New European Youth Migration to the UK in the light of ‘Crisis’ and ‘Brexit’

Russell King

Department of Geography, University of Sussex

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Plan of Presentation

- The challenge of migration to Europe and the trope of ‘crisis’
- YMOBILITY, a Horizon 2020 programme of research on ‘New European Youth Mobilities’ – the intersection of intra-EU migration with ‘youth transitions’
- As part of YMOBILITY, the UK evidence, based on 120 interviews with young migrants aged 18-35 before and after Brexit
Europe faces multiple challenges – but also opportunities – relating to migration:

- **The demographic** challenge of the inevitability of an ageing population, and the extent to which this can be ‘rejuvenated’ by young migrants who are net fiscal contributors and reproductively active.

- **The economic and developmental** challenge of the spatially uneven distribution of resources, wealth and labour-market opportunities, contrasting areas of labour deficit (typically, booming urban-industrial-leisure regions) with regions of high (youth) unemployment and limited job opportunities (rural, peripheral regions and old industrial areas) – and the extent to which (youth) migration can equalise these disparities.

- **The political and humanitarian** challenge of the 2015-16 ‘refugee crisis’ emanating from Syria and other Middle Eastern ‘hot spots’, which challenged the ability of Europe to respond to the influx of > 1 million refugees within a short span of time.

- **The rarely-discussed ontological** challenge of the role of migration in shaping the European societies of today and tomorrow.
The word ‘crisis’ was mobilised and instrumentalised to connote the urgent and unforeseen nature of these challenges (sic), at both EU and individual national levels. Its use is often dubious and deliberately hides where the true responsibility lies and the fact that the ‘crisis’ was predictable and is solvable.

- **demographic crisis or time-bomb**: this is likely to generate a graduated response which combines labour-market adaptations (longer working lives, rearrangement of the pensions deficit) with continued immigration

- **economic and financial crisis** produced by the excesses of the pre-2008 boom and the failure of the banks in several vulnerable countries of the ‘peripheral’ EU – new migration flows (along with the politics of austerity) were the main result/’solution’ for the most affected countries (GR, I, ES, P, IRE, LV, LT).

- **structural or systemic crisis** of long-term youth unemployment in many poorer regions of EU; progress also blocked by entrenched systems of power over the allocation of jobs and other resources

- **refugee crisis** has been the most obvious ‘crisis’ event in EU migration in recent years, where Germany claimed the moral high ground, but few followed this example, the reaction being especially negative and unhelpful in several Eastern EU countries.
What can Social Science do? The example of YMOBILITY

Youth Mobility/Why Mobility? 2015-18, Horizon 2020: **keywords** are youth migration, life-course transition, education, labour market, economic crisis, regional development, (+‘Brexit’)

**Key objectives**

- identifying and quantifying the main patterns and trends of international youth migration in the EU for three migrant categories – students, higher- and lower-skilled workers
- understanding individuals’ motivations for moving – their decision-making strategies, information sources and migration channels
- analysing individuals’ outcomes in terms of education, skills, careers, welfare/wellbeing, identities, and youth-to-adult transitions
- mapping the territorial outcomes for countries/regions of origin and destination – economic, demographic, cultural – including the impact of return migration
- Highlighting implications for policy – migration, labour market, education, housing, services etc.
Countries and Partners

Receiving countries
UK: University of Sussex, University of Surrey
Germany: University of Bielefeld
Sweden: Malmö University

Sending countries
Latvia: University of Latvia
Slovakia: Slovak Academy of Forecasting
Romania: University of Bucharest

Countries which both send and receive
Italy: University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’
Spain: University of Almeria
Ireland: University College Cork
WP3: In-Depth Interviews

840 across the 9 countries, stratified by migrant type (student, higher- and lower-skilled), gender, in-migrants and return migrants.

Interviews had questions grouped under 10 themes:

- personal and family background
- migration history
- migration motivations and decision-making; role of 2008 crisis
- education and employment experiences in migration
- life satisfaction
- identity issues
- social inclusion
- travel and remittances
- knowledge and suggestions for policies for migrants
- future plans

