



# COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

FEBRUARY 2017

## **Number of surveys completed:**

	<b>No of surveys completed</b>	<b>Time lived in UK</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>from 2004 onwards, greatest majority, 44%, in the last 3 years</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>from 1999 onwards, greatest majority, 31%, in the last 3 years</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>from 2001 onwards, greatest majority, 42%, between 2010 - 2012</b>

The majority of people from Poland, Latvia and Lithuania choose to settle in the UK to seek greater economic security, a better start in life for their children and better prospects for themselves.

The people completing the questionnaires have reported some major advantages in relocating to the UK; a summary of these benefits is below:

## **Benefits**

The improved financial situation due to better employment opportunities in this country in turn provides a better standard of life, and the prospects for the future for themselves and their families are greatly enhanced.

The most significant benefits for all three groups are as follows:

(all the percentages in this report are to the total number of responses from each community)

	<b>Financial</b>	<b>Employment/better job</b>	<b>Prospects/standard of life</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>27%</b>

Other benefits included:

- Less stress
- Improved housing (compared to their own country)
- NHS care
- Schooling

## **ISSUES**

Relocating to another country obviously can create problems and the issues raised are highlighted below:

The single most crucial issue raised by all three groups was the **language barrier**.

	<b>Language barrier</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>42%</b>

This has wide ranging consequences including the following:

- inability to communicate effectively with medical professionals
- not understanding the written word means there is an inability to complete official documentation (banks, solicitors etc)
- a barrier to career development and opportunities
- lack of understanding of rights they have as tenants in rented property
- lack of understanding of rights they have as an employee
- confusion with housing applications
- confusion with Tax Credits
- not understanding British culture/laws and how they differ from their home country
- isolation and difficulties integrating into the local community
- public hostility
- not knowing where to seek help and advice

Not specifically raised as an issue, but several of those completing the questionnaires are over qualified for the work they are now doing e.g:

- several have a masters degree and are now factory workers
- a PE teacher is now a shop worker
- another teacher now a manual labourer
- a manager of a textile factory is now a line worker

There is no indication if this is due to the language barrier, to qualifications not being recognised in this country or due to lack of opportunities to work in those areas.

Some specific examples of the problems created by the language barrier are:

### **Medical issues**

There are several examples where individuals have been unable to communicate effectively with medical professionals and this has led to:

- misdiagnosis of medical conditions
- not receiving suitable treatment
- not getting appropriate help for a disabled child
- having to return to their 'home' country for treatment (incurring expensive travel costs)
- difficulty in claiming benefits to pay for accommodation for family after receiving a terminal cancer diagnosis
- being unable to get appropriate help for mental health issue

### **Exploitation**

Being unable to communicate effectively and being unaware of rights can lead to exploitation there are instances of this by both employers and landlords.

	<b>Exploitation</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>18%</b>

## **Exploitation by employers**

- withholding wages
- unfair working hours
- not being given days off
- risk of losing job if any days off are taken
- unclear working hours
- working 6 weeks with no day off
- not receiving back wages (this was ultimately accepted by the individual so they could keep their job)

## **Exploitation by landlords**

Many of the people completing the questionnaires have families, some are single parents and they face various difficulties which are in some cases exacerbated by exploitation. Many live in substandard accommodation and the following are examples of the issues:

- landlords knowing tenants are not aware of their rights and have limited options to find alternative accommodation
- renting a 'room only' for a whole family
- paying £600 per month for a double room
- sharing accommodation with other adults with problems (e.g alcoholism)
- landlord not providing rent book or tenancy agreement leading to individual being unable to claim housing benefit due to lack of proof of rental costs
- two instances of a landlord demanding sex in return for the individual remaining in accommodation (one was reported to the police but it was not followed up - it is unclear if this one incident happened locally or if the woman moved here to get away from the situation)
- being evicted from property with no notice

one person reported they have:

- no kitchen
- no shower
- no washing machine
- no cooking facilities (relying on fast take away foods for child)

## **Housing (general issues)**

Living in shared accommodation can confuse the issue when claiming tax credits. Two people have had to repay thousands of pounds awarded in tax credits as they were assumed incorrectly to be cohabiting as they were in shared accommodation.

There are examples where the local council has not helped with rehousing but one specifically said referral to Shelter housing had been very beneficial

One comment was that the local Council was judgmental and unhelpful

Not having a credit score can lead to difficulties when trying to improve the housing situation (e.g getting a mortgage)

## **Prejudice/racism**

There are significant variations in the percentage of people in each of the three communities citing issues with prejudice/racism

	<b>Prejudice/racism</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>12%</b>

There are no specific details provided but several individuals mention hate crimes

There also is a general feeling that people's attitude and tolerance changes when they hear individuals speaking a different language

## **Laws/Cultural differences**

- Not understanding or being aware of UK laws and not appreciating some cultural differences has led to problems with:
- drinking alcohol in the streets
- rules on driving hours
- very young child (10 years old) not able to be left to care for younger sibling (this is ok in Lithuania)

- 2 serious cases where children have been taken into care following reports from schools of injuries which the individuals say happened accidentally
- not being aware of employees rights leading to exploitation
- not being aware of tenants' rights leading to exploitation

### **Feeling homesick**

In many cases the extended families (sometimes children) still remain in their 'home' country and are greatly missed. Being unable to communicate effectively and make friends with members of the local community can add to the feelings of being homesick and lead to isolation and loneliness.

	<b>Homesick</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>12%</b>

### **Making friends with English people**

There is an encouraging number who have made friends with English people in some cases this is only through being friends with work colleagues and not socialising out of work

	<b>Made friends with English people</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>36%</b>

## **Help needed**

Despite the issues raised there seems in many cases to be a wish to be independent and a reluctance to show vulnerability and ask for help. The help requested is predominantly with language and with housing issues.

	<b>Help needed</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>Latvian</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Lithuanian</b>	<b>54%</b>

One example an individual gave was when being referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau they were told the CAB could not provide a translator due to cost. They called the help number provided by CAB and on calling the number they were told to learn English and the phone was put down on them.

## **Wish to return to 'home' country**

The advantages of living in the UK do seem to outweigh the issues and only a very small number (6 out of all those completing the questionnaires) say they would like to go back:

**Polish            3 individuals**

**Latvian           2 individuals**

**Lithuanian       1 individual**

## **Summary**

The majority of those completing the questionnaires appreciate the benefits of living in this country especially as they are more financially stable, have a much better lifestyle and an improved standard of living for themselves and their families.

With only 6 out of the total of 182 saying they wish to return 'home' it is obvious the benefits and future prospects are such that they intend to remain in this country permanently.

With improved communication skills a lot of the issues raised could be addressed and avoided. It would also provide a better awareness of the rights and responsibilities when living in the UK.

Being able to understand English (spoken and written) would facilitate social connection with the local community and with official organisations, improve career progression and help with self-esteem.

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