

Here to stay?

Dr Daniela Sime and Dr Christina McMellon explain how a new research project aims to engage young Eastern Europeans living in Scotland, exploring their views on identity, citizenship and belonging

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, Brexit is likely to bring to an end the free movement of people and restrict the flow of services and trade between the UK and EU. As the dust settles on the vote and activity begins to begin the leave process, the future of EU citizens living and working in the UK has become an issue of public and policy interest and a source of anxiety for many families. For those who have made their home in the UK, the outcome is an ongoing concern with many asking: What does Brexit mean for the children and young people born in Eastern Europe and who have made the UK their home over the last decade or longer?

Eastern Europeans are the fastest growing minority groups in the UK, but many now face an uncertain future.

The *Here to Stay?* project, funded by the Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC) and led by Dr Daniela Sime at the University of Strathclyde and Dr Naomi Tyrrell at the University of Plymouth, is looking to engage young Eastern Europeans in current debates around issues of identity, citizenship and belonging. The study focusses on Eastern European young people who arrived in the UK as children and aims to explore their everyday lives, cultural and national identities, and sense of belonging. It will contribute to public debates on migration and Europe, and inform policymakers and practitioners who work with Eastern Europeans.

The project will focus primarily on three key aspects of young people's lives: relationships and social integration, sense of identity and belonging, and migrant children and their engagement with services.

Relationships and social integration

This theme will explore the long-term effects of family migration on children's family and peer relationships, and the ways in which young people have reconfigured their social networks and developed their social and cultural capital after spending at least three years in the UK. It will build on Dr Sime's previous research with newly arrived migrants which showed children often become 'cultural brokers' and act as mediators of social networks for families, and will assess the ways in which children influence adults' attitudes and understandings. We ask:

- What are the experiences of integration of children of European migrants settled in Britain since the EU Enlargement, and how is Brexit influencing future plans for settlement?
- What are their main social, cultural and emotional challenges long-term of migration for families?
- How do children perceive the value of their social networks with peers in the UK and what is the role of these for children's integration and sense of belonging?

Sense of identity and belonging

The idea that one's identity is fixed and stable, monolithic and exclusionary has been disputed by researchers, leading to new ideas of identity as hybrid and changeable over time. In the case of migrants, belonging and social inclusion are closely connected, as experiences of social inclusion lead to a sense of a stake in society and acceptance. Certain groups of migrants can be marginalised not only economically (through insecure work and poor pay), but also socially (through residential segregation, lack of political capital, limited informal networks of support). Social and economic factors force migrants to share disadvantaged areas with other marginalised social groups and these areas become the focus of conflicts, as evidenced in recent racist attacks in Northern Ireland, Birmingham and Glasgow.

The *Here to Stay?* Project aims to examine the effect that place has on young people's everyday experiences and their perceptions of the role of their local community in helping their integration and countering racism, especially in the context of Brexit. We will investigate the processes of negotiation that take place between Eastern European families and communities, asking the following questions:

- What is the role of communities on young Eastern European's views of life in the UK, especially in the context of increased racism after Brexit?
- How do the children of Eastern European migrants negotiate their cultural and social interactions with non-migrant families? How do these negotiations impact on migrant young people's sense of identity?
- Which identities do children from a migrant background invest in and how much choice do they have over their affiliations and allegiances? What is their agency in the process of identification?

Access to and use of public, private and voluntary services

Children and young people are users of a range of services that aim to provide for, and promote, their well-being and social inclusion. Standards exist in relation to children's and young people's participation, stating that they should be routinely involved in service planning and improvement.

However, we do not have enough evidence on the participation practices within migrant families and the ways in which these might influence involvement in local communities. Our previous research has also shown that migrant families encounter difficulties in accessing services soon after their arrival, in locating services, accessing information or finding services relevant to their cultural background.



Image supplied by the Here to Stay? project

This third theme will investigate how long-term migrant children and their families use their social networks to gather information on services and to access provision. We will focus on three key services: education (a universal right of children), health (essential, especially as migration can impact negatively on health) and leisure (seen as crucial for well-being and integration), with the following research questions:

- To what extent does the provision of key services reflect the needs of settled migrant groups?
- What are the main difficulties that settled migrants encounter in accessing services in communities and how are these addressed by statutory services?
- How could services be improved to support better the integration of settled migrants and bring into alignment self-defined and professionally defined needs of these groups?

Research on the two-year project began in 2016 and is due for completion in summer 2018.

We believe it is important that as many young people take part as possible and have their voice heard. The team is currently running a UK-wide survey, open to all young people of Eastern European origin aged 12-18, who have been in the UK for at least three years. After the survey is completed, the research team will conduct focus groups with young people across the UK with at least 100 young people.

The team will be planning a series of events to get a range of audiences informed and involved with the project findings, including events for practitioners and

policymakers, seminars and conferences, events for the general public and migrant families. We also hope to organise an arts exhibition in early 2018, reflecting young Eastern European's lives in the UK.

Dr Daniela Sime is the Here to Stay? Project Leader, based at the University of Strathclyde. Dr Christina McMellon is a Researcher, also based at the University of Strathclyde

For more information on the project, to sign up for updates or to contact the project team, visit www.migrantyouth.org

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Here to Stay Survey

The *Here to Stay?* project team are keen to reach as many young people as possible and have asked for help in distributing their survey.

Open to all young people of Eastern European origin, aged 12-18 who have been resident in the UK for a minimum of three years, the survey is available at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/heretostayproject

A list of the Eastern European countries the survey is focused on and eligibility criteria can be found on the project website.