Published outputs so far: King et al. 2016a, 2016b
UK case: London Region

• According to ONS (2016), UK hosts 2.8 million EU citizens, with 1.4m from the ‘new’ (i.e. post-2004) member-states
• To quote Adrian Favell (*Eurostars and Eruocities*, 2008), London is the ‘Eurocity par excellence’, the ‘Europolis’ or ‘EUtopia’ where young Europeans, especially those with higher education and career ambitions, want to move to, at least for a time
• 120 interviews conducted in the London area, 20 each with migrants aged 18-35 from ES, IRE, I, LV, RO and SK
• Interviews conducted during period September 2015 to June 2016
• **And then came Brexit!** 23 June 2016: 52% voted to leave the EU
• We decided to re-interview quota-samples of 8-10 respondents for each national group: this process still ongoing
‘Brexit’ highlights

• came as a major national surprise, that even the leaders of the Brexit campaign did not actually expect

• revealed a diagnosis of a sharply divided population, with a substantial reservoir of pent-up anger and alienation, both with the ‘political class’ and with deteriorating life conditions, exacerbated by the politics and economics of austerity

• whereas the ‘Remain’ camp’s main message (fronted by PM David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne) was based on the threat to the economy of leaving the EU, the real message which won the day was the ‘moral panic’ over immigration, stoked by the three ‘Brexiters’ Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, and ruthlessly pushed by the right-wing tabloid media

• in an age of ‘post-truth politics’, ‘expert knowledge’ was vilified: ‘the experts: what do they know (about ‘real’ life)?’

• so, the slogans that won the day were about ‘taking back control of our sovereignty’ (from the EU) and especially ‘controlling our borders’ at a time of a perceived ‘crisis’ of immigration
Six Post-Brexit Questions

1. Did you expect the result of the Referendum?
2. How do you feel after Brexit?
3. What do you think now as a [Latvian, Romanian, Slovak, etc.] citizen/passport holder in this new situation?
4. Has your sense of ‘home’ or ‘belonging’ or ‘identity’ changed in the light of Brexit?
5. Has Brexit changed your plans for the future? Referring here to short- and long-term plans about where you want to live/work and settle down?
6. Are you considering applying for British citizenship or a Residence Card?
Theoretical Frames

• **Liquid migration**, which has the following key features: it is predominantly *work and study* driven, it is envisioned as *temporary*, it is *invisible* due to open borders, hence it is *legal*, it is *spontaneous* and *unpredictable*, and its defining characteristic is the ‘migratory habitus’ of *intentional unpredictability* (Engbersen and Snel 2013).

• **Voiceless politics** and ‘*weapons of the weak*’ (Kallio and Hakli 2011; Scott 1985): irony that, although the Referendum was about ‘them’, they had no right to vote as EU citizens, so their reaction was to participate in discussions, including online, avoiding confrontation, enduring difficulties, at the same time emphasising their right to ‘belong’.

• **Tactics of belonging**: strengthening their ‘roots’ in London/UK, their ‘value’ to the British economy through study and work, applying for citizenship and residence card; although this sense of belonging was shaken by the Referendum result.
1. Did you expect the result?
   Most said ‘No’, but a few ‘saw it coming’ in the last few days

2. How did you feel after Brexit?
   ‘Like shit’. ‘Shocked and disappointed’ (the main reaction). ‘Life goes on’. ‘I will continue working, and wait and see’. ‘Reaffirmed my decision to return’.

3. What do you think now as a Slovak citizen in this new situation?
   Many were very critical of the voters: ‘The British made a big mistake’. ‘I don’t see any benefits in their decision to leave’. Others were ambivalent: ‘We have to wait and see how Brexit works out’. Or they reaffirmed their ‘tactics of belonging’ – ‘The UK government will keep those migrants who work and contribute; the UK is not going to expel us’. Negative personal impacts: ‘More controls flying back and forth’; ‘What will happen to the Slovak-British couples and their kids in the UK?’
4. Has your sense of ‘home’ or belonging changed?
   Most said ‘No’ or ‘Not yet’; but a few said that this had made them think about their identity more now, and reaffirmed their belonging to SK as their ‘true home’

5. Did Brexit change your future plans?
   Again, most said ‘No’ or ‘Not yet’; it depends on what form Brexit will take. For those planning to return to SK, this intention is strengthened. For those more oriented to staying in UK (eg. those who are married/partnered and/or with kids), the future is more uncertain. One interviewee in this situation said they had decided to postpone buying a house/flat in England. Another wanted to explore moving to another EU country (more common for LV interviewees).

6. Applying for British citizenship or residence card?
   Most said ‘No’. Situation is affected by the fact that SK does not allow dual citizenship (LV does allow it). A very few said they might consider British citizenship; rather more were exploring the residence card (which is also much less costly) in the case that they decide to settle longer-term.
References


Thank you!

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