they otherwise would have been. Ernst & Young estimated that the cost of borrowing and of mortgages would be 0.5% higher if it were not for the migrants.
- The new migrants are stereotypically hard-working, enthusiastic, skilled and flexible. This has exposed some

Table 2: Growth in passenger numbers at Polish regional airports 2000-2006

Year	Krakow	Gdansk	Katowice	Wroclaw	Poznan	Lodz	Rzeszow	Szczecin	Bydgoszcz
2000	517	270	115	185	210	3	20	60	18
2001	549	319	124	213	228	3	29	72	16
2002	501	318	131	209	227	2	55	80	18
2003	593	365	145	241	264	7	69	90	22
2004	841	467	466	288	381	6	74	96	26
2005	1586	672	831	393	419	18	94	106	39
2006	2302	1256	1129	780	671	217	207	201	134

shortcomings in the UK workforce. Labour MP Frank Field pointed out that school leavers and university students seeking vacation jobs have been losing out to Eastern European migrants. Some employers have said that they prefer to employ Poles or Slovaks who have had the initiative and strength of character to leave home and travel to the UK, rather than a young Briton with little enthusiasm and few skills.

Issues of concern include:

- Some Polish migrants have been exploited by unscrupulous employers and employment agencies in the UK. Although paid the minimum wage, some workers have had large deductions made for accommodation, transport, food etc., which have reduced their earnings considerably.
- The broad geographical spread of Polish and other A8 migrants has brought large-scale migration to areas which have not experienced it before. This has created tensions and misunderstandings. Anti-Polish graffiti has appeared on the streets of a number of UK cities. There have been isolated incidents of abuse and attacks on migrant workers. The worst examples have occurred in Northern Ireland, where migrant workers have had bricks thrown through the windows of their homes and in two cases have had their homes petrol-bombed. Most of the attackers have been working class Protestants, attacking the Poles as much for their Catholic religion as for their perceived taking of jobs.

However, by and large the influx of A8 migrants across the UK has provoked little open xenophobia and many efforts have been made to make their experience easier. The Yorkshire Bank has launched a telephone service in Polish, Lloyds TSB opened a Polish branch in Manchester, road signs in Polish have appeared in several areas, and British community groups have welcomed Polish visitors in an effort to improve understanding.

Conclusion

The influx of over 600,000 Eastern Europeans into the UK has been the major demographic event of the current decade. It is too early to assess the full impact, and much depends on what percentage of the immigrants

intend to stay permanently in this country – indications are that most intend to return home, and many have already done so. Whilst there are both advantages and disadvantages, the balance seems to be much in favour of this immigration into the UK.

‘Looking at Britain’s economy as a whole, with high growth, low unemployment and low interest rates, the arrival of Poles, Czechs and the rest seems an unequivocal bonus, helping to fill skills shortages, boosting productivity and creating new taxpayers. For almost a million workers who remain unemployed while Eastern Europeans win new jobs, the analysis may look rather different. But closing the doors to migrants won’t help, while better training and education might.’ (workpermit.com)

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. (a) Draw a pie graph from the statistics in the table below:

Age of Registered Eastern European Workers in the UK June 2006

18–24:	183,000
25–34:	168,000
35–44:	44,710
45–54:	26,000
55–64:	3,400

(b) Describe and explain the age distribution of the migrants.

2. In what ways does the geographical distribution within the UK of migrant workers from the A8 countries differ from that of earlier waves of migrants? How can this be explained?

3. (a) Why has the UK proved such a popular destination for migrant workers from the A8 countries?

(b) Evaluate the impact of the migration on the UK